



**‘Come as you are’: Peer research exploring
the everyday lives of sex workers in South
Australia**

By

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Abstract

Underpinned by a 'Nothing About Us Without Us' approach, this research is conducted by a sex worker and explores the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers, centring their voices. It rejects the binary that depicts either the 'victimised' sex worker or the fully empowered one to expose the nuances and shifts in power and agency that sex workers experience day to day. This approach avoids the inevitable creation of a simplified version of sex work that is often perpetuated by unintentionally reinforcing stigma and leaving out stories of resilience. In South Australia, unlike some other Australian states and territories, sex work is fully criminalised. Subsequently, there has been relatively little empirical research conducted compared with other Australian jurisdictions.

The method undertaken strongly adheres to the more stringent requirements for consultation laid down by sex workers and their organisations compared with those laid out by university ethics committees. This is in contrast to much of the literature on sex work and sex workers, which continues to be written by outsiders and where a focus on the 'problems' associated with sex work prevail.

This thesis found that in everyday life discrimination does not exist without resistance. Everyday stories with sex workers delved into the mundane—but also complicated—facets of life, and these nuanced depictions better highlight the impacts of social and institutional structures that influence everyday life and showcase other intersections impacting sex workers. Sex workers spoke about heteronormativity, gendered violence, sexuality, race, class and fatphobia, and that they were not only at the whim of such forces, but actively challenged these structures in both subtle and overt ways. This was demonstrated through the relationships sex workers spoke about and that were found to be central to everyday life: with clients, lovers, family, friends and the personal relationship to oneself. These stories showcase rich and complex narratives that sex workers learned to manage. Stigma was understood to be part of sex work but also contributed to creating an evolved understanding of sex work and marginalisation and was demonstrated by all aspects of life—the

good, the bad and the mundane—highlighting that these manifest in relationship with one other and do not exist in isolation.

Key findings include the importance of exploring the everyday to ensure that important and nuanced findings beyond the binary are discovered. The ways sex workers use their skills, experience, and connections to the sex worker community and organisations to navigate pervasive stigma and the challenges they face in a fully criminalised setting highlight the skills required to do this work. These challenges, and the ways sex workers in South Australia resist stigma and discrimination arising from criminalisation, reflect inequalities that exist elsewhere in society, and sex work might better be viewed more broadly as a microcosm of everyday life rather than as a profession in which sex workers need ‘rescuing’. The growing importance of sex worker (peer)-led research is highlighted, along with suggestions for ensuring that ethical and accountable research with sex workers is prioritised.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university
2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and
3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.



Signed.....

Date..... 20/04/2022

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I first started researching sex work through my honours program in 2015. I had just read Elena Jeffreys' work on sex work and ethics and took the recommendations very seriously. I decided to consult with SIN about potential research topics. The Manager at the time, Sharon, said I could explore decriminalisation and kindly offered me a desk and much support. That initial meeting eventually resulted in me becoming deeply involved with the organisation and sex worker rights in South Australia. Eight years later, I'm still involved with SIN, currently serving as the President. I am indebted to SIN for providing me with so many great opportunities and for providing me with the ability to connect with an amazing community. I would like to thank the SIN Board (past and present), SIN staff (past and present) and the broader sex work community (past and present). I wouldn't be where I am today without SIN.

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Student publications and presentations

Publications

2021- Media Release

Diamond, R. (2021, November 2). Fear of police grows among SA sex workers. Flinders University.

2021- Parliamentary Select Committee Submission

Diamond, R. (2021, April 21). Inquiry into the Statutes Amendment (Repeal of Sex Work Offences) Bill 2020. South Australian Legislative Council Select Committee.

2021- Book Chapter

Diamond, R., Dunk-West, P., & Wendt, S. (in press). Using sex worker feminisms in practice to promote a peer-based methodology: Exploring personal and professional identities in a research alliance centring sex worker lived experience. In C. Cocker & T. Hafford-Letchfield. (Eds.), *Rethinking feminist theories for social work practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

2020- Media

Diamond., R. (2019, August 7). How the 'National Cabinet of Whores' is leading Australia's coronavirus response for sex workers. The Conversation.

2019- Media

Diamond., R. (2019, November 5). SA's sex workers won't stop fighting for legal protection. InDaily.

2019- Media

Diamond., R. (2019, November 5). 'No more fear of police': South Australia is close to fully decriminalising sex work. *The Conversation*.

2017- Academic Journal Article

Baratosy., R., & Wendt, S. (2017). Outdated laws, outspoken whores: Exploring sex work in a criminalised setting, *Women's studies international forum*, 62, 34-42.

Selected oral presentations

2021- Oral Presentation to a Parliamentary Select Committee

['Select Committee on Statutes Amendment \(Repeal of Sex Work Offences\) Bill'](#), Flinders University.

2021- Oral Presentation to a Parliamentary Select Committee

['Select Committee on Statutes Amendment \(Repeal of Sex Work Offences\) Bill'](#), SIN.

2019- Conference Presentation

'125 years of suffrage – The future is female', 'Why sex workers want decrim: Decriminalising sex work in South Australia', Australian Education Women's Union, 2019 conference. Australian Education Union.

2018- Conference Presentation

'Precarity, rights and resistance', 'Is being an insider enough?: Thinking through sex work research and ethics', The Australian Sociological Association, 2018 conference. Deakin University.

2018- Conference Presentation

'Queer legacies, new solidarities', 'Is being an insider enough?: Thinking through sex work research and ethics', Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association, 2018 conference. Deakin University.

2018- Parliamentary Symposium

'Sex work laws and workplace health and safety symposium', 'The history of decriminalising sex work in South Australia', Scarlet Alliance, 2018 symposium. Brisbane Parliament House.

2018- Conference Presentation

'Thinking, doing, learning', 'Come as you are': Exploring the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers,' College of Education Psychology and Social work, 2018 HDR conference. Flinders University.

2017- Conference Presentation

'Art(i)culations of violence: gender, sex, sexuality and the politics of injury and revivification', 'Come as you are': Exploring the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers,' SA Gender, Sex, and Sexuality Studies conference, 2017 conference. University of South Australia.

Chapter One: 'Come as You Are'

Introduction

I am a sex worker and activist first and foremost. Second, I am a researcher exploring sex work. Being a 'peer' provides me with a privileged, 'insider' account into the everyday lives of sex workers. It provides me with greater access to the sex work community and peer organisations compared with other researchers. And it also creates responsibilities. I have been involved with SIN, South Australia's only peer sex worker organisation, since 2015 and have been a sex worker since 2012. Being an insider who is also closely connected to the sex worker community through activism enables me to better understand what sex workers expect from researchers in ways that 'outsiders' often remain unaware (Jeffreys, 2010b; Jello, 2015). In this thesis, I do not view the participants as 'research subjects' but as peers: people who are experts on the subject matter. And I engage in sex work not only as a profession but as someone who is also strongly connected to the peer sex worker rights movement across Australia (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Diamond, 2019a; 2020).

As a feminist my work builds on, and contributes to, sex work feminist literature. My choice of 'Come as you are' as the title for this thesis highlights from the outset that honouring sex worker voices and lived experience is essential to a sex work feminist approach. I also use first and third-person points of view in this thesis as a demonstration of both my identity as a sex worker and activist as well as the benefits of insider research, which I discuss in more detail in the literature review (Chapter Two).

In contrast to much of the research that has made sex work 'exotic', this research addresses a significant gap in the literature by exploring the 'everyday', or day-to-day, lives of sex workers. Within the formal knowledge system of academic scholarship, little is known about the everyday practices of

sex workers despite countless numbers of sex workers writing and speaking about their lives as sex workers using public platforms such as social media as well as publishing books about their lives (Anonymous, 2016; Bellavue, 2014; Green, 2021; Lawless, 2020; Lawless et al., 2021; Sass, 2020; Vanting, 2018). Research into the lives of sex workers has predominantly focused on larger constructions situated around sex work, such as health and HIV (Argento et al., 2011; Bates & Berg, 2014; Beyrer et al., 2015; Callander et al., 2017; Decker et al., 2015; Harcourt et al., 2010; Seib et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2010), governance and policy (Abel, 2014a; 2014b; Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Begum et al., 2013; Crofts, 2006; Crofts & Summerfield, 2008; Jeffreys et al., 2010; Kim, 2015; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014; Stardust & Story, 2015), safety issues for sex workers, such as violence or victimisation (Decker et al., 2013; Huschke, 2016; Matthews, 2014; O'Doherty, 2011; Prior et al., 2013), and sex trafficking or migration (Aziza & Meena, 2015; Jackson, 2016; Jana et al., 2014; Kempadoo, 2015; Kempadoo et al., 2012; Weitzer, 2014).

These enquiries are important because social and structural barriers, including stigma, marginalise sex workers and expose us to further stigma, discrimination and human rights violations (Benoit et al., 2017b; Kim, 2015). However, I argue that the everyday experiences of sex workers within academic research have become invisible, and the complexities of sex workers' realities over-simplified. This exclusion of everyday experiences has led to the proliferation of studies that have instead focused on 'problems' and contributed to the false dichotomy so often represented in the literature about sex workers: that we must be either the empowered sex worker *or* the 'victimised prostitute' (Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; Smith, 2016; Sprankle & Bloomquist, 2017).

In the literature, sex workers are repeatedly viewed as research subjects rather than as real people, and our lives are most often explored by outsiders, that is, by people who are not sex workers. This

has resulted in the creation and exacerbation of stigmatising dialogue about sex work (Sprankle & Bloomquist, 2017). My focus on the everyday will add both nuance to, and a rich account of, the narratives of sex work from the viewpoint of sex workers themselves.

This thesis embodies the slogan 'Nothing About Us Without Us', which represents the cornerstone of sex worker research and research ethics (Stewart, 2017). This common rallying cry has also been adopted by a range of marginalised groups who have been, and continue to be, routinely excluded from policy making and regulatory processes, such as disability rights advocates for example (Charlton, 2000). Sex workers across the globe have adopted this phrase for protest, highlighting that we will no longer tolerate being left out of decision-making processes (or in this case research) that affect our lives. Outsider research is research done 'to' sex workers and is a pervasive problem for the sex work community (Mac & Smith, 2018; Stardust, 2019b). People are fascinated by sex workers, and the literature documents that many people from a range of different fields want to 'save prostitutes' (Agustín, 2008; Grant, 2014; Kempadoo, 2015; Van der Meulen, 2011), so it is unsurprising that more and more people are drawn to sex work research (Barron, 2019).

Stereotypes around sex work and sex workers are a major source of harm. Scarlet Alliance (2014, p. 11) states that 'myths and stereotypes about sex work have acted to harm, isolate and misrepresent sex workers and lead to misinformed policies and laws'. For example, radical feminist, or abolitionist, positions on sex work have greatly influenced research frameworks under which sex workers and our organisations are left out of the research process and our voices misrepresented (Van der Meulen, 2011; Weitzer, 2010b). This occurs because the inherent stereotyping and resulting stigma informs ideas of violence and exploitation associated with sex work. Furthermore, 'outsider' status is often presented as 'objectivity' and used to justify 'expertise' on 'prostitution'. These issues are explored

further in the literature review, which demonstrates that often these critiques of sex work are disguised as 'rescue' and appeal to those with conservative agendas that feed into the 'oppression paradigm' (Weitzer, 2010a).

When sex workers are forced to respond to sensationalised arguments about our lives we are taken away from important community work, such as fighting for laws that protect us from violence (Stardust, 2017). Researchers and academics who promote a carceral feminist stance and advocate for the criminalisation of sex work use their privilege and power to destabilise community action and enable violence against sex workers. Sex workers condemn laws and policies that aim to criminalise sex work and advocate for the full decriminalisation of sex work (Aroney & Crofts, 2019). Peer research is important because it enables sex workers to take back discussions about sex work and better advocate for policies that we support, such as the full decriminalisation of sex work.

Sex work: Why the everyday?

Sex work is commonplace in Australia, and regardless of how it is legislated it will continue to exist. Due to its 'illicit' nature, concrete figures around the number of workers working at any given moment are difficult to ascertain (Perkins et al., 1994; Shaver, 2005). While there are no official data on the number of sex workers in Australia, the UN estimates that there were around 20 500 sex workers working in 2014 (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2014). Obtaining actual figures remains fraught however due to the broad definition of sex work.

Stigma is a large part of the lives of sex workers. Social stigma, in part created and exacerbated by prohibitive and discriminatory legislation, means that many sex workers have little trust in authority. This also creates difficulties when undertaking research into sex work because of the 'hard-to-reach'

nature of the research population. Put simply: sex workers are easier to access when sex work is not criminalised (Donovan et al., 2012). Australian sex work research has therefore tended to focus on jurisdictions where sex work has been either largely decriminalised, such as New South Wales (NSW) (Abel, 2014a; Aroney & Crofts, 2019; Donovan et al., 2012; Fawkes, 2014a; 2014b; Jeffreys et al., 2010; Kim, 2015; Stardust & Story, 2015) or licensed (such as in Queensland and Victoria¹) (Begum et al., 2013; Orchiston, 2016; Sullivan, 2010; 2013; Sullivan & Jeffreys, 2002). Stigma features heavily in the everyday lives of sex workers, as one South Australian sex worker and blogger explains.

Take a moment now to think about every stereotype you can imagine relating to sex workers. Think of *Pretty Woman*, and the bodies in dumpsters on *Law and Order*, of high-class call girls, and desperate drug dependant street workers, about sex slaves, pimps and dangerous clients. About sex workers' childhoods, their reasons for working, their lifestyle. Every stereotypical image you can think of and then some.

I want you to understand that every single time we tell someone that we are a sex worker, we do so knowing the person we tell may have one or all of these assumptions about sex workers. When we tell someone we are a sex worker we risk having them instantly apply and compare any or all of those stereotypes to us. Imagine how we might feel when we disclose our job to you, or anyone. If it's hard for you, it's hard for us (Anonymous, 2012, Para 3,4).

Everyday life is constructed, and through storytelling we as researchers can interpret the constructed nature of these realities (Sarantakos, 2005). Exploring the relationships between individuals and their

¹ Victoria has very recently decriminalised sex work but has a long-documented history of harms arising from their partially criminalised model.

social and structural environments allows the researcher to understand the mundane aspects of everyday life as well as how these broader structures present in everyday life situations. Heller (1984, p. 3) states that:

No society can exist without individual reproduction, and no individual can exist without self-reproduction. Everyday life exists, then, in every society; indeed, every human being, whatever his place in the social division of labour, has his own everyday life. But this is not to say that the content and structure of everyday life are the same for all individuals in all societies.

By conducting a phenomenological enquiry I have been able to tease out how what have previously been regarded as the slight—or mundane—exchanges between sex workers and those with whom they conduct relationships to identify and highlight the ways in which the lives of sex workers are shaped by social and institutional structures in the everyday (Neal, 2015). Furthermore, this research honours storytelling and sex workers' accounts of their lives. The sex workers interviewed spoke about their lives as they chose, with little intervention from me, the researcher.

This research study is situated in South Australia where sex work is fully criminalised. It explores what the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers look like, the social and structural institutions that impinge on their everyday lives and the impact of these. It is an important addition to the body of work on sex work because it was conducted entirely in South Australia where sex workers have a unique experience of total criminalisation. No legislative reform to benefit sex workers has occurred (Armstrong & Sibree, 2019; Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Leaker & Dunk-West, 2011; Murphy et al., 2015), and South Australian sex workers have, as a result of this, featured less in academic research in Australia.

The context

Sex work in Australia is governed by individual state and territory governments, and therefore sex work laws vary from state to state. Australia provides a unique case study where three jurisdictions—New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Victoria—have decriminalised sex work, setting a strong precedent for decriminalisation in other Australian state and territory jurisdictions (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Donovan et al., 2012; Kim, 2015; Stardust & Story, 2015). Both New South Wales and Victoria have retained elements of criminalisation, therefore not all sex work is truly decriminalised in those jurisdictions. A number of other states including South Australia and Queensland also have active ongoing, sex worker-led law reform campaigns aimed at achieving full decriminalisation (Aroney & Crofts, 2019). Licensed (in reality partially criminalised) sex work is also common in Australia and can be best evidenced by both the Queensland and (until very recently reformed) Victorian laws. These systems harm sex workers (Begum et al., 2013; Jeffreys et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2010; Sullivan & Jeffreys, 2002). Under licensing models large swathes of the industry remain criminalised, and therefore a range of issues including police violence and intervention remain.

The best practice model that sex workers, allies and health rights organisations alike advocate for is the full decriminalisation of sex work. Full decriminalisation has been evidenced as the best model to support the health, rights and safety of sex workers (Abel, 2014b; 2018b; Abel, et al., 2009; Ahmad, 2001; Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Harcourt et al., 2005; Harcourt et al., 2010; Kim, 2015; Rekart, 2005). New South Wales decriminalised sex work in 1995 (Donovan et al., 2012) as did the Northern Territory in late 2019 (Roberts & Breen, 2019) and Victoria in early 2022. These jurisdictions lead the way in terms of sex work regulation. No other jurisdiction in the world other than New Zealand has been able to achieve decriminalisation. It needs to be noted though that New Zealand continues to criminalise migrant sex work, leaving this population vulnerable to harm (Abel, 2011; 2014a; 2014b; 2018b; Abel

et al., 2009; Harcourt et al., 2010; Harrington, 2010). Sex worker and activist DeCat (2019, Para 2) states, 'our movement has promoted the New Zealand decriminalisation model for decades without being critical of New Zealand's criminalisation of migrant workers'. DeCat (2019) argues that this oversight is due to racism. It is evident that even with the advent of decriminalisation in any local context other structural forms of oppression will continue to exist for sex workers, especially those more marginalised sex workers (DeCat & Stardust, 2020).

The criminalisation of sex work does not eliminate it and fails to protect sex workers, especially those who are most marginalised. It has been extensively demonstrated within the literature that criminalised sex workers experience far greater harms than those working within a decriminalised setting (Abel, 2018a; 2018b; Ahmed et al., 2011; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). Criminalisation coupled with stigma means that sex workers are exposed to more state-based violence and discrimination than non-sex workers, resulting in significantly detrimental impacts on their day-to-day lives (Armstrong, 2018; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; Weitzer, 2010a; 2010b). For example, the introduction of the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) introduced in March 2018 in the United States is effectively a form of criminalisation and surveillance masquerading as a response to combatting sex trafficking. FOSTA-SESTA is disguised as 'well intended law' but due to shutting down cheap and accessible advertising platforms for sex workers has had global repercussions for the sex industry. This includes South Australian sex workers (Stern, 2019), where sex workers of colour, First Nations, LGBTIQ+ and working-class sex workers have been most impacted.

Not only is sex work fully criminalised in South Australia, apart from some minor changes most of the laws have remained unchanged since they were first enacted, some more than 60 years ago (Armstrong & Sibree, 2019). Traditionally, brothels made up the majority of the sex industry in South Australia and the current laws still reflect this (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Nagy & Powell, 2016; Perkins et al., 1994). However, the industry has changed dramatically, with more and more private,

independent, and non-brothel sex work occurring and online sex work becoming a major proportion of the industry. The laws do not reflect how sex work operates today, and it is impossible for sex workers to navigate how the laws relate to sex work. The industry is changing, and criminalisation impacts the day-to-day lives of sex workers. More state-specific and higher quality research is needed to better understand the context and impact of these changes.

Aims of the research

There is a sparse literature on the impact of the everyday on sex workers and this thesis aims to address this gap. Little is documented about how the contemporary environment impacts the day-to-day lives of sex workers and how social and institutional structures intersect with their everyday experiences. The consequence of this dearth of literature is that the everyday experiences of sex workers inevitably become invisible, or the complexities of sex worker realities become oversimplified (Smith, 2016; Sprankle & Bloomquist, 2017). South Australia provides a unique setting in which to explore the everyday lives of sex workers because of its completely criminalised context and the associated social and institutional stigma that is created from such a context (Murphy et al., 2015). To specifically address this gap in the literature, this study was underpinned and informed by the findings in relation to the following research questions:

- What are 'the everyday' experiences of South Australian sex workers?
- What factors shape and construct the contemporary, everyday experiences and meanings for sex workers in South Australia?

Overview of the thesis

The central finding of this research exploring the everyday lives of sex workers is that stigma is an every-day occurrence. This was highlighted through different forms of relating and relationships. Those shared with clients, lovers, friends, family and the self were central, and these were the issues most frequently identified in interviews. Heller (2015, p. 55) states that ‘the best guide to the qualitative content of everyday life remains the formation of direct personal relationships between people’. This is unsurprising given that more broadly, relationships in everyday life are the cornerstone of the human experience (Heller, 2015). However, this thesis demonstrates that it is due to the presence of stigma that these particular relationships were highlighted. It was also found that both visible and invisible social and institutional structures impact sex workers and their relationships; demonstrating how, when combined with stigma and discrimination, these impinge on relationships and affect the very foundations of sex workers’ social lives. Sex workers of colour, bigger-bodied, queer and working-class sex workers were even more affected. Exploring the everyday experiences of participants also revealed that despite criminalisation and stigma, sex workers understood power and agency and demonstrated autonomy by managing and resisting stigma in various ways. Participants also demonstrated that resilience, professionalism and expertise were important parts of a sex worker’s everyday life.

This thesis is structured around nine chapters:

Chapter Two (the literature review) explores the relevant literature, highlighting that while research focusing on stigma and the harms associated with sex work is important, it has also perpetrated additional stigma. It does this by obscuring the everyday, mundane aspects of sex workers’ lives by focusing only on injustice, without connecting this to the everyday context. Stigma is explored in

recognition that globally, sex work remains criminalised despite the extensive evidence showing the benefits of full decriminalisation. Stigma is also explored with respect to how it enables the exploration of outsider research in the literature, highlighting the importance of insider research to create better quality research by being more inclusive of the voices of sex workers.

Chapter Three (the methodology) explains the choice of methods deemed most useful in answering the research questions, expands upon the importance of insider research and how the concept of the ‘everyday’ for sex workers remains underexplored. Sex work feminism and phenomenology are explained, as is how these are used to highlight sex worker voices, thus enabling participants to lead the research more meaningfully without much intervention from me, the researcher. The methodology establishes clear theoretical and methodological frameworks—including sex work-specific ethical considerations—to support insider research within an institutional setting (the academy of higher education), which often undermines and minimises the ‘insider’ in favour of ‘objectivity’.

Chapter Four (the South Australian context) explains the turmoil around the policing of sex work laws in South Australia (as well as in the United States) at the time that participants were recruited in 2018. It explores how these impacted (and continue to impact) the everyday lives of sex workers due to the particularities of criminalisation in this state and the impacts of stigma.

Chapter Five explores the everyday lives of sex workers and their interactions with clients. Participants successfully managed complicated work lives despite criminalisation, stigma, gender and power imbalances, drawing on resilience as a key feature of everyday life. Findings include that sex workers have developed a number of expert ways to protect themselves from harm and violence, understanding and using complex interactions in order to do so. When participants spoke about violence, ‘extreme’ forms of violence were not discussed; rather, everyday forms of harassment and

violence were highlighted. This first findings chapter shows that participants resist and navigate everyday harassment, which complicates the nature of their work, and also identifies the skills and expertise they employ to do sex work.

Chapter Six explores sex workers and their romantic relationships. It was found that participants manage their relationships in several ways due to stigma, which often creates extra labour for them. In addition to managing stigma in their everyday working lives, they also have to mitigate any stigma their partners experience or perpetrate. This chapter shows how sex workers grapple with 'outing' themselves to their partners, where despite valuing honesty, risk is a feature of romantic life.

Participants reported not wanting to feel shame about sex work, yet because disclosure complicates romantic relationships for sex workers, many resisted by creating boundaries in their relationships and being clear about what they would and would not accept from partners.

Chapter Seven highlights how sex workers interact with and manage relationships with family and friends. This is an area of research that has largely been neglected within the literature on sex work. Overall, the family lives of participants reinforce gendered dynamics and are ones that favour more traditional norms and expectations. These dynamics are strengthened because sex workers ultimately want support from their parents or family members, which often means compromising and hiding who they are. Participants told many stories about not wanting to 'out' themselves to family due to fear and the risk of being ostracised. Romantic relationships and friendships were identified as the safest relationships for participants, and these were where they reported receiving most of their support. Participants also deeply value the sex work community and highlighted in this chapter how workplaces and peers often help them resist everyday stigma and criminalisation as well as help to build resilience and pride.

Chapter Eight explores how sex workers speak about themselves and highlights that through thinking about ‘space and place’ and other intersections—such as race, class and sexuality—that interact with stigma, sex workers are able to understand and use both agency and power within everyday life as well as resist power misused against them. It highlights expertise gained through deep understandings of how stigma and power manifest, not just in work settings but in complex ways and in other aspects of life. This was also demonstrated when participants spoke about politics and how they wanted to advocate for law reform and decriminalisation.

Chapter Nine synthesises the discussion and conclusion chapters with the findings chapters to present the overall findings and argument of this thesis. It outlines how this research contributes to sex work feminism as a methodology, and based on the findings it outlines recommendations for sex work research moving forward.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Sex work has existed for millennia, yet it is still largely a stigmatised and marginalised profession. Sex workers continue to work precariously and fight for the most basic of rights and recognition; hence the widespread use by sex workers and allies of the slogan ‘sex workers’ rights are human rights’ (Decker et al., 2015; Fawkes, 2014b, p. 19; Godwin, 2012; Mac & Smith, 2018). Representations and depictions of sex work are more often than not derived from ‘outsider understandings’ rather than from sex workers and sex worker organisations; however, sex workers have not been passive and have spearheaded a shift in the dialogue around sex work (Chapkis, 1997; Fawkes, 2005; Jeffreys, 2005; 2010b; Jeffreys et al., 2011; Schuler & Oliveira, 2018; Sprinkle, 1997b; Vijayakumar et al., 2019). More recently, for example, sex workers have been speaking out about their lives and campaigning for law reform and the decriminalisation of sex work by adding much-needed nuance and critique (DeCat & Stardust, 2020).

Outsider-led research remains a pervasive problem for sex workers, and because sex workers’ lives are routinely sensationalised the focus has been on the perceived ills associated with sex work rather than more nuanced and balanced understandings of the work (Foley, 2019; Shaver, 2019; Weitzer, 2020). Within academia, outsider sex work researchers continue to focus on those sectors of the sex work community, and especially on those groups of sex workers who experience more violence, discrimination and stigma. These insights can be of benefit to sex workers and are often intended to

challenge the policing of sex work and barriers to legislative reform or health care. Whilst this is important, it also misrepresents what many sex workers experience within their day-to-day lives, and in doing so, it fails to add nuance and context to the work.

Being open as a sex worker within academia is risky due to stigma, discrimination and misogyny, and hence many peer sex working academics remain closeted for a range of reasons including safety (Bowen & Bungay, 2016; Dr Anonymous, 2020; Hammond & Kingston, 2014). This impacts the ability of sex working academics to conduct insider research and stifles its use in academia. It is sex workers who have actively challenged the mainstream dialogue around sex work and raised the visibility of the profession and the need for full decriminalisation reforms as a first step to obtaining human and other rights (Aimee et al., 2015; Davina, 2017; Grant, 2014; Lee, 2015; Leigh, 1994; Rita, 2020; Mac & Smith, 2018). For example, in the Northern Territory it was sex worker voices and their representative peer sex worker organisation that helped sway the votes in favour of decriminalisation, highlighting that the lived experiences underpinning sex worker voices are impactful and matter (Sex Worker Outreach Program Northern Territory, 2019). Technological advances have changed the way all our lives are organised (Sanders et al., 2018a), and for sex workers this has also brought about greater visibility of some sex workers and forms of sex work (such as internet-based sex work) while reducing the visibility of street-based sex work (DeCat, 2019; Lawless, 2020; Sanders et al., 2018a; Vanting, 2018). However, despite the increased opportunities for sex workers to speak out about their lives they still face discrimination and inequality in their everyday working lives, which this literature review demonstrates. Additionally, only some sex workers, especially Caucasian sex workers, are afforded a platform to speak about our profession. This includes myself, whereas other sex workers—for example migrant sex workers—risk ostracism for speaking out (DeCat & Stardust, 2020).

Sex work cannot be discussed without addressing the devastating impact and complexity of stigma. Stigma disproportionately harms some sex workers more than others, namely First Nations sex

workers, sex workers of colour, trans and gender-diverse, street-based, working-class, drug-using and migrant sex workers. Clearly, eliminating stigma is not straightforward, and whilst aiming to normalise sex work is important (Chapkis, 2017; Weitzer, 2017a; 2017b), it also requires challenging colonialism, racism, gender inequality, poverty, class privilege, heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia (Chapkis, 2017; Kempadoo, 2001b; 2015; Kempadoo et al., 2012; Mac & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, dismantling and challenging deeply entrenched ideals around 'normativity' will go further towards advancing social justice agendas than simply trying to 'fit' sex work into rigid and narrow understandings of the current status quo. The full decriminalisation of sex work, which is supported by sex workers, allies and human rights organisations, will begin to dissolve the stigma around sex work (Aroney & Crofts, 2019). Such reforms can set new precedents that acknowledge that the policing of consenting adults and their bodies is outdated and archaic. However, it must be noted that full decriminalisation is only the start, and some members of the sex work community will remain disadvantaged. The complexities of sex work, including its intersection with migration and drug use for example, must also be explored and addressed (DeCat, 2019; DeCat & Stardust, 2020). However, this can only occur by giving sex workers a platform on which to speak about their lives, as this thesis aims to do.

Peer research is important and necessary to challenge research that has, and continues to, stigmatise sex workers; especially when it only positions sex workers as disenfranchised and without autonomy. This literature review provides critiques of sex work research and how this impacts sex workers. It demonstrates that insider research and privileging the everyday lives and practices of sex workers is a necessary addition to the existing research. Introducing the concept of the 'everyday' in order to exhibit the lives of sex workers in more detailed and nuanced ways. This counters the powerful sex worker/victim dichotomy and essentialist arguments as well as contextualises the work so that stigma can begin to be addressed.

This literature review begins by defining peer (insider) sex work research and sex work (a contested concept) before explaining why sex work has been stigmatised. Stigmatisation has influenced a wave of sex work research that has explored health, policing and violence, as well as debates on the criminalisation and decriminalisation of sex work and 'trafficking'. This is followed by discussion of empirical literature conducted by sex work peer researchers with regards to insider and outsider research. The latter part of this literature review explores empirical studies conducted by sex work peer researchers and the value of exploring the everyday lives of sex workers.

Sex work research

Sex work peer researchers are members of the group they research. They may be academically trained researchers themselves, trained by outsiders to participate as co-researchers, or work with peer sex work organisations that produce research (Lobo et al., 2020). Peer-led research is important because sex workers are better placed to speak on insider issues and approach the subject matter with a specific perspective that only insiders can offer (Jeffreys, 2010b; Stardust, 2020; Treloar et al., 2021). Sex workers can get to the core of issues pertaining to sex work because of their lived experience rather than focusing on the dominant stigmatised constructions and assumptions arising from stereotypes about sex work that lack discussion of resistance strategies (Jeffreys, 2010b; Stardust, 2020). This perspective and the increased depth of knowledge provides richer accounts about the lives of sex workers and reflects what sex workers already know through lived experience and shared peer anecdotes to be true (Jeffreys, 2010b; Stardust, 2020). In addition, peer researchers are more successful in the recruitment process because sex workers have a fraught history with outsiders enquiring about their lives, therefore more trust is afforded to a peer researcher than an outsider (Jeffreys, 2010b; Lobo et al., 2020). For example, I successfully recruited and interviewed 30 sex workers in three and a half weeks in the recruitment phase of this thesis.

Alarming, it has been found that when outsiders interview sex workers that participants reveal tragic accounts to appease researchers (Pickering, 2013; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). It has been argued that when outsider researchers target sex workers who have been victimised and ask leading questions then narratives of victimisation dominate, and subsequently skew, research findings, which ignores both the context and complexities embedded in sex work (Kempadoo et al., 2012; Shaver, 2019; Weitzer, 2006; 2010a; 2010b; 2020). When researchers do not believe that 'positive' accounts of sex work exist, it is harder to account for alternative, more nuanced narratives (Kempadoo et al., 2012; Pickering, 2013; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Norma and Tankard Reist's (2016) book *Prostitution narratives: Stories of survival in the sex trade* is a good example of this kind of research where researchers only explore 'victims of prostitution', fail to include 'sex worker' accounts and refuse to accept any input from our organisations.

Peer research has been instrumental in challenging existing research approaches and advocating for researchers to work in partnership with sex work organisations to avoid problematic research practices and ensure outcomes that better protect sex workers (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). There has also been a strong call to recognise and position sex workers and sex worker organisations as the true experts on sex work, and for sex worker voices to have the same status and validity in research as statistical data (Jeffreys, 2010b; Jeffreys et al., 2012; Jeffreys et al., 2011). In peer research, sex worker organisations and sex workers are central to the research process throughout, from conception to completion, as well as in the rolling out of publications (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). Exploring the everyday lives of sex workers as a peer researcher, I argue, results in a greater quality and depth of enquiry. My research adds to the growing field of peer sex worker research and academic work being conducted, especially here in Australia where more and more research about sex work is designed by, and created for, sex workers (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Barron, 2019; Fawkes, 2014a; 2014b; Jeffreys, 2010a; 2010b; 2018; Jeffreys et al., 2011; Jeffreys et al., 2010; Kim, 2015; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Matos & Haze, 2019; Perkins et al., 1994; Rayson & Alba, 2019; Stardust, 2015; 2019b; Treloar et al., 2021).

Who defines sex work?

'Prostitute' is used as both a descriptor and a debaser aimed at stigmatising sex workers and positioning them as only *women* without agency (Benoit et al., 2017b). Sex work is the preferred terminology used by sex workers, and the pejorative term 'prostitute' and other oppressive language that aims to further marginalise sex workers and sex work is rejected (Scarlet Alliance, 2014). However, it should be noted that some sex workers have reclaimed the word 'prostitute' in an act of resistance, as evidenced by the recent book *Revolting Prostitutes* by Mac and Smith (2018).

Sex workers have been instrumental in this reframing of 'prostitution' as sex work. The phrase was first coined by American sex worker and activist Carol Leigh, who argued that it was important to focus on 'sex work as work' and 'sex worker rights' rather than on violence and victimisation (Grant, 2014; Jeffreys, 2015; Leigh, 1994; 1997). Despite this reframing to more accurately define sex work as work however, many outsider scholars continue to use the term 'prostitute' when speaking on sex work. Confusingly, this includes use of the term by groups who also advocate for decriminalisation and sex worker rights (Benoit et al., 2017b). When sex workers and scholars use the term 'sex work' it is political and a form of resistance used to highlight that sex work is work and not inherently exploitative in and of itself. Rather, stigma and social constructs create an oppressive environment for sex workers (Benoit et al., 2017b; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013a; Bungay et al., 2011). Highlighting that sex work is a form of labour also demonstrates that sex workers are deserving of the same work rights and protections as any other worker (Durisin et al., 2018), and that similar to other forms of labour sex work may include coercion and exploitation but also resistance and agency (Sullivan, 2010). It also highlights that sex work includes emotional labour (Murphy et al., 2015), where it is contextualised in relation to other forms of care work, service work and feminised labour.

Sex worker-led and run organisations such as Scarlet Alliance, Australia's peak sex worker organisation, and other human rights-based organisations define sex work to encapsulate as many workers as possible (Godwin, 2012; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). Scarlet Alliance (2014, p. 11) highlights that 'there are many different kinds of sex work, including private, brothel and street sex work, escorting, massage, stripping, phone sex operating, pornography, web camming, sadism and masochism, bondage and discipline, and sex for favours, goods and accommodation'. Furthermore, the term 'sex work' is also used to refer to and advocate for people who engage in sexual labour (Godwin, 2012). Recognising diversity within the sex work community allows for the acknowledgement of other intersecting issues, such as racism and classism, that impact upon the everyday lives of sex workers (Durisin et al., 2018). For example, the continued criminalisation of migrant sex workers in New Zealand has been shown to discriminate against sex workers of colour (DeCat, 2019).

Pheterson (1993) discusses how 'sex' is an inadequate description of sex work because many sex workers do not offer 'penetrative sex', otherwise known as 'full service'. The use of the term 'sex' as a part of 'sex work' implies that sex work is more rigid and mirrors broader social constructions about sex. This inevitably skews the picture of sex work; for example, that all sex work is full service sex work and penetrative in nature (Perkins et al., 1994; Pheterson, 1993). Despite this, modern sex work is considered to be an umbrella term inclusive of all kinds of sex work, regardless of what sex and sexual intercourse mean culturally (Jackson & Scott, 2010; Perkins et al., 1994).

'Prostitution' evokes images of cisgender women who only engage in heterosexual and 'strictly penetrative' 'sexual' encounters (Ahmed, 2011; Scarlet Alliance, 2014; Smith et al., 2015). The sex work community is not limited to cisgender women and sex work ought to be viewed as a gender-neutral term as the community is also comprised of men, trans and gender-diverse workers as well as workers of diverse sexual orientations (Godwin, 2012; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). Disregarding the diversity of sex workers positions 'prostitution' only as an institution that perpetuates patriarchal,

normative gender and sexual roles, whereas it can also counter and disarm these institutions (Ahmed, 2011; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). Such definitions, it has been argued, marginalise members of the community and their unique experiences of sex work, for example, trans women of colour (Bianchi et al., 2014; Brennan et al., 2012; Bungay et al., 2016; Edelman, 2011; Ganju & Saggurti, 2017; Hoffman, 2014; Lyons et al., 2017). In short, insider sex work researchers argue that simplistic narratives about sex workers including the use of the term 'prostitute' marginalise more vulnerable members of the sex work community. However, this can be countered when the everyday lives of sex workers are explored as part of a broader, deeper range of sex worker narratives and included in research.

Sex work is forever evolving, especially in online spaces where the ways in which sex work occurs is as simple or involved as the sex worker's imagination allows (Sanders et al., 2018b). By highlighting the everyday aspects of sex work we can gain deeper and richer understandings around how broader social and institutional structures impact sex workers and the services offered.

'Prostitution' abolitionists, radical feminists and Christian groups do not define sex work as work, rather as 'prostitution', where 'prostituted women' are coerced and subject to male sexual violence (Ahmed, 2011). Definitions of 'prostitution' often incorporate moralistic overtones and are emotively depicted (Coy et al., 2019; Jeffreys, 1997; Moran & Farley, 2019; Norma & Tankard Reist, 2016; Weitzer, 2020). Radical feminists, or abolitionists, are powerful actors (Ahmed, 2011; Durisin et al., 2018) who have aggressively framed and led research on 'prostitution' within the spaces of academia and law reform. Furthermore, their 'advice' as to how sex work should be regulated has had disastrous results for sex workers (Durisin et al., 2018; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014). For example, radical feminists and Christian groups alike have advocated for punitive models of law reform, such as the Swedish, or Nordic models, that aim to 'protect prostitutes' by curbing the sale of sex via criminalising the clients of sex workers. This model has been deplored by sex workers and shown to actively create further harms, especially for women and migrant workers (Vuolajärvi, 2019). Carceral feminists

advocate for punitive measures as the answer to violence and trafficking (erroneously conflating sex work with trafficking); however, alongside this a 'rescue industry' that attracts large amounts of funding has emerged (Agustín, 2004; 2005; 2008; Jackson, 2016).

It is important to point out that amongst these debates of who and what defines sex work, other factors such as law, policy and regulation also play an important role in the meaning making of it (Nagy & Powell, 2016). These factors function to set precedents and to define norms, values and 'problems' within society, where what constitutes a 'problem' is both political and contested (Nagy & Powell, 2016). Hence, when politicians and government officials define sex work as 'prostitution', the resulting definitions are often less inclusive, more rigid and shrouded in morality and risk (Armstrong & Sibree, 2019; Hubbard et al., 2016). Additionally, evidence-based research may become sidelined and therefore ineffective in directing policy when there is an unwillingness to separate moral views and opinions from debate on sex work and law reform (Shaver, 2019). For example, in South Australia sex work Bills have often been subject to 'conscience' votes (Armstrong & Sibree, 2019; Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Nagy & Powell, 2016). When sex work is discussed within parliament, regardless of whether it is depicted as sex work or 'prostitution', risk is still a common feature and attempts at passing progressive law reform often fail (Nagy & Powell, 2016; Shaver, 2019). Sex workers are often depicted in ways that support certain political agendas, such as aligning with political factions or lobby groups, and are often divorced from the ways in which sex workers speak about themselves and their everyday lives.

The importance of 'the everyday'

Little is documented about the everyday lives and practices of sex workers. Research has predominantly focused on larger constructions situated around sex work. These enquiries are important because they have exposed the social and structural barriers, including stigma, that marginalise sex workers and further expose them to discrimination and human rights violations (Benoit et al., 2017b; Kim, 2015). However, it can be argued that the everyday experiences of sex workers have become invisible, where the complexities of sex worker realities have become oversimplified, often representing either the empowered sex worker or a victimised 'prostitute' (Smith, 2016; Sprankle & Bloomquist, 2017; Sprankle et al., 2017). These observations can guide research into unexpected places (Neal, 2015) and hence might provide new issues or alternative explanations for the issues raised within sex work research. Gardiner (2000, pp. 75-76) argues that:

The everyday should not be taken for granted or ignored and represents the site where we as researchers can understand sex work with a specific kind of depth that allows us to bear witness to how essential human desires, powers and potentialities are formed, developed and realised.

Everyday narratives give voice to sex workers and break down stereotypes that shroud the sex industry. Furthermore, everyday narratives do not only inform academia but represent sex work as sex workers understand it.

Lefebvre (1971) argues that everyday understandings of life highlight the central role that the everyday plays in our social world and illuminate how social and institutional structures dictate our lives (Gardiner, 2004) and in particular, sex and sexuality. The everyday is socially constructed,

therefore everyday sexuality not only conceptualises sex as reproductive, but as a space where social norms negotiate and construct sex and sexuality (Dunk-West, 2016; Dunk, 2007; Lavie-Ajayi, 2020). Sex is also viewed as an important aspect of people's everyday lives (Dunk-West, 2016), hence the demand for commercially available sex. Historically, human sexuality has always, in one form or another, been regulated by social institutions and conventions where 'normal' sex and 'abnormal' sex have been socially constructed and legislated (Jackson, 2010; 2012). Western society's notions around sexuality and sexual intercourse are closely tied to heterosexuality, love, romance, monogamy, gender and morality (Jackson & Ho, 2014). Sex work is explicitly connected to these understandings; however, it falls outside traditional, accepted heterosexual norms (Jackson, 2010; 2012), highlighting why tensions arise around sex work and its regulation. While modernity has brought along with it a loosening of normative constraints affixed to sexuality, such as sex before marriage, many heterosexual norms remain unquestioned, such as monogamy (Jackson, 2012; Jackson & Scott, 2010).

The 'specialness' of sexuality, Jackson and Scott (2010) argue, must be challenged and instead seen as a mundane, ordinary and everyday occurrence. Sexuality is a part of our social landscape and is not limited to sexual intercourse but involves feelings and relationships and contributes to the ways in which we view others and define ourselves (Jackson, 2010; 2012; Jackson & Scott, 2010). Heterosexuality also upholds traditional family values, reinforcing gendered roles and norms because it regulates and controls those within its boundaries (Jackson, 2006). Although concepts affixed to heterosexuality have slowly shifted, including the ways in which these norms are regulated, heterosexuality retains its dominance within society as the normative form of human sexuality and therefore contributes to the marginalisation of sex workers (Rissel et al., 2003). Challenging the 'specialness' of sexual intercourse and locating sexuality and sexual activity in the everyday is foundational to this research (Dunk-West, 2012; Jackson & Scott, 2004). By exploring the everyday experiences of sex workers, we view sex work as work and reimagine concepts situated around sex workers from a sex worker's perspective. Rather than focusing on the 'sex' aspect of sex work,

everyday sexuality illuminates the constructed social nature of sex work and 'prostitution', therefore disconnecting sex and sex work from something that is taboo or deviant. This approach allows the everyday experiences of sex workers to be identified where they may be used to challenge common assumptions about sex work by highlighting its constructed nature.

Stigma

Historically, empirical examinations of sex work have tended to focus on the more stigmatised aspects of the work (Treloar et al., 2021). This leads to sex work being conceptualised as having inherent risks, with abuses associated with sex work positioned as inherent to sex work overall (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). This hyper-focus on the harms associated with sex work means that the everyday, mundane aspects are ignored, resulting in understandings about sex work by sex workers themselves being deprioritised (Benoit et al., 2018; Grant, 2014; Mac & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, when the 'extreme' examples of the harms associated with sex work are explored, everyday sex work becomes obscured. For example, Kate Holden (2007, p. 1414), sex worker and writer states:

What do I remember of being a prostitute? I remember tenderness, boredom, the ice-creams we would eat at 3 a.m. in front of the television; the smell of cocks, shy men with silky skin, laughter; dark streets gleaming; boys in baseball caps slouching in the introduction lounge, heavy bellies pressing on me; conversations, sneaking cigarettes while fixing my make-up.

Academics further feed into sex work stigma by positioning sex work solely as an institution, reinforcing gendered hierarchies that legitimise the sexual exploitation of women by men without the broader context of wider social issues (Benoit et al., 2018). These researchers tend to focus on

violence—especially against women—exploitation, trafficking, street-based sex work, mental health issues associated with the work and drug use (Corbin, 1990; Jeffreys, 1997; Norma & Tankard Reist, 2016; Pheterson, 1996; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; 2017). Violence and exploitation does occur; however, in reality sex work is neither good nor bad but rather is a form of labour that overlaps with multiple forms of social inequality, such as class, gender, and race, and like other forms of work, is performed within neoliberal capitalist societies (Benoit et al., 2018; Chapkis, 1997; Fawkes, 2005; Mac & Smith, 2018; Pheterson, 1996; Sanders, 2005a;).

Researchers exploring stigma have rarely included sex worker experiences and how they resist stigma (Weitzer, 2017a; 2017b). Research can easily contribute to damaging narratives about sex work, especially when researchers themselves do not recognise stigma, are influenced by stigma or stigmatise participants (Murphy, 2010; Sullivan & Jeffreys, 2002). Even researchers exploring sex work experience stigma themselves despite not being sex workers, indicating the severity of the stigma attached to sex work (Dr Anonymous, 2020; Hammond & Kingston, 2014; Sinha, 2017). Stigma creates a narrative that sex workers are believed to be a threat to society because they disrupt heteronormative family values and are viewed as dangerous and considered a nuisance within the urban landscape (Hubbard & Sanders, 2003). Researchers have shown that stigma is a fundamental determinant of behaviour, wellbeing and health for many marginalised groups, but sex workers are notably absent from their analyses (Benoit et al., 2017a). It is important to explore the everyday lives of sex workers in contemporary life, as depictions around ‘prostitution’ dehumanise sex workers. These everyday accounts can build different constructions around sex work.

Stigma also renders sex work ‘dirty work’ (Blithe & Wolfe, 2017), which is considered ‘tainted’ because it is regarded as physically, socially and morally less attractive than other occupations (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Bruckert & Chabot, 2014). Despite sex work being pervasive in society and ‘one of the

world's oldest professions' sex workers continue to experience stigma on macro, meso and micro levels (Benoit et al., 2017b), or put differently: from socio-power structures, institutions, the community and the individual (Grittner & Walsh, 2020). Goffman's (1986) scholarly work on stigma and identity has continued to serve as a starting point for researchers aiming to define or explore stigma in the context of sex work (Benoit et al., 2017b; Link & Phelan, 2001; Vassenden & Lie, 2013; Yang et al., 2007). However, his work is limited in its application because he focused on the individual and how a 'mark' is seen as a personal attribute rather than how society affixes stigma onto an individual or a group (Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014; Link & Phelan, 2001). Stigmatic assumptions regarding sex work are not only perpetuated socially but embedded in social structures (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013a; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; 2017). Researchers now include discrimination and power in their definitions of stigma, with a greater focus on institutional stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001; 2014; Phelan et al., 2008). For example, Link and Phelan (2001, p. 363) reconceptualise stigma as 'the co-occurrence of its components, labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination and further indicate that for stigmatisation to occur, power must be exercised'. Stigma is ultimately used to maintain power structures and social order by strengthening powerful groups and individuals. This is done by justifying difference through the creation of hierarchies (Grittner & Walsh, 2020).

'Whore stigma' is a specific kind of stigma (Bruckert & Chabot, 2014; Pheterson, 1993; 1996) that all sex workers experience (Weitzer, 2010b) and is key to understanding why sex workers experience inequality and discrimination in their everyday lives (Benoit et al., 2017b; Benoit et al., 2020; Bettio et al., 2017; Bowen & Bungay, 2016; Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Minichiello et al., 2018; Pheterson, 1993; Scambler, 2007). Sex workers are highly aware of the stigmatic assumptions situated around sex work (Bruckert & Chabot, 2014) and that sex workers are commonly referred to as 'dirty', 'immoral', 'hyper-sexualised' and conceptualised as 'home-wreckers', 'coerced', 'victims' and 'illegitimate workers'

(Bruckert & Chabot, 2014). French sex work activists Maîtresse Nikita and Thierry Schaffauser (translated into English by Bruckert and Chabot (2014)), wrote about sex worker experiences of whorephobia and discrimination, stating that:

Whorephobia is one of the most widespread discriminations in our Western culture, so much so that it goes unnamed. [...] There are many rationales underlying the whorephobic sentiment. The two main ones are defining 'prostitutes' as 1) victims, too dim-witted to be able to know what is good for them [...] 2) delinquents, vectors of disease and epidemics, whose mere visibility is a nuisance. In both cases, whorephobes act with the will to feel superior. Consciously or not, they get the feeling of either being saviours or policemen at the service of humanity. These two rationales, victims or delinquents, can intersect and are not necessarily contradictory in the minds of whorephobes.

Structural and cultural stigma

Sex work stigma is complex and involves many layers. It negatively impacts the everyday lives of sex workers (Grittner & Walsh, 2020). There are many ways in which society squashes, marginalises, excludes, avoids, rejects and discriminates against sex workers (Benoit et al., 2017b; Link & Phelan, 2001; Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). Structural stigma includes all societal-level conditions, cultural norms and institutional policies that constrain the opportunities, resources and wellbeing of sex workers, for example, the criminalisation of sex work (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). Power is intrinsically connected to structural stigma, which is socially constructed, institutionalised and structurally reproduced (Biradavolu et al., 2012). Link and Phelan (2014, p. 24) state:

When people have an interest in keeping other people down, in or away, stigma is a resource that allows them to obtain ends they desire. We call this resource 'stigma power' and use the term to refer to instances in which stigma processes achieve the aims of stigmatisers with respect to the exploitation, control or exclusion of others.

Socio-power structures that interact with stigma and impact on the everyday lives of sex workers are rooted in gender, race, colonial rule, class, ableism and capitalism (Benoit et al., 2018; Dziuban, 2015; Grittner & Walsh, 2020). When people are deprived of resources, are marginalised and experience sexism or transphobia, racism, homophobia and economic exploitation—or all of them at once—violence and stigma are also experienced (Dziuban, 2015). Sex work stigma is also rooted in cultural norms about gender and sexuality (Benoit et al., 2017b; Link & Phelan, 2014) where sex workers are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy (with other groups) and punished for operating outside of monogamous, heterosexual conventions aimed at safeguarding the social order (Ahmed et al., 2011; Benoit et al., 2017b; Comte, 2013; Ganju & Saggurti, 2017; Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Koken, 2012; Murphy et al., 2015; Roche & Keith, 2014).

Researchers have shown and argued that intersectional differences among sex workers mean that each group of sex workers faces unique sets of structural and cultural challenges (Benoit et al., 2017b; Vijayakumar et al., 2019). For example, stigma is imbedded in structural inequalities where sex workers of colour have to compete with white supremacy and racism in addition to whore stigma. This impacts their labour conditions and ability to earn, resulting in reduced employment opportunities (Miller-Young, 2010; Sullivan & Day, 2019; Wojcicki, 1999). Colonial rule has long impacted sex work, where colonisers have exerted power and control over sex workers of colour (Doezema & Kempadoo, 1998; Kempadoo, 2001a; 2001b; 2015; Perkins et al., 1994). Colonisation and recolonisation continues to occur, for example in tourist destinations where sex workers are subject to eroticising, sexualising fantasies and exploitation (Kempadoo, 2001a). Sex work is like any other

form of labour, and class stratifications or 'whorearchy' mean that sex work is similar in how it privileges and disadvantages certain groups of people based on race, class and citizenship status (Bernstein, 2007; Dewey, 2015; Mac & Smith, 2018; Simpson & Smith, 2020). For example, Grant (2014, p. 77) writes:

Whore stigma makes central the racial and class hierarchy reinforced in the dividing of women into the pure and the impure, the clean and the unclean, the white and virgin and all the others. If women is other, whore is the other's other.

Another example is how sex work and disability intersect in countless ways, exposing structural and cultural stigma. Researchers have argued that sex workers and clients with disabilities are discriminated against and stigmatised on multiple levels (Rozengarten & Brook, 2016), where accessing sexual services is not only stigmatised but many barriers exist to accessing services (Fritsch et al., 2016; Liddiard, 2014).

Structural and cultural stigma shape and influence research into sex work and how it is conducted. For example, Australian university ethics committees often deem sex work research high risk due to sex work being viewed as criminal and a dangerous area to study (Hammond & Kingston, 2014; Sanders, 2006). Academic and conference spaces are also notorious for reproducing stigma for sex workers, where damaging narratives continue to hold space, such as radical feminist understandings of 'prostitution' (Barron, 2019). Researchers often use 'prostitute survivor stories' and dismiss sex worker narratives as unrepresentative. They do this in order to use 'prostitution' narratives as political capital to argue against decriminalisation and bolster criminalisation models such as the Nordic model (Barron, 2019; Coy et al., 2019; Jovanovski & Tyler, 2018; Norma & Tankard Reist, 2016; Phipps, 2016). The media is also complicit: sex work is often sensationalised and distorted for public pleasure, with the media blaming sex workers for their plight (Aimee et al., 2015; Grant, 2014; Grittner & Walsh,

2020; Perkins et al., 1994). Inevitably all these narratives feed into sex work policy, where often law reform efforts are stifled due to stereotypes about sex workers (Benoit et al., 2018; Jackson, 2016; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). Sex workers are not only discriminated against and stigmatised by law makers, but also by the laws they create (Benoit et al., 2018; Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Hubbard et al., 2016; Johnson, 2015; Weitzer, 2010b). Sex worker policy is often debated in a largely 'evidence-free environment' due to stigma, where any moral issues connected to sex work outweigh evidence or sex workers' lived experience (Benoit et al., 2018; Wagenaar, 2017).

Structural and cultural stigma also influence how the community perceives sex workers. For example, human service organisations reinforce sex work stigma by 'safeguarding' the community and positioning sex workers as a nuisance and risky (Campbell, 2015; Grittner & Walsh, 2020). This 'safeguarding' is often perpetrated by the police, but also by social service agencies, community and neighbourhood associations, local councils, income support agencies and through the built environment (Campbell, 2015; Duff et al., 2015; Edelman, 2011; Grittner & Walsh, 2020). Policing has been called an 'everyday' form of violence as the 'everydayness' of this issue renders it invisible because violence is often invisible to those it does not touch (Krusi et al., 2016). Researchers have demonstrated that a police presence within the community places sex workers at increased risk of violence (Csete & Seshu, 2004; Thukral & Ditmore, 2003). For example, condoms are used as evidence (to prove a criminal act is occurring) and this reduces the ability to negotiate safer sex transactions (where sex workers may have to rush a service or screen less comprehensively) and as a result are more at risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV (Anderson et al., 2015; Armstrong, 2016; Benoit et al., 2016; Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013b; Fernandez, 2016; Ganju & Saggurti, 2017; Klambauer, 2017; Krusi et al., 2016; Shannon et al., 2015; Sullivan, 2010).

Stigma and criminalisation forces sex workers to work in clandestine ways; however, the most 'visible' sex workers, such as street-based sex workers, are the most heavily policed and legislated against

(Campbell, 2015; Krusi et al., 2016). Additionally, stories of violence and coercion, such as being forced to have sex with police to avoid arrest, are common amongst street-based sex workers (Barker, 2020). Street-based sex workers are heavily stigmatised and often pushed into industrial areas, through gentrification for example, and hidden away from the rest of the community to maintain respectability in residential areas, again in part due to community concern (Anderson et al., 2015; Edelman, 2011; Hubbard & Sanders, 2003; Sullivan, 2010; 2013). Police have been shown to prioritise responding to community members and complaints about street-based sex workers over safeguarding these particular workers from community violence (Krusi et al., 2016). Therefore, it is unsurprising that sex workers distrust the police and are unable to rely on them for support and justice as they only protect some members of the community and not others (Anderson et al., 2015; Barker, 2020). Furthermore, prohibitive licensing and policing practices prevent sex workers, owners and operators from adopting safer workplace measures and increase health and safety risks for sex workers (Anderson et al., 2015).

The research has established that structural and cultural stigma have a dramatic impact on the everyday lives of sex workers and directly correlate with the distribution of life chances (Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; 2017), creating and reinforcing deeply hierarchical and harmful social systems, aimed at ensuring those with power retain their power. As a result, research has shown that stigma limits and constrains the agency of sex workers (Dziuban, 2015). Stigma is widespread and manifests through discriminatory laws, exploitative economic conditions, repressive institutional practices and biased cultural beliefs. However, it also harms sex workers in invisible ways that remain unquestioned (Dziuban, 2015). This is possible because structural and cultural stigma is deeply ingrained, part of everyday life and accepted as 'the way things are' (Dziuban, 2015). Understanding how sex workers experience this is important. Simply exploring structural and cultural stigma associated with sex work does little to curb stigma if it does not also highlight how sex workers resist it on a day-to-day level.

Internal and interpersonal stigma

Whorephobia is widespread, and sex workers are at increased risk of internalised and interpersonal stigma, with lifelong implications (Benoit et al., 2020; Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Rayson & Alba, 2019; Wong et al., 2011). ‘Insidiously, when stigma is effective it means that even the ways in which stigmatised people cope or manage stigma ultimately achieve the goals of *the stigmatiser*, which is to stay “in”, “down” or “away”’ (Link & Phelan, 2014, p. 24). According to Benoit et al. (2017b), stigma has a negative impact on self-concept and identity formation and can result in varying degrees of social exclusion (either self-imposed or enacted by others) (Link & Phelan, 2001; 2014; Sallmann, 2010). This can result in difficulty when engaging in social interactions because of secrecy or shame around sex work to the complete discrediting or exclusion by others (Benoit et al., 2017b; Goffman, 1986; Link & Phelan, 2001; 2014; Wong et al., 2011). Stigmatisers often do not realise they are perpetuating stigma and often do so in unrecognisable or covert ways, unwittingly achieving the goals of powerful bodies (Dziuban, 2015; Link & Phelan, 2014). Structural and cultural stigma and interpersonal stigma work in tandem, making it difficult to disrupt.

Research has shown that interpersonal stigma for sex workers occurs as part of everyday life and stems from friends and family, researchers, journalists, healthcare providers, police, social workers, clients and romantic partners (Easterbrook-Smith, 2021; Ellison, 2017; Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Lowthers et al., 2017; Pickering, 2013; Sallmann, 2010; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). For example:

Waitresses, nurses, mechanics, models, athletes, and entertainers all have jobs that involve both physical labour and close relationships. After a hard day of work they expect to come home to people who love and support them. Sex workers want this too, but their reality is more complex (Aimee et al., 2015, p. 131).

Due to the perception of 'risk' attached to sex work and the focus on mitigating risk by social services like social work, sex workers are pathologised and infantilised without any recognition of resistance or the socio-cultural and legal contexts in which risk is experienced and conceptualised (Abel & Wahab, 2017; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014; Murphy et al., 2015; Sanders, 2005b). Sex workers have reported difficulties with landlords, immigration authorities, child custody and tax authorities and are hugely concerned about prejudice from authorities (Abel & Wahab, 2017; Levy, 2014; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014). While sex workers often report concerns that friends, lovers and family members will not accept them if they find out they are sex workers, many sex workers describe feelings of discrimination from service providers and social policies that allegedly aim to 'help' (Koken, 2012; Sallmann, 2010). As a result of perceived and experienced social stigma from family, friends, health providers and authorities, sex workers are forced to make the decision whether or not to keep their profession a secret (Begum et al., 2013; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Wong et al., 2011). Sex workers do not necessarily want to conceal their work but do so for the sake of others, especially romantic partners (Matos & Haze, 2019). Matos and Haze (2019) comment on this, stating that 'This obligation shows the strong moral overtones evident amongst partners, where morality overrides that of their sex working partner's emotional well-being and mental health'.

Sex work stigma, negative and judgmental attitudes are deeply rooted and widespread in society, leaving sex workers uncertain about openly sharing their work with family, friends and partners (Dziuban, 2015). Deciding whether or not to 'out' oneself is crucial and a strategy for managing the impact of stigma (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013a; Tomura, 2009; Wong et al., 2011). Sex workers are fearful of being 'outed', and due to this experience much tension, distress and emotional suffering (Dziuban, 2015). When sex workers are 'outed' without their consent, they are at further risk of discrimination, violence and, in extreme cases, murder (Bryce et al., 2014; Dziuban, 2015; Egwea, 2019; Strega et al., 2014). However, staying 'closeted' may mean further marginalisation, isolation and loneliness and also limits opportunities for psychological and emotional support (Dziuban, 2015; Wong

et al., 2011). Sex workers attempt to manage interpersonal stigma by creating a strict divide between their work lives and personal lives, though how this manifests differs from person to person (Abel, 2011; Bellhouse et al., 2015; Dziuban, 2015; Murphy et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2003).

Sex workers are not a homogenous group and hold varying attitudes towards their sex worker status; however, internalised stigma is common (Abel, 2011; Groves et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2011). For example, some sex workers feel their work is of benefit to society and see it as a social service (Matthen et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2011), whereas others feel a great sense of shame and internalise whorephobia (Abel, 2011). Whorephobia and harbouring negative feelings about sex work are risk factors that may lead to depression and burnout (Abel, 2011; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; 2005). In contrast, sex workers who have a positive outlook on their work and challenge sex work stigma are less likely to settle for uncomfortable working conditions, but this can also relate to white privilege and class (Abel, 2011; Van der Meulen et al., 2013). Internalised stigma is generally linked to mental health problems (Link & Phelan, 2001), creating a reluctance to seek out or use health care and outreach services, which is only compounded by criminalisation, stigma and discrimination (Bernstein, 2007; Simpson & Smith, 2020).

While there is evidence that points to sex workers experiencing more mental health issues due to the nature of the work rather than stigma, there are extensive flaws in this literature where deeper, more nuanced correlations between sex work and mental health are largely unexplored or ignored (Burnes et al., 2012; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; Sanders et al., 2017; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Other evidence has shown that there is no increase in mental health issues for sex workers (specifically due to the work) when compared with the general population (Donovan et al., 2012; Romans et al., 2001); however, it is noted that the environment in which sex workers operate, in addition to policing and stigma, will create more harm and stress for sex workers overall. Other research has shown that sex workers

challenge stigma and navigate it in their lives to overcome internalised and interpersonal stigma (Benoit et al., 2020; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013a; Swendeman et al., 2015; Thompson & Harred, 1992; Thompson et al., 2003; Tomura, 2009; Wong et al., 2011).

Sex workers experience a concerning level of stigma and discrimination when seeking out mental health support, and these experiences significantly reduce the likelihood of sex workers 'outing' themselves to healthcare providers and seeking support in the future (Burnes et al., 2012; Rayson & Alba, 2019; Roche & Keith, 2014; Treloar et al., 2021). Sex workers in some jurisdictions are denied appropriate access to health care due to both stigma and the legal environment (Harcourt et al., 2010; Kim, 2015). Sex workers have described being treated as 'dirty' and undeserving of respect by health care providers when accessing drug treatment or other health services (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Koken, 2012; Whitaker et al., 2011).

On a global scale, sex workers are disproportionately affected by HIV, where stigma and discrimination—in conjunction with other compounding intersectional factors—prohibit sex workers from protecting themselves, their families and sexual partners from HIV (Beyrer et al., 2015; Decker et al., 2015; Decker et al., 2013). Stigma, discrimination and prejudice by health care providers create extra barriers to health care for trans sex workers because they are more likely than other sex workers to delay seeking out medical care, which may greatly impact their health outcomes for conditions including HIV and other STIs (Ganju & Saggurti, 2017; Lyons et al., 2017; Roche & Keith, 2014). Street-based sex workers also experience many barriers to accessing health care and experience judgment from health care providers because of drug use and working outdoors (Krusi et al., 2016; Lazarus et al., 2012). In addition, migrant sex workers face increased challenges when accessing health services due to stigma, workplace violence, ethnic discrimination, police raids, racial profiling and harassment. They also experience barriers to testing and treatment for HIV, STIs and other blood-borne infections

(Goldenberg et al., 2015). This highlights how marginalised sex workers are particularly susceptible to, and experience, increased discrimination and interpersonal stigma when compared with Caucasian cisgender sex workers.

Sex work stigma has been shown to negatively impact sex workers' romantic relationships (Begum et al., 2013; Bellhouse et al., 2015; Matos & Haze, 2019; Syvertsen et al., 2013; Warr & Pyett, 2001). Monogamy and heteronormativity facilitate intolerance toward sex workers in general and prevent the partners of sex workers from being supportive because they are unable to accept the requirements of the profession (Bellhouse et al., 2015; Bradley, 2007). This highlights that the meaning of commitment in romantic relationships is often synonymous with monogamy (Murphy et al., 2015) and explains why the partners of sex workers are often uncomfortable with the 'sex' aspects of the work. Furthermore, the majority of the studies exploring sex work and relationships focus on female sex workers in heterosexual monogamous relationships (Matos & Haze, 2019), thus erasing the experiences of non-monogamous sex workers. The partners of female sex workers have been shown to struggle with issues relating to honesty, trust, guilt and jealousy, and because of this many sex workers choose to remain single (Bellhouse et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2015). For example, in *Spread*, Aimee et al. (2015, p. 143), in exploring issues around the partners of sex workers, cite the case of Natalie, who spoke candidly about her relationship with a dancer. She said: 'There was her work, and then there was us. And I thought I was comfortable with that. The fucked-up thing about that was, I was comfortable as long as I didn't really know what she was doing'. This is where a separation between work and home is often used to 'manage' partners, and it constitutes 'emotion work', where social scripts are used to navigate the complexities between the two identities (Bellhouse et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2015). Needless to say, the relationship dynamics for sex workers are complex (Jackson et al., 2009).

Some sex workers experience physical and sexual violence in their intimate relationships due to sex work stigma (Argento et al., 2014; Muldoon et al., 2015), and this increases the potential for HIV risk pathways (Argento et al., 2014). However, there is not enough information on intimate partner violence within the private lives of sex workers, especially on how power dynamics influence intimate partner violence, where the stigma around sex work compounds that imbalance (Muldoon et al., 2015). Low levels of relationship power increase intimate partner violence; however, the experiences of sex workers are similar to women in the general population (Muldoon et al., 2015). While some sex workers do experience violence it cannot be reduced to the nature of the work itself but must be considered within the contexts of social, cultural and structural stigma as well as gendered inequality and sexual violence more broadly (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001).

Much of the research exploring violence within the lives of sex workers depicts sex work in a negative light (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001), and this approach has been heavily critiqued (Weitzer, 2010b). However, sex workers do live with labelling, violence and discrimination as part their everyday lives, and this is seen to be normal and anticipated by sex workers (Sallmann, 2010). Interpersonal violence, including psychological abuse, is frequently experienced by sex workers due to sex work-related stigma (Anderson et al., 2015; Day & Ward, 2001; Decker et al., 2015; Elmore-Meegan et al., 2004; Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Krusi et al., 2012). This can manifest in both overt and subtle ways, overlapping with other forms of discrimination (Dziuban, 2015). Stigma facilitates violence where sex workers are seen to be disposable and culpable for the violence they experience (Barker, 2020; Grittner & Walsh, 2020). Therefore, any response to sex work violence by the police or justice system is inevitably dismissed because it is expected and considered to be 'deserved' (Grittner & Walsh, 2020; Sallmann, 2010; Thukral, 2005). For trans and gender-diverse sex workers, violence is common and a manifestation of transphobia, whorephobia and racism, where physical and sexual violence committed by clients and the police are significantly higher than that experienced by sex workers in other parts of the sex work community (Edelman, 2011; Lyons et al., 2017). Furthermore, some clients

understand that sex workers are less likely to report victimisation (Benoit et al., 2016; Edelman, 2011; Howard, 2019; Kinnell, 2006; Lyons et al., 2017) and therefore target and abuse sex workers (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012). For example, Velvet, in a previous study I conducted on sex work, spoke about the fraught relationship with police and how it creates barriers to reporting crimes.

Velvet: I think if you didn't have to worry about cops it would make things so much safer. And then you would have less risk of being attacked because those people that intend to do harm would be more wary about getting in trouble because they know you could call the cops if it was decriminalised. They know that you are less likely to call the police so you are an easier target (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017).

Overall, the research focuses on 'risk and harm' (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001); however, recently calls have been made to focus on sex worker resistance. Solidarity with other sex workers through sex worker organisations has been shown to be critical for developing important personal and social resources for sex workers and has helped them resist internal stigma (Bates & Berg, 2014; Swendeman et al., 2015; Vijayakumar et al., 2019). The advent of the internet has led to social media playing an important role in helping sex workers maintain community, form connections with other sex workers and foster a positive sense of self (Sanders et al., 2018b; Simpson & Smith, 2020). Stigma means that sex workers are forced to be resourceful, and regardless of the legislative environment and community attitudes to sex work, sex workers always find ways to manage their 'tainted' identities. However, the scope of this is yet to be explored within the everyday lives of sex workers (Treloar et al., 2021).

Morality

Combined with stigma, moral frameworks influence understandings around sex work—especially within legislation and policy. Moral panic around the sex industry can be traced back to the abolitionist debates in France during the 19th century (Corbin, 1990). For example, in New Zealand when sex work was first decriminalised in 2003 there was a tension between the government and the general public where the public opposed decriminalisation and sex work was framed as immoral (Warnock & Wheen, 2012). The participation of the public during parliamentary discussions influenced the final legislative outcome where, due to stigma and morality, local councils retained the right to scrutinise where brothels could operate (Warnock & Wheen, 2012). This resulted in new bylaws and town planning controls being created, regulating sex work despite ‘decriminalisation’ being implemented (Warnock & Wheen, 2012).

Similarly, Ronald Weitzer has explored how in the United States there has been a ‘powerful moral crusade’ in operation that has succeeded in reshaping American government policy towards sex work. This moral crusade has enhanced penalties for existing offences and created new crimes in relation to sex work (Weitzer, 2010a; 2010b). These policies have had detrimental impacts on other countries, which due to not abiding by US policy in regards to ‘sex trafficking’ have lost foreign aid (Dewey et al., 2016). In Ireland new legislation was passed in 2014 that criminalises those that purchase sex, known as the Swedish or Nordic models. Huschke (2016) argues that these policy processes are morality driven, and the actual concerns of sex workers have been sidelined, distorted and dismissed. During these debates, sex workers were presented as victims with no choice, which was refuted by many sex workers (Huschke, 2016). Hubbard et al. (2016) argue that when legislators aim to regulate sex work there is often an attempt to draw boundaries between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, with ‘prostitution’ depicted as sinful or wrong. Furthermore, ‘expert’ or ‘insider’ knowledge of the sex industry is often framed as insufficient and fails to displace deeply ingrained moral values. Public opinion is also believed to be as valid as the views of academics or researchers because sex work and its governance are considered a moral issue (Hubbard et al., 2016). This demonstrates how morality guides the debates around sex

work and influences decision making to the detriment of sex workers. Exploring the everyday dimensions of sex workers lives will disrupt and deeply question the entrenched narratives around sex work as well as give voice to sex workers who are often left out of such discussions.

Ideas surrounding sex work play into the constructions of 'prostitution', connecting the portrayals of sex work to assumptions about violence and victimhood (Weitzer, 2010a; 2010b; 2017b). Debates around sex work on a national or global level contribute to these constructions and are used to justify policy aimed at monitoring or 'safeguarding' sex workers (Weitzer, 2010a; 2010b; 2014). However, it must be noted that when sex work is criminalised, violence is amplified (Deering et al., 2014; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). The violence associated with sex work, according to Vanwesenbeeck (2001), is too often conflated with sex work itself instead of the stigma attached to it, therefore leaving out discussion of constructive ways to counter the violence sex workers do experience. The association between sex work, violence and victimisation is overwhelming, especially in academia, despite sex workers often claiming autonomy within their work (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). For example, historically, street-based sex workers have been over-represented within the literature (Bungay et al., 2016), and the unique findings from this particular group have not only been generalised as applicable to all street-based sex workers but also to all sex workers, thus misrepresenting the experiences of sex workers more broadly. These narratives continue and remain part of the contemporary constructions around sex work, especially when law reform is discussed (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017).

Contemporary discussions around sex work and violence no longer focus only on violence and street-based sex work (Armstrong, 2015; Hubbard & Sanders, 2003); rather, trafficking discourses dominate (Matthews, 2014; Weitzer, 2014). Some researchers have suggested that most sex workers are trafficked, forced or 'tricked' into sex work, despite consent and sex workers stating otherwise (Bettio et al., 2017). New legislation and policy have been conceptualised following this trend. The Swedish model has been hailed by some despite it deeming all sex work to be violent and leaving sex workers

without rights (Hardy, 2015). This model aims to eradicate sex work via criminalising the purchase of sex; however, it creates further harms and violence for sex workers (Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014). Violence is something that sex workers experience, but without exploring the everyday lives of sex workers it becomes easy to attribute this violence to all sex work rather than the stigma and the social and systematic factors that contribute to violence.

Criminalisation

Criminalisation refers to the legislative framework that renders sex work, or the associated activities connected to sex work (such as living off the earnings), a criminal act (Global Network of Sex Work Projects, 2014; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). Criminal laws are enforced by the police, and combined with stigma often result in police abusing their powers; thus perpetrating discrimination and violence (Barker, 2020; Klambauer, 2017; Krusi et al., 2016). Criminalisation can result in surveillance, warnings, arrest, being charged or fined and imprisonment (Global Network of Sex Work Projects, 2014; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). Criminalisation of sex work applies to any consensual sex that involves payment and related activities including buying, soliciting or procuring, brothel-keeping and management of sex work, and vagrancy, loitering and public nuisance (Kim, 2015). Sex work criminalisation has more recently moved into the neo-abolitionist space, where 'instead' clients are targeted through criminal sanctions in order to 'end the demand'; however, this replicates and creates new harms for sex workers (Armstrong, 2020; et al., 2014; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; 2019; Weitzer, 2020).

Those who possess power have the authority to define who or what is considered deviant or criminal (Bessant, 2007). Criminalisation is the most common model used to govern sex work worldwide despite evidence pointing to the multiple harms this model causes (Graham, 2017; Vanwesenbeeck,

2017). Criminalisation models systematically marginalise sex workers at both the institutional and social level (Dewey et al., 2016). Furthermore, criminalisation influences societal attitudes and constructions about ‘undesirable’ groups, creating further fear, panic and hysteria, which feeds back into regulation (Grohe et al., 2012; Lancaster, 2011). Studies exploring the criminalisation of sex work demonstrate that such models deny sex workers their human rights and autonomy (Benoit et al., 2017a; Powell & Karlsen, 2017; Sanders & Campbell, 2014; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). When sex work is criminalised, state-based oppression and coercion is justified because sex workers are either seen as perpetrators of crime—undeserving of human rights—or as potential victims of exploitation subject to ‘rescue’ programs (Graham, 2017; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). Harm caused by the state is easily ignored due to the stigma surrounding sex work, where stigma is more visible than discrimination (Graham, 2017).

Inevitably, access to health care services, education and outreach programs prove difficult in such an environment where sex workers are fearful of arrest, discrimination and being ‘outed’ (Decker et al., 2015; Dewey et al., 2016). The policing of sex work disproportionately affects street-based sex workers, migrant, trans and gender-diverse workers who already face discrimination based on their race, citizenship, sexuality, economic and geographic status (Dewey et al., 2016; Krusi et al., 2012; Krusi et al., 2016). Sex workers who live in poverty are more visible because they are more likely to work in a street setting or a brothel and so are more likely to be profiled and targeted by the police (Krusi et al., 2012; Krusi et al., 2016; Seib et al., 2009). Vanwesenbeeck (2017) concludes that when sex work is criminalised, sex is the focus rather than crime and argues that it offers no solution to the structures that impinge on and marginalise sex workers. Furthermore, using the criminal justice system to fight gendered inequality and poverty is highly questionable, exacerbating rather than solving problems (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). This can be seen in South Australia, where sex workers are framed both as criminals undeserving of rights and as victims needing state protection. Despite evidence pointing to the dangers of criminalisation sex work continues to be policed, therefore

compromising sex worker health—including mental health—and safety (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Sanders et al., 2017). Exploring the everyday lives of sex workers will highlight how sex workers define themselves within the criminalised context and resist criminal sanctions.

The decriminalisation of sex work is overwhelmingly supported by sex workers, sex worker organisations and human rights organisations alike (Abel, 2010; 2018b; Ahmad, 2001; Aroney & Crofts, 2019; Beyrer et al., 2015; Comte, 2013; Decker et al., 2015; Godwin, 2012; Jeffreys et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Shannon et al., 2015; Stardust & Story, 2015). However despite this, on a global scale sex work remains largely criminalised and is linked to extensive harms among sex workers (Ahmed et al., 2011; Decker et al., 2015; Godwin, 2012; Platt et al., 2018; Sanders & Campbell, 2014; Van der Meulen, 2012; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001, 2017). Any attempts at law reform often result in more criminalisation and an overload of controls and regulations for sex workers instead of progressive change that could actually benefit them (Östergren, 2017b; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). Punitive legislation, such as criminalisation, licensing and the Swedish or Nordic models, are much more common than decriminalisation. These violate and disrupt sex worker human rights as well as public health responses and are contrary to harm reduction principles (Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014; Sanders & Campbell, 2014; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; 2019). The regulation and surveillance of sex work continues to occur because sex work is not recognised, nor is it treated, as work desperately in need of law reform: rather, is positioned as inherently risky and exploitative (Van der Meulen, 2012).

Debating sex work within the political arena is often used to highlight political moral agendas, and despite the evidence in favour of decriminalisation evidence-based research is habitually rejected by politicians, policy makers and radical feminists alike (Huschke, 2016; Nagy & Powell, 2016; Shaver, 2019). Any form of criminalisation is rooted in stigma and aims to abolish the sex industry, which is not achievable: nor is a response that harms so many workers in a highly gendered industry a feminist response (Ahmed, 2011; Comte, 2013; Durisin et al., 2018; Fawkes, 2005). Including sex workers in the

law reform process, together with evidence-based policy development is key to attaining the best outcomes for sex workers. For example, sex worker and activist Fawkes (2014a, p. 22) illustrates how curbing stigma and discrimination starts with law reform:

Whilst laws alone will not eliminate stigma and discrimination, decriminalisation has shown strong signs of creating an environment where sex workers are able to address discriminatory practices. Where in place, anti-discrimination legislation that specifically includes sex workers sends a strong message to the community that discrimination against sex workers is unacceptable, promotes social inclusion, and supports sex workers' own campaigns around access to social and legal justice.

Criminalisation allows for repressive policing practices that increase stigma and normalise marginalisation, discrimination and violence against sex workers (Platt et al., 2018). The criminalisation of sex work authorises the state to police the bodies of consenting adult sex workers and is a blatant violation of sex workers' rights to equality, human dignity, privacy and the right to bodily integrity (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Sex workers in criminalised settings have been found to be three times more likely than other sex workers to experience sexual or physical violence (Howard, 2019) and less likely to report crimes committed against them because of fears associated with the police (Klambauer, 2017). Criminalisation reinforces gender, racial and economic inequalities (Krusi et al., 2016), disproportionately impacting trans and gender-diverse sex workers of colour (Ganju & Saggurti, 2017; Lyons et al., 2017; Platt et al., 2018). Criminalisation and policing of sex work have been shown to increase the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases for sex workers, especially those working in concentrated and generalised epidemic settings (Ahmad, 2001; Ahmed, 2011; Argento et al., 2011; Bates & Berg, 2014; Decker et al., 2015; Ganju & Saggurti, 2017; Hargreaves et al., 2017; Kim, 2015; Shannon et al., 2015). Additionally, sex workers are less likely to connect with sex worker organisations due to fears of being 'outed', thus risking safety and anonymity,

and are more likely to miss out on peer education and support (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). Peer sex work organisations are credited with improving sex working conditions, educating clients and promoting safe sex practices (for example, education around HIV), whereas criminalisation has been shown to impede these efforts (Bates & Berg, 2014; Donovan et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2012; Harcourt et al., 2010).

Sex worker organisations are important because they play a key role in advocating for sex workers (Vijayakumar, 2018; Vijayakumar et al., 2019). They assist sex workers in accessing social services, mitigate the everyday levels of violence, put pressure on the police to reduce levels of unlawful detainment and police harassment, facilitate sex workers' access to social entitlements and respond informally to cases of discrimination by families, landlords or school officials (Vijayakumar et al., 2019). Removing structural barriers and decriminalising sex work would decrease HIV incidence and reduce violence and police harassment, allowing for sex work to be recognised as legitimate, with sex workers then more able to access the same industrial and human rights as other workers (Decker et al., 2015; Donovan et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2012; Godwin, 2012; Harcourt et al., 2010; Kim, 2015; Roche & Keith, 2014; Ryan et al., 2019; Shannon et al., 2015).

There is a substantial body of literature demonstrating that when sex work is repressed, regulated or criminalised, public health and human rights become compromised (Abel, 2014a; 2018b; Jeffreys et al., 2010; Kim, 2015). Contemporary research has focused on HIV as it has directly or indirectly created many of the current day contexts in which sex workers experience some of the most challenging health risks (Allman & Ditmore, 2016; Beyrer et al., 2015; Decker et al., 2015). Anderson et al. (2015) found a community-based approach to be the most successful in combatting HIV, where sex workers take ownership over sexual health programs targeting HIV. However, structural barriers and criminalisation impede community-based approaches (Bekker et al., 2015). Supporting the sexual health of sex workers becomes difficult in the face of regressive international discourses and funding constraints,

and intersecting social stigmas, discrimination and violence (Ahmed, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Powell & Karlsen, 2017; Rekart, 2005; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; Wolffers & Van Beelen, 2003). Policy reform, such as decriminalisation, has been evidenced to support public health efforts and help curb the spread of HIV through safeguarding human rights and working to eliminate stigma and discrimination (Allman & Ditmore, 2016; Beyrer et al., 2015; Decker et al., 2015). However, due to moral debates around sex work, the public health response and scientific evidence are most often secondary to criminalisation, and operations aimed at ‘rescuing’ ‘victimised’ sex workers (or those workers perceived to be trafficked) remain (Shannon & Montaner, 2012). There is a large body of literature exploring the health of sex workers; however, little is known about the day-to-day experiences of sex workers within these contexts.

Decriminalisation

Under the full decriminalisation model, sex work and sex workers are regulated just like other businesses. Full decriminalisation treats sex work as work. It is pragmatic, affords and upholds human rights and the occupational health and safety of sex workers (Abel, 2014a; 2018b; Jeffreys et al., 2010; Kim, 2015). Decriminalisation is achieved through the removal of sex work from the criminal code without additional legislation introduced aiming to regulate or surveil sex workers, especially by the police. Research on sex work and sex workers shows that partial criminalisation or ‘licensing’ (legalisation) gives authorities more power to harass sex workers, undermining any sex work that does occur in a lawful context (Wojcicki, 1999). Furthermore, licensing displaces sex workers because they are often unable to comply with licensing requirements (Anderson et al., 2015). Full decriminalisation means that sex workers are still subject to federal and state laws like other working people; however, sex work itself is not illegal. Decriminalisation does not mean no regulation; rather, it means whole-of-government regulation (Kim, 2015). Sex work is then treated like any other form of labour, falling

under existing regulatory mechanisms such as local council planning or industrial rights obligations (Kim, 2015).

The decriminalisation of sex work is associated with better coverage of health promotion programs for sex workers (Harcourt et al., 2010) and correlates with higher rates of condom use (Cahill, 2019; Donovan et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2012; Harcourt et al., 2010; Platt et al., 2018). Decriminalisation allows sex workers to proactively manage their own sexual health without the police enforcement of mandatory testing, which has proven to be both costly and to negatively impact on STI and HIV prevention (Armstrong, 2017; Donovan et al., 2012; Jeffreys et al., 2012). Removing the police as regulators of sex work is credited for much of its success, as sex workers can access police due to an improved relationship dynamic, leading to improved safety and wellbeing (Klambauer, 2017). Additionally, police no longer impede sex workers' screening processes, whereas under partial criminalisation models both screening and client negotiations may be rushed to avoid police detection (Howard, 2019; Kinnell, 2006; Landsberg et al., 2017).

Decriminalisation is based on compelling evidence (Donovan et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2012). However, very few jurisdictions have successfully decriminalised sex work and full decriminalisation has rarely been achieved (Östergren, 2017b). Additionally, sex work legislation terminology is often confused, lacks consensus and there is no common understanding around what constitutes decriminalisation, licensing or criminalisation, with terminology often used interchangeably (Östergren, 2017a). In Australia, New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Victoria have achieved decriminalisation; however, some regulation around street-based sex work remains in New South Wales and Victoria. Additionally, New Zealand, often praised for its decriminalisation model, could be better described as a regulatory model. According to Östergren (2017a), because certification is mandatory in New Zealand and there are health and safety requirements and restrictions on the advertising of commercial sexual services, sex work ought not to be considered decriminalised. New

Zealand laws continue to criminalise migrant sex workers, where they operate illegally without any safeguards and are more vulnerable to police discrimination (DeCat, 2019; Östergren, 2017b). Furthermore, sex work laws often intersect with other laws, regulations and policies that intersect with the lives of sex workers, such as migration, trafficking and drug laws (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Mac & Smith, 2018). Decriminalisation is 'only the first step', and when addressing the human rights violations that sex workers of colour experience an anti-colonial approach to justice and law reform is needed. For example, decriminalisation does not address the racism that Aboriginal and, or, Torres Strait Islander sex workers experience (Duff et al., 2014; NT Public Hearing Transcript, 2019; Sullivan & Day, 2019), especially because the legal system is based on colonial law and there is no treaty (Giannacopoulos, 2011). Scarlet Alliance clearly defines decriminalisation, licensing and criminalisation and makes policy recommendations in their publication 'The Principles for Model Sex Work Legislation' (Kim, 2015; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). One policy recommendation highlights that: 'Governments, researchers, academics and feminists must recognise that sex worker involvement in leading policy development, research and theory is valuable, necessary and essential' (Scarlet Alliance, 2014).

Sex worker-led and informed work and publications in support of decriminalisation (Scarlet Alliance, 2014) are purposefully ignored, and studies favouring opposing legislative models are promoted (Shaver, 2019). When politicians make decisions on behalf of sex workers during the law reform process, the laws and the policies created can further exacerbate the harms facing sex workers, especially when sex workers and sex work organisations are not included and consulted throughout the process (Scarlet Alliance, 2014). However, when sex workers are given a platform to speak and can feed into the law reform process, sex workers benefit because the laws more accurately reflect their input (Jeffreys, 2010b; Jeffreys et al., 2011; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; NT Public Hearing Transcript, 2019). However, the law reform process is challenging and dependant on those who hold power, and such people often have conservative agendas (Shaver, 2019).

Trafficking

Sex work and trafficking are often conflated, and migrant sex workers are disproportionately profiled due to their migrant status and perceived vulnerability (Butcher, 2003; Chuang, 2010; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). This highlights how sex trafficking discourse intersects with migration and the concept of the 'illegal or undesirable migrant' (Kempadoo, 2015). Kempadoo (2015) states that this movement to end trafficking, often endorsed by Caucasian celebrities from the Global North, results in stronger 'anti-prostitution' policies, infantilising rescue missions, greater police surveillance, new policies and programs to catch 'traffickers', new policies to catch 'pimps', more border controls to prevent migration to wealthy countries, greater numbers of detentions and deportations and generalised public fear and moral panic around sex 'trafficking'. When radical feminist groups call for the rescue and rehabilitation of both trafficked and 'prostituted' women it is driven by their own morality and values rather than those of the sex workers they purport to protect (Butcher, 2003). Adult sex workers are treated like children, where consent is deemed irrelevant, because they are considered to be trafficked victims rather than migrant sex workers with agency and autonomy (Kempadoo et al., 2012).

According to Weitzer (2014), sex trafficking has generated a tremendous amount of public attention throughout the world over the last few years. He asserts that claims surrounding trafficking and its prevalence are not based on evidence, nor are they verifiable because there has been little high quality research conducted on the topic (Kempadoo et al., 2012). Zhang (2012) confirms this and states that there is so much attention on sex trafficking that some researchers have come to believe the most common type of human trafficking involves sex exploitation; however, industries such as the garment industry account for a larger proportion of trafficking activity (Hoefinger et al., 2020). Despite this, anti-trafficking laws and policies globally have remained focused on sex trafficking and sex work itself.

The constructions around human trafficking, according to Kempadoo et al. (2012), are rooted in anti-migration, 'anti-prostitution' ideologies, and their current popularity is generally most relevant to western European and North American concerns. Kempadoo et al. (2012) calls on academics to critique the victim approach. Victimhood and trafficking have in recent years had a strong influence on how sex workers are viewed, policed and governed. How these new conceptualisations impact on the day-to-day lives of sex workers is largely unknown.

Research by outsiders

Exploring 'prostitution' is often an attempt at understanding 'criminal activity' and 'deviant behaviour' (Benoit & Shaver, 2006; Ferguson, 2015; Pérez-Y-Pérez & Stanley, 2011). Sex work has often been investigated through an ethnographic lens where researchers would 'breach the sex work world' and 'peer into' the lives of sex workers, often without any regard for the community or the repercussions on those they studied (Jeffreys, 2010a; 2010b; Pérez-Y-Pérez & Stanley, 2011). Whilst sex work research has evolved and many researchers now focus on labour, social rights, health and wellbeing, stigma, social exclusion and marginalisation (with the aim of bettering the lives of sex workers) (Benoit & Shaver, 2006), there is, unfortunately, still a prominent and highly influential body of radical feminist research that continues to stigmatise sex workers by focusing on violence, victimisation and criminalisation (Ahmed, 2011; Barron, 2019; Comte, 2013; Fawkes, 2005; Holden, 2011; Kempadoo, 2015; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013). Too often sex work research is explored within the confines of morality and continues to focus on deviance, crime, contagion and exploitation (Benoit & Shaver, 2006).

Even though more thorough guidelines now exist for human research ethics committees, prevailing stereotypes continue to impact how sex workers are viewed, and they are often labelled as risky and vulnerable human subjects (Benoit et al., 2018; Hammond & Kingston, 2014; Kumar, 2019).

Furthermore, human research ethics committees are not required to include sex workers when overseeing research concerning sex workers, despite committees often requiring a minister of religion (Commonwealth of Australia 2018). Universities continue to support radical feminist research on 'prostitution' (Barron, 2019; Coy et al., 2019) despite extensive evidence demonstrating methodological flaws within this field of research (Vanwesenbeeck, 2019; Weitzer, 2010b). Furthermore, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (2018, p.2) states that researchers must 'treat human participants and communities that are affected by the research with care and respect, giving appropriate consideration to the needs of minority groups or vulnerable people'. Sex workers are not often afforded this level of respect by researchers (Jeffreys, 2010b), and this is in part allowed because enormous amounts of funding are poured into research areas that are most prominent in political debates, such as trafficking, which are often deliberately conflated with sex work. These debates often they do not reflect the agendas that are crucial to sex workers (Hammond & Kingston, 2014; Sanders, 2013; Vanwesenbeeck, 2019).

Research projects exploring more everyday accounts of sex work are uncommon because academia is hierarchical and 'applied' research is seen as 'low-status' (Dewey et al., 2018). Furthermore, due to a disconnect between academic theorisations and grassroots sex work activism, research tends to focus on sensationalised accounts of sex work over everyday accounts (Lowthers et al., 2017). This highlights the dilemma for researchers, where academic standards of ethics are misaligned with sex work community ethics, and researchers must mediate between how to produce research that is valued by both academia and the sex work community (Lowthers et al., 2017). Sex workers are well aware of the potential for research to further stigmatise and perpetuate social prejudice against them (Dewey et al., 2018), therefore it is not surprising that sex workers remain critical of researchers, especially those who do not work closely with communities and solely prioritise academic pursuits (Shaver, 2005).

One of the prevailing issues with outsider-led research on, rather than with, sex workers is that it presents an array of ethical dilemmas that researchers alone cannot address without consulting and working alongside sex workers and sex worker organisations (Jeffreys, 2010b; Lowthers et al., 2017). Some ethical issues include informed consent, confidentiality, access and accurate representation of sex worker narratives (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). Non-peer researchers often unintentionally perpetuate stigma and are also more at risk of letting their personal beliefs and moral views around migration, sex work, race, gender and sexuality influence research methodology, analysis, interpretation and outcomes (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). When researchers target specific population groups of sex workers, such as street-based sex workers and migrant workers, who already experience higher levels of violence when compared with other sex workers, researchers may generalise the results by assuming that this level of violence is common to all sex workers (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). This kind of targeted approach does not explore violence more broadly from a structural or cultural context, and measures to address violence outside of criminalisation are ignored (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Sex workers are well aware that researchers bring their biases with them, often laden with moral judgments. To counter this, researchers need to be willing to explore all accounts of sex work, highlighting narratives that fall outside of binary deprecations (Pickering, 2013; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Furthermore, accounts of both victimhood and agency have been extensively explored; hence there is a call for researchers who work closely with sex workers and are sex workers to lead research, and commit to recording the nuanced—sometimes conflicting—in-depth accounts of sex work. For example:

We do not need more research imposed by people who believe they know best how other people ought to live and who have already taken a moralistic position before research has begun. An example is the statement ‘We began this work from the perspective that prostitution itself is violence against women’. On the contrary, we need a lot of research undertaken by people who are very close to sex workers’ lives, or who are sex workers

themselves, but who will above all commit themselves to honestly recording all the different and conflicting points of view and stories they run into during the research (Agustín, 2004).

To depict richer and deeper accounts of sex workers' lives, thinking about how frameworks create and influence research is important (Agustín, 2004). Theoretical frameworks that frame sex workers in a particular way, such as victims of trafficking or violence, reduce the scope of sex work accounts to those that fit within such frameworks and ignore evidence of agency and resistance (Agustín, 2004). Exploring migration for work for example, would make it possible for a sex worker to share their story and talk about the struggles, joys and complexities of working and travelling as a migrant (Agustín, 2004), especially if it is research conducted by an insider (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). This kind of framework 'shift' would mean that structural and cultural injustices would be revealed and more in-depth accounts of sex worker lives would be documented (Agustín, 2004; Dewey & Zheng, 2013b). Furthermore, a researcher has a responsibility to recognise and adequately think through ethical dilemmas as they present themselves, including considering if the research is in fact wanted by sex workers (Jeffreys, 2010b). Lastly, a framework that considers sex work as culture, rather than viewing it through a moral, criminal or risk framework, would allow for a focus on everyday practices and distinguish between normal everyday ideas, customs and social behaviours and what society views as morally wrong (Agustín, 2005). If sex workers are dissenting to research (Barron, 2019) than researchers have an ethical obligation to cease (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018). Reliable research that sex workers support is incredibly important as it can be used to inform policy and feed into the improvement of service delivery and improved health and human rights of sex workers (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013).

Insider research

Outsiders will never be able to fully conceptualise sex work (Stardust, 2019a). Intimate knowledge of the work is important because stigma and stereotypes pertaining to sex work prevail and mean that outsider-led research has a greater chance of misrepresenting sex workers. Therefore, outsiders who speak on sex work often—even if unintentionally—further harm sex workers, especially when a paternalistic approach to research is used (Huschke, 2016; Kempadoo, 2001b; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013, 2014). Furthermore, the everyday aspects of life are often neglected in favour of more simplified narratives, which neglect to progress understandings around who sex workers are (Agustín, 2004; Lepp & Gerasimov, 2019). It is commonplace within academia for outsiders to conduct research about communities they are not part of; however, marginalised communities are critical of this approach as it often results in participants being viewed as objects to be studied rather than people with real lives (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). Sex workers demand appropriate representation, consultation and inclusion about anything that concerns sex work (Bruckert & Chabot, 2014; Fawkes, 2005; Global Network of Sex Work Projects, 2014; Jeffreys, 2010b; Jeffreys et al., 2019; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Scarlet Alliance, 2014).

Researching sex work is difficult for both peer researchers and outsiders due to the challenges that arise from competing motivational factors, such as the tension between what communities demand and academic institutional requirements (Dewey et al., 2018). The challenges specific to sex work research often centre around who may claim to be an expert on sex work and who has authority to speak on sex work. For example, should lived experience and ‘peer’ positioning outweigh ‘expert’ derived knowledge in an academic context? (Dewey et al., 2018). According to sex workers and sex worker organisations, insider knowledge should be privileged and sex workers seen as expert on their own lives, as the risks of outsiders researching the sex work community may outweigh the benefits, especially when researching more vulnerable community members such as migrant workers (Jeffreys, 2010a; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). For example, ethnographers researching

undocumented migrant workers could potentially put sex workers at greater risk by drawing attention to their very existence in what is often also a criminalised environment (Dewey & Zheng, 2013b).

Sex workers know too well the impacts that poor research outcomes have on the lives of sex workers, and because of this there is a call for peer-led research (Jeffreys, 2010b). There is a growing body of sex work research conducted by peers (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Dr Anonymous, 2020; Fawkes, 2014a; Hardy, 2015; Jeffreys, 2015; Jeffreys et al., 2012; Jeffreys et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Leigh, 1997; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014; Perkins, 1993; Perkins et al., 1994; Phoenix, 2017; Sanders et al., 2017; Stardust, 2020; Stardust & Story, 2015; Tempest, 2019; Toone, 2018; Treloar et al., 2021). It has been shown that insider research conducted by sex workers benefits the research process and results in more reliable and representative outcomes (Jeffreys, 2010b; 2018; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Treloar et al., 2021). Peer researchers are able to view sex work from a holistic perspective, have greater access to participants, better comprehend and understand issues relevant to sex workers, have increased trust within the community and are able to collect more reliable data from participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Jeffreys, 2010b; 2018; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Stardust, 2020).

Insiders appreciate and recognise sex work-specific language and culture, value sex work organisations and prioritise the sex work community in unique ways due to their insider status and knowledge (Jeffreys, 2018). Furthermore, sex worker organisations play a key role in research, where many sex workers not only have a relationship with sex work organisations but when conducting research, work in collaborative ways. This ensures that representatives of the community and sex workers are able to feed into the research process and outcomes (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Jeffreys, 2010b; Jeffreys et al., 2012; Jeffreys et al., 2011; Levy & Jakobsson, 2014; Stardust, 2020). Researchers cannot be accountable to sex workers if they are not connected to the community and to sex work organisations. Ethics specific to sex work have been outlined by the sex work community and are important because they have a greater meaning outside of academia to sex workers (Scarlet Alliance, 2014).

A pervasive problem that sex workers and sex work peer researchers continue to face is that despite research no longer exclusively problematising sex work, governments are rapidly adopting punitive responses to sex work and undervaluing or ignoring evidence-based research (Benoit et al., 2018; Lepp & Gerasimov, 2019; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; 2017; 2019). This is occurring because globally there is a growing trend toward social conservatism and an over-reliance on surveillance and punitive responses to both social and 'moral' issues, which serve to secure the conservative agendas of those in political power (Lepp & Gerasimov, 2019). This leaves sex workers in a difficult position where only particular types of research, often those opposing sex worker rights, have the ability to sway public opinion and feed into political debate (Lepp & Gerasimov, 2019). Therefore, sex workers and sex worker organisations must advocate for inclusion and lead projects in what is often an adversarial environment, including within universities and political arenas (Barron, 2019; Hammond & Kingston, 2014; Jeffreys, 2018; Stardust, 2020). Furthermore, many sex workers are not able to 'out' themselves and claim their lived expertise within academic settings because stigma and discrimination is rife (Dr Anonymous, 2020). As a result, it is also difficult to tell how much of the literature is actually written by peer sex workers unless it is explicitly stated or understood due to insider knowledge.

Conclusion

Historically, sex work scholarship has concentrated on larger constructions situated around sex work such as stigma, gender, morality, criminalisation, violence, trafficking and health. These constructions impact on the everyday lives of sex workers. More recently, the role of stigma has been shown to be central in maintaining negative perceptions about who sex workers are, and addressing stigma through decriminalisation has remained difficult. Morality, similar to stigma, is ever-pervasive and influences law reform, policy and legislation, where evidence-based research and lived experience are

considered secondary to moral rationalisations by those in power and society at large. Criminalisation reinforces punitive laws that maintain a moral stance on sex work and concurrently perpetuate stigma, violence and human rights violations.

The violence sex workers experience is well documented; however, most sex workers work in a criminalised environment, which perpetuates violence. Therefore it continues largely unchallenged. Conflating all sex work with violence without acknowledging the impacts of criminalisation is damaging and has paved the way for the Swedish model, which discounts the lived experiences of sex workers and creates more harms. Trafficking and migration have more recently compounded these issues further, where the 'rescue industry' has lobbied for the creation of stricter laws and regulation around all sex workers, not just 'trafficked' sex workers. Trafficking discourse has conflated all sex work with trafficking and reflects the global unease around migration in general, especially about migrants from 'developing' countries. In addition, the health of sex workers has been heavily researched. Sex workers have historically been constructed as vectors of disease and immorality. Stigma, criminalisation and trafficking discourse maintains inequality for sex workers and has been found to impede access to health care, adequate health care and community mobilisation. All these themes reinforce the other, creating a complex reality for sex workers. Little is known about how these all impact on sex workers' everyday realities or about the everyday lives of Australian sex workers in general, where work conditions differ substantially to workers in many other parts of the globe (Jeffreys et al., 2010). This research aims to fill this gap in the literature through documenting the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers working within a criminalised context.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In Australia, as more generally in the field, there is a scarcity of literature about sex workers' day-to-day lives. As demonstrated in the literature review, it is unclear how the constructions situated around sex work, and the structural and cultural conditions under which it is performed, impact the day-to-day lives of sex workers. Sex worker voices in particular are missing. This research investigates the contemporary, everyday dimension of sex workers' lives and illuminates these experiences through their storytelling. As a sex worker, my aim is to privilege sex worker stories and contribute to the body of work conducted by peer sex work researchers (Letherby, 2003). I also pay homage to all the work that has been done by sex workers. This research is first and foremost for sex workers.

In the literature review I also critically examined outsider research and insider research for the purposes of better understanding the field of sex work research. Overall, the themes explored within academic settings overwhelmingly relate to the struggles sex workers experience. In doing so, they inadvertently feed into and exacerbate sex work stigma. Although these enquiries are necessary, I will demonstrate that finding the nuances through exploring the everyday has produced new findings in the field. Everyday enquiries give us new insight into who sex workers are and *as they come*, rather than subjecting us to outsider interpretations of our stories. Everyday stories are important and have the power to build new narratives around sex work as well as subvert stigma.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the chosen method has elicited data to answer my research questions. I discuss the epistemology (social constructionism, sex work feminism, sex work insider research, the risks of being an insider sex worker researcher and sex worker activism) as well conflicts

of interest. I then discuss the research design (qualitative phenomenology, storytelling interviews, recruitment, sampling, reflexivity and reflection, and data analysis) before discussing, ethics, risk and the limitations of this study.

Aims

The aim of the research is to explore the day-to-day experiences of South Australian sex workers to better understand the structural and cultural factors that shape and construct their everyday lives. The research design enables sex workers speak for themselves; identifying and speaking to their everyday experiences by following their own thoughts and exploring tangents throughout the interview process in order to answer the research questions:

- What are the day-to-day experiences of South Australian sex workers?
- What factors shape and construct the everyday experiences and meanings for sex workers in South Australia?

Epistemology

This research has been influenced by social constructionist ideas and sex work feminism, which value sex work lived experience as expert and provide a useful approach to better understanding the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers (Berg, 2014; Comte, 2013; Fawkes, 2005; Karnilowicz et al., 2014; Sarantakos, 2005).

Social constructionism

Social constructionism underpins the epistemology of my research because it focuses on the belief that there are no set objective truths or realities (Sarantakos, 2005). Because sex work as work is a contested concept, using social constructionism is important because it highlights the constructed nature of reality and that it is created based on our interactions with the world (Sarantakos, 2005).

According to Crotty (1998, p. 42) social constructionism is:

...the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

Reality is constructed by human beings, and constructing reality means making meanings about the world around us and gaining impressions. These impressions are set in our specific location (culture) and time (history) and based on our interpretations and personal experience (Crotty, 1998; Sarantakos, 2005). The underpinning epistemology shapes the approach to research, which in this case is a sex work feminist approach that views sex work as work. Sex work, or 'prostitution', has often been constructed around dominant stereotypes of criminality and this reinforces stigmatic assumptions (Iantaffi & Barker, 2019). The assignment of meanings, like those attached to 'prostitute', are assisted and reinforced by cultural mechanisms such as socialisation, where people—through this socialisation—then learn the meanings of things.

Scarlet Alliance (2014) points out that sex work and 'prostitution' are two commonly used terms; however, there are major differences in their meanings and how they position sex workers. As outlined in the literature review, the term 'prostitute' suggests that women in the sex industry are women who 'sell their bodies'; that they are vulnerable victims and that their work is inherently

violent. Furthermore, the term reinforces an 'us' versus 'them' stance and reinforces a binary, moralistic view of the world (Iantaffi & Barker, 2019), which in turn keeps people 'safe', or reinforces power hierarchies. Culture and society play an important role in constructing meanings through the process of socialisation (Sarantakos, 2005) and therefore in perpetuating the continued criminalisation of sex work. Meanings are generated collectively, are readily available, and are already constructed and conveyed through culture. This is why more nuanced, everyday understandings of sex work are an important addition to the literature so as to build other constructions, meanings and values about sex work. The stigma around sex work is pervasive and difficult to counter. It is constantly being constructed and reproduced, hence the aim of this study is to open up the contested nature of sex work and showcase its everyday existence and meanings through sex workers' narratives about their lives (Treloar et al., 2021).

Social constructionism helps us understand both social groups and individuals. At the individual level of interaction different truths can exist—even simultaneously—depending on the social situation, the people involved and the location (Fortune et al., 2013). For example, some feminists may view a sex worker as oppressed, whereas an individual sex worker may feel oppressed, indifferent to sex work, or may feel that they have found a way to make a living. These different truths exist at once, and exploring the cultural and structural levels in conjunction with the individual's everyday experience can identify why (Grant, 2014; Mac & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, the life of a street-based sex worker and a brothel worker may be very different due to the stigma attached to each type of work, pointing to the whorearchy that exists within sex work and the intersection of factors that create more marginalisation and discrimination. Because many sex workers keep their work secret, opposing realities are created for the purposes of safety (Sanders et al., 2017). Sex work and the sex worker are made up of many social constructions and subjectivities (Crenshaw, 1991; Fortune et al., 2013).

Constructions around 'sex work' can obscure the fluidity around identity when sex work is the only one that 'sticks'. It is the everyday accounts of sex workers that will allow for the multiple truths and complexities to be visible and exist all at once.

Sex work feminism

Sex work feminism as a concept is not new (Ahmed, 2011; Brooks, 1999; Fawkes, 2005; Holden, 2011) although it has yet to be clearly defined and developed as a discipline of its own. I base my sex work feminism on two seminal pieces that heavily inform my approach to sex work research and activism (Jeffreys, 2010b; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). For me, 'Nothing About Us Without Us' and its associated principles, such as aiming to involve sex workers and sex worker organisations at all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation, point to the underlying principles that also help guide a sex work feminist approach (Lynch et al., 2021). For example, although I am a sex worker with a decade of experience in the sex industry, when I write about sex work, I am mindful of how limited my representation is, as I am but one sex worker and a privileged one at that. Furthermore, research about sex workers affects all sex workers. Therefore, I work alongside sex workers and our organisations to consult and seek feedback regarding my research, in particular my writing. I develop and adapt this process each time I do it, and it remains reflexive depending on the circumstances or situation. For example, for this research project I have had several discussions with other sex workers and the leaders of sex worker organisations to negotiate and discuss how to best consult with sex workers regarding my findings and recommendations. By the time I publish my work, especially in academic spaces, other sex workers will have seen my work and offered critiques. This is a demonstration of my sex work feminism in action.

Sex workers and sex work researchers continue to argue that sex work ought to be recognised as a feminist issue, but the exclusion of sex worker issues by some feminist traditions remains (Sultana, 2020). Building up a sex work feminist scholarship, especially by insiders, is an important task and this body of work contributes to this. My sex work feminist inspirations come from other sex work researchers, writers and community activists (Fawkes, 2005; Holden, 2011; Jeffreys, 2015; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Lawless, 2021; Mac & Smith, 2018; Perkins et al., 1994; Sanders et al., 2016; Stardust, 2015). In discussing my sex work feminist approach it is also important to acknowledge however that the sex industry is very diverse, albeit outside the scope of this thesis.

Academia traditionally values quantitative, objective insights (Sarantakos, 2005) with insider and feminist research often deemed irrelevant or not 'true' scientific inquiry (Holden, 2011; Leavy, 2014; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; Weitzer, 2010b; 2020). This is important to highlight because my insider status ought to be valued and recognised as beneficial to my research and approach to research (Letherby, 2003).

Feminist research has been described as 'corrective' of a traditional research approach that has often neglected lived experience, especially that of the lives of women and other marginalised people (Leavy, 2014; Letherby, 2003). Yet stigmatised and hard-to-reach communities such as sex workers have a fraught history with academia and for too long have demanded better representation and methodological approaches (Barron, 2019; Jeffreys, 2010b; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). For example, the Swedish or Nordic model has put sex workers, especially working-class and migrant sex workers, at great harm despite being based on 'feminist' policies (Levy, 2014; Levy & Jakobsson, 2013; 2014). This highlights that feminism can be used to protect only certain kinds of women, especially Caucasian women (hooks, 2015). However, sex working feminist theorists have taught us that lived experience is a form of expertise that academia has only recently begun to recognise, and that this expertise cannot be replicated or understood by outsiders (Jeffreys, 2010b; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). Peer

researchers offer unique and valuable insights into sex work due to their lived experience as sex workers themselves, providing a space in which to explore how sex workers use and resist power in their everyday lives (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019).

Sex work insider research

Sex worker peers understand sex work as a research subject differently from outsiders due to their lived experience (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). It is this, and the personal understanding of stigma and how it manifests, that allows sex workers to produce more nuanced, respectful research on sex work. It is crucial that studies within the field of sex work research are conducted by those who also work or have worked within the sex industry or, failing this, those who ethically consult and work alongside sex workers and our organisations (Jeffreys, 2010b). Insider research, and placing importance on lived experience, is qualitative in nature and combines well with social constructionism and sex work feminism (Fortune et al., 2013; Sarantakos, 2005). Social constructionism emphasises equality and collaboration, and research is seen as a shared process between participants and the researcher (Fortune et al., 2013).

Unethical research with sex workers is still commonplace, and the field of sex work research has greatly benefited from the involvement of sex workers throughout the research process, from its inception, to conclusion and beyond (Jeffreys, 2010b; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). More and more research about sex work is designed and created for sex workers by sex workers or allies who work closely with sex workers and sex worker organisations, building sex work feminism (Aroney & Crofts, 2019; Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Bates & Berg, 2014; Caldwell, 2018; Fawkes, 2014b; Jeffreys, 2018; Kim, 2015; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Perkins et al., 1994; Rayson & Alba, 2019; Stardust, 2019a).

Being an insider to sex work

Due to sex work being criminalised in South Australia, I was advised by one of my supervisors against stating if I was currently sex working. Other sex work peer researchers have also experienced this (Stardust, 2020). Sex working researchers have experienced stigma directly, as have outsiders by association, where research has received an overly critical or negative reception and been perceived as 'dishonourable' and 'no good' (Hammond & Kingston, 2014). However, the risk for peer researchers is doubled, and despite epistemological framing demonstrating that objectivity is fraught, sex work peer researchers continue to be questioned and are perceived as being too close to their subject (Dahl, 2011). Furthermore, peer sex worker researchers are often caught 'in-between' the sex work community and their universities due to policies and procedures regarding research ethics not aligning with those developed and practised by the sex work community. This creates tension, as sex work safety within research ought to take priority and consultation is integral; however, university policy requirements can infringe upon the consultation process. There are limits to what non-sex workers can provide in terms of advice around ethics pertaining to sex work (Stardust, 2020).

As Stardust (2020) states, 'I am a sex worker first and a researcher second'. This is my approach to research and this positioning has assisted me in prioritising the needs of sex workers as best I can. Again, Stardust (2020, p. 26) states that, 'I think researchers need to think of ourselves less as experts and more as cogs within broader research movements'. My own research is deeply connected to sex work feminist values, my work with SIN and sex workers more broadly. For example, I sit on the Board of SIN and campaign for the decriminalisation of sex work in South Australia. In addition to this, I prioritise learning from other sex workers, peer researchers and peer organisations like Scarlet Alliance, and this has hugely contributed to my positioning as a sex worker researcher and the ethics that inform my work (Jeffreys, 2010b; Jeffreys et al., 2011; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Scarlet Alliance, 2014). When I was first thinking through my 'peerness' at the beginning of the PhD process, I

presented a paper on my insider status at the *Queer Legacies, New Solidarities Conference* in 2018, organised by Deakin University's Gender and Sexuality Studies, The Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association and The Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives. I posed a question to the audience: 'Is my insider status enough to research sex work?' I wanted to show that simply being an insider was not enough, but that it was my reflexivity and continuously ongoing reflection on my position of power and privilege, active membership within the broader sex work community and involvement with peer-based sex work organisations that meant I was able to be more accountable to sex workers. This has meant that alongside writing my thesis I have actively remained involved with the sex work community (and was involved before conducting my PhD) and have actively participated in advocacy activities throughout to better the work conditions for sex workers in South Australia. Being involved in sex work organising is integral to my understanding of what it means to be a peer within sex work research.

Sex work activism

During the course of my PhD, several Bills were presented before the South Australian Parliament aimed at decriminalising sex work and legislating sex worker rights. *The Statutes Amendment (Decriminalisation of Sex Work) Bill 2018* was being debated and I began writing for SIN, with Board approval, and used both my insider and research expertise to create media attention about the Bill from the perspective of sex workers. I wrote two articles in 2019: one in *The Conversation* titled 'No more fear of police: South Australia is close to fully decriminalising sex work' (Diamond, 2019a) (Appendix 1) and the other in *The Advertiser* titled 'Tinkering with Bill harms sex workers' (Diamond, 2019c) (Appendix 2). Both articles utilised my insider status and 'expertise' as a researcher to speak about the everyday lives of sex workers to show how an amendment to extend police powers would put sex workers at further risk of harassment at the hands of the police. The amendment to the Bill

(24A) would have allowed a police officer, at any time, day or night, to enter into, break open with force and search a sex work premises, if the officer has reasonable cause and without warrant (Diamond, 2019a; 2019c). Both articles pointed out that the police already had extensive powers to investigate suspected criminal offences, and I used sex worker experiences of police harassment and corruption to show the dangers of policing. When the Bill was voted down, I wrote a piece for *InDaily* titled 'SA's sex workers won't stop fighting for legal protection' (Diamond, 2019b) (Appendix 3) and pointed out that despite overwhelming community support many politicians did not represent the views of their electorates.

In 2020 I wrote another article for *The Conversation* titled 'How the "National Cabinet of Whores" is leading Australia's coronavirus response for sex workers'. This article highlighted how sex worker organising at the national level during COVID-19 demonstrates that sex workers could mobilise to support the community and in particular reach marginalised members of the sex work community, despite increased policing and government resistance to supporting sex workers.

Finally in 2021, a different Bill was introduced, the *Statutes Amendment (Repeal of Sex Work Offences) Bill 2020*, which aimed to take sex work out of the criminal code. I used the evidence gathered from participants in this study to support decriminalising sex work and highlight police corruption in South Australia (Diamond, 2021) (Appendix 4). The findings were submitted to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council that was established to inquire into and report on the Bill, to which I presented with SIN and alongside other sex workers, oral evidence (SA Transcript of Evidence, 2021) (Appendix 5). This body of work highlights that the environment surrounding sex work in South Australia, including increased policing at the time, personally impacted upon my sex work, activism and PhD research. I aimed to utilise my power as an insider and researcher to advocate for the rights of sex workers and used my evidence in practical ways to inform legislative reform debates and insert sex worker voices into the wider public debate.

Conflict of interest

Initially, I was hoping for my research to be endorsed and supported by SIN, and my research proposal was submitted to the General Manager to be forwarded onto the Board. However, when I submitted my ethics application to the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at the university, they deemed that a conflict of interest existed because at that time I was the President of the SIN Board. The SIN Board agreed that my being the President of the Board at this time was a conflict of interest. As a Board, we decided to separate my research from SIN, especially for the purposes of recruitment. From this point on my research work was conducted separately from SIN, although I aimed to (and did) consult with SIN and sex workers throughout my research, especially with respect to finalising the findings.

Design

Qualitative phenomenology

This thesis was undertaken using a qualitative phenomenological design, which enables the use of the important elements of sex work feminism and social constructionism that form my epistemological underpinnings (Ahmed, 2006; Husserl, 2012; Sarantakos, 2005). As Connelly notes, ‘Phenomenology started as a philosophical movement that focused on the nature of experience from the point of view of the person experiencing the phenomenon, known as “lived experience”’ (Connelly, 2010, p. 127).

Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, centres lived experience and inhabiting a body, which he called ‘living body’ (Ahmed, 2006; Husserl, 2012). A phenomenological enquiry lets the way

a concept is understood to be informed, at least in part, through an open receptivity toward the phenomena or object itself (Ahmed, 2006; Barnacle, 2001), such as interviewing sex workers about their lived experience and recognising this as expert (Ahmed, 2006). Phenomenological theory is completely opposite from rational theories where a structure or concept is 'placed onto something' in advance (Barnacle, 2001), rather than the research being inductive and informed by the sex workers interviewed. As a research design phenomenology is inductive and descriptive, lending itself to qualitative interviewing and narrative storytelling (Omery, 1983). A researcher using this method will examine the qualities or essence of an experience through interviews, stories or observations (Connelly, 2010). Phenomenology is crucial to this study of everyday sex work because it emphasises the importance of lived experience (Ahmed, 2006), which is integral to this research. Furthermore, phenomenology combines with sex work feminism and allows me, a sex worker, to reflect on my own experiences of sex work (Letherby, 2003). My lived experience will also influence this research project, as will the sex workers involved and those organisations I consulted, such as SIN and Scarlet Alliance (Jeffreys, 2010b; Letherby, 2003).

Interviews

Storytelling is one principal way of understanding the lived world around us (Lewis, 2011, p. 505). Storytelling and narrative interviewing methods have the power to give marginalised groups a voice (Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, storytelling can be a less exploitative research method than many others (Lewis, 2011). However, within sex work research this also greatly depends on who is steering the research, as stories can be used against sex workers to support a particular world view or outcome, such as the research undertaken by Norma and Tankard Reist (2016). It has been shown that sex worker stories contribute to shifting the opinions of politicians when debating sex work law reform, and this has become part of best practice when campaigning (Aroney & Crofts, 2019). Storytelling

complements and supports lived experience as sex workers are the experts of their own lives. Stories give us much insight into the everyday and will provide rich accounts that allow for a more complex and complete picture of social life (Lewis, 2011).

Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research because they produce rich in-depth data and help highlight participants' lived experiences and viewpoints (Mann, 2016). They can provide sex workers with the unique opportunity to describe in their own words their activities, experiences and opinions in contrast to structured surveys (Mann, 2016). The accessibility afforded to explore a sex worker's everyday life and experiences raises considerations around power, and I found that interactions between me and the participants unfolded in different ways, depending on the type of sex work they did, their gender, ethnicity and class (Fortune et al., 2013). For example, when I spoke with dancers, whilst there was some overlap, their work differed to my work experience, and whilst I was in a position of power as I researcher, my work, full-service sex work, is more stigmatised. This also highlights how power can move and shift. These issues are explored and reflected upon in my findings.

A qualitative and sex work feminist research approach allows for flexibility and enables the interviews to be driven by the participants. To understand the day-to-day experiences of sex workers in South Australia, in-depth, semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted. Pre-determined questions were devised to help guide the discussions with participants if necessary (Fortune et al., 2013) (Appendix 6). This interview style has the advantages of combining the benefits of both structured and unstructured interviews. It addresses the bias that can be created by generating predetermined topics without being rigid and meant that participants ascribed their own meanings to any questions asked (Fortune et al., 2013).

To prompt storytelling, all participants were asked how they got into sex work. This question is often asked of sex workers in order to further stigmatise them, as one sex worker commented. However, this seemed like the best place to start when exploring the everyday lives of sex workers, and this question as a starting point was well received by participants as it was a logical launch pad to prompt storytelling. Because they knew I was a peer, they felt comfortable with it. Some participants came to an abrupt halt after sharing for half an hour as 'the everyday' was difficult to conceptualise. The research 'was about nothing' and 'everything' at the same time, and initially I found it difficult to explain what the everyday entailed and that they could share anything they liked. I used the 'sample interview questions' in this kind of instance to help discussion flow. In contrast, other participants talked for two hours non-stop and were in disbelief about how much they had to share about their everyday lives.

Some participants commented on their interview being a cathartic experience, and that it was not a common occurrence to share information about their sex work or lives in such depth and in such an uninterrupted way. They commented that this was cathartic and in-depth especially because I was a peer. Furthermore, the ability to share about one's everyday life did require a certain level of vulnerability, which not all participants were willing to disclose. This is important to point out because semi-structured narrative interviews allow for this kind of diverse approach to interviewing (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). It meant that sex workers could stop when they wanted, be prompted or talk as in-depth as they wished about their lives.

The interview guide was used to explore working as a sex worker in South Australia. Little prompting was required for most interviews; however, when it was needed participants were asked to look over the research questions to see if anything stood out to them that they wanted speak to; otherwise they were able to end the interview. Only two interviews went for less than an hour. The question prompts were about their daily lives, and they were encouraged to discuss anything they felt was necessary to

help highlight their daily lives and experiences. As the interview guide was a sample, my own bias as a full-service sex worker meant that some of the prompt questions related more to this part of the community. I interviewed two dancers and some of the questions were not relevant to them; furthermore, I had not expected to reach dancers. This related to unspoken norms and shared meanings within the sex work community as well as those specific to certain sectors of the community. For example, terms like whorearchy, which explains the hierarchy of privilege in the sex work community, have a shared meaning in the sex work community. Researchers using a phenomenological approach discuss this (Ahmed, 2006; 2017), and it was important for me to reflexively notice the 'taken-for-granted' language and terms that I used.

The interviews were conducted at the Flinders University city campus, away from my assigned office at Bedford Park. A private study room was used so as to ensure as much privacy as possible for the participants and to minimise the power imbalance that can occur in interview situations. This location was chosen so that the participants could remain anonymous and did not have to travel far away from the city centre. Flinders University is 12 kilometres away from the city, so a central point of contact was considered important. Based on my previous experience with ethics committees and sex work research I chose to meet only at Flinders University because I wanted the ethics committee to approve my application quickly, which they largely did. As this was not SIN research I did not use the SIN office as a meeting place. I had a list of suggested services, including SIN, for the participants to access if they needed any support after their interview, although this was not necessary and no one requested support. I interviewed people pre-Covid, therefore meeting online was not necessary and no one asked for it. The interviews were recorded on a tape recorder and the recordings were stored at my home in a secure location and on university electronic devices, protected by a passcode. I stored all the participants' names, mostly sex-working names or Facebook names (which were not always their legal or identifying name) on OneDrive in a document separate from the interviews in case I needed

to get in touch with participants, but the interviews themselves were labelled by the pseudonyms I assigned to them. The interviews were estimated to take an hour; however, as there were no strict time limits at least five went for over two hours.

Each participant consented to the research and verbally acknowledged receiving the payment of \$50 for their time spent on the interview. Payment in recognition of their time and expertise is part of best practice research conducted with sex worker participants (Jeffreys, 2010a; 2010b; Koken et al., 2004; Thukral & Ditmore, 2003). SIN suggested that 50 dollars was an ideal amount. In hindsight, I feel this was not enough and according to Jeffreys (2010b), in recent times sex workers have begun to demand appropriate payment from researchers who need their assistance. Sex workers are a hard-to-reach population due to fear and stigma, therefore workers were thought to need encouragement to participate. However, many participants commented that they did not realise they were getting paid to participate and that the money was a bonus to them.

I conducted all the transcription myself, which again was stored securely in my home and on university devices, secured with a passcode. Only I have had access to the full audio recordings and transcriptions as this was considered an essential part of ensuring sex worker safety, confidentiality and privacy.

The university ethics committee additionally questioned that, given the sensitive nature of this research and the conflict of interest, why interviews were to be conducted face to face instead of in another format, such as via an anonymous survey. This would have eliminated the need to obtain informed consent from participants and provided more protection for them. As this is a phenomenological study that sought to explore the everyday lives of sex workers, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were necessary for a qualitative exploration of sex work (Gardiner, 2000). Surveys and standardised questions avoid both natural language and open-ended questions and answers, which would have severely limited the possibilities and outcomes of this research (Wolf et al., 2016).

Qualitative, semi-structured narrative interviews provide rich data and enable storytelling without the constraints and limitations of surveys (Barnacle, 2001; Gardiner, 2000; Sarantakos, 2005). The interviews facilitated a comfortable environment and allowed for a 'natural' discussion between me and the participants. Because of the research approach chosen the participants highlighted all kinds of unexpected topics of discussion, which could not have been explored through surveys. For example, one participant spoke about her family lineage in South Australia and trans and gender queer family members dating back to the early 1900s.

Recruitment

Because sex work is criminalised in South Australia, sex workers are difficult to reach due to fear and stigma (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). However, due to my insider status I was able to recruit 30 sex workers over a period of three and a half weeks. I am well known in the sex work community in South Australia due to my involvement with SIN and having been an active sex worker for some time. For example, private sex workers see my online adverts. Some sex workers participated because they knew me and trusted me, whereas those that did not know me trusted my insider status and shared this with me. Some sex workers also shared my poster with their friends at the brothel they worked at after seeing it advertised on Facebook.

Sex workers past and present were the target for this study. Sex workers were recruited online through a Facebook page created specifically for this project (Appendix 7), a Twitter account, again created for the project, and through verified private online sex work communities to which I had access as a peer. This meant sex workers could be confident I was a peer. SIN did not officially endorse my project although they viewed my research proposal and knew about my project. This was decided after the university ethics committee deemed my involvement with SIN and position as President

constituted a conflict of interest. No sex workers were approached face to face and asked to participate so as to avoid any possible coercion.

There was more interest in the research; however, as funding was limited and saturation reached at thirty I decided to stop. I knew I had reached saturation because the stories sex workers shared started to become repetitive. According to Mason (2010), samples needed for qualitative studies are significantly lower than those for quantitative studies. The average sample size for a phenomenological study ranges between five and twenty-five, as the findings elicited from the nature and process of the research are rich in detail. Furthermore, Mason (2010) found that authors tend to agree that saturation is achieved at a comparatively low level. Thirty interviews were enough and provided rich data, including that elicited from participants when they followed many unexpected tangents, highlighting the diversity of experiences for sex workers when asked about their everyday lives.

Sampling

The research project utilised purposive and snowball sampling (Seth, 2016). Snowball sampling was concurrently utilised as sex workers are considered a hard-to-reach population (Bungay et al., 2016), especially certain populations such as male, trans and migrant sex workers. Therefore, when sending out information regarding the study to interested participants, I encouraged them to forward the study on to other sex workers. Around five participants were recruited in this manner. Previous research conducted by me and my supervisor, Professor Sarah Wendt (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017), found that when speaking with sex workers affiliated with a sex worker organisation, especially if they work at the organisation, that their narratives are influenced by the organisation's values. Hence, snowball sampling was used to encourage the especially 'hard-to-reach' sex worker community and

those traditionally left out of research (Bungay et al., 2016). It was also important to speak with sex workers not affiliated with sex work organisations. In addition, some sex workers declined to participate when I sent them the research information, highlighting that sex workers felt empowered and safe to not participate. I am not sure why they declined, but because I was initially concerned that sex workers might feel that they had to participate because of who I was, I felt more confident that I was not coercing people into participation when they did so.

The sample of sex workers interviewed included 23 cisgender women, two trans women, four non-binary people and one cisgender male. Most of the participants were Caucasian, with four people identifying as Asian (or Asian-Australian) and one as African. For privacy reasons further details of the countries from which non-Caucasian participants were drawn were not sought, and they were also asked to not specify where they were from. Five participants were past sex workers and 25 reported that they were currently sex working. Additionally, seven people specifically identified as polyamorous and one as asexual. Over half of the participants specifically identified as being part of the LGBTIQA+ community. The types of sex work in which the participants engaged was also broad, and I was expecting to interview mainly private workers. However, I interviewed several participants who worked in a brothel and two current dancers as well. As with my decision to limit potentially identifying information on participants' race and ethnicity, I decided not to include a table outlining other demographics as this too had the potential to identify participants.

Reflexivity and reflection

Reflexivity and allowing myself sufficient time to reflect after the interviews was an important part of my project. It meant I was able to learn from the participants and appreciate their lived experiences as sex workers and what they had to say about their everyday lives. Fortune, Reid and Miller (2013, p. 213) state:

When thinking about interviewing subjects in a qualitative study - researchers are permitted to participate in a truly remarkable enterprise - one that puts the researcher into the learner position and the subject into the expert position.

Below are some of my particular learnings recorded as part of my reflections that influenced my position as researcher.

The benefits of peer research: people are more willing to open up to me because they know that I'm a sex worker and someone they can trust. This has meant a lot to my participants. The discussions have overall felt so natural and comfortable. I was concerned about narrative interviewing initially, as I found it hard to imagine how I would get participants to first tell their story and just talk for the majority of the time. I have discovered that this has come quite easily, especially when I simply ask them how they came into sex work. After that, some participants chatted almost for the entire hour without me needing to prompt. Being a peer has meant that I have also been able to share my experiences, or know what to ask, which has helped the whole process and creating a conversation, rather than a stiff interview. I have no idea how many participants I would have interviewed if I didn't recruit from my community, or state that I am a sex worker.

Interviews are draining: I have felt a similar level of emotional exhaustion after a full day of bookings. To focus for one-two hours with one person, where I am largely listening is VERY draining. I was not prepared for this and did not anticipate how familiar the feeling would be when interviewing sex workers. Interviewing, similar to sex work, felt like emotion work.

Talking to all these sex workers has given me an elevated sense of love and respect for my community. Doing interviews with other sex workers has been so rewarding. It has been amazing hearing everyone's stories. Not one has been similar, and it speaks to the variety of experiences within the sex industry. I have enjoyed sharing and laughing with participants. Sex workers are truly amazing people.

My experience as a sex worker has helped me manage my interviews (bookings LOL), respond to potential participants, and interview multiple people in one day. This is one of the skills I have developed as a sex worker. Furthermore, having the skills to already manage my work FB, Twitter and adverts has easily transferred into the recruitment process.

Cathartic experiences for participants: Many sex workers noted how wonderful it was to be given this safe platform, where they can just tell their stories and be heard. In some ways the discussions did feel like 'counselling' sessions, in that some people just needed to talk about their experiences but have no one else in their lives to do this with. I was a safe person, who understood, without judgment.

My feelings of emotion and hearing such intimate stories: I felt almost elated and high from having discussions with other sex workers, as even for me, it's not every day I just get to hear these stories or meet with so many different sex workers. I felt like they were truly connecting experiences between myself and the participants.

The more interviews I have conducted, the easier it has been to explain my research, and be clearer about how to explain what the everyday is. Also, more and more I have just started calling the interviews stories, and have encouraged people to tell me stories about their lives and who they are. It has been really strong and empowering for me to say 'us' as insiders.

Facebook has been so useful, as keeping in contact with participants has been easy. They are able to easily contact me if they want to withdraw consent at any time, even after interviews, or specify bits of the interviews they might in hindsight want cut out. Furthermore, when I finish my thesis, it will be a useful platform for me to ask participants if they want a copy of the thesis. Many have asked for this. In terms of mitigating perception of coercion, a few people chose not to participate, who I personally know, therefore I feel that that is a good sign that people do not feel like they need to participate.

These are some of my reflections and observations written during and after the interviews took place. They demonstrate the reflexive process I engaged in throughout this research project. They encapsulate how connected I felt to the participants and how rewarding an experience it was to conduct research with my community. I did not know what to expect from the interview process; however, my reflections highlight the power of qualitative, sex work feminist research—not only for the participants but for me. Feminist research encourages reflexivity, hence why note taking and reflections during and after the interviews were important to highlight, and matter (Gill & Ryan-Flood, 2010). Reflexivity helped me examine and respond to the ethical complexities of collaborative research, for example power relations between me and the participants and how power shifted (Ahmed, 2017; Linabary et al., 2020). For example, although I was in a position of power as a researcher, I interviewed two sex workers who charged \$800 an hour and earned considerably more than I.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to code the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2016). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a succinct guide for TA and have developed analysis especially for a qualitative

paradigm. This version of TA is widely cited, hence why it was chosen. I have used this kind of analysis previously and was therefore already acquainted with it (Baratossy & Wendt, 2017). TA is designed to provide flexible, accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative interviews. Themes found from generating codes provided a framework for organising and reporting on my findings. TA was especially useful for capturing the lived experiences of participants, for example, coding laughter. The research was inductive, therefore the findings were driven by participants and meant that it was not until I wrote my findings chapters that I understood what the data actually meant. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that coding and finding themes are not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, rather on whether they capture something important in relation to the overall research question, in this case, the everyday lives of sex workers. TA is flexible in that there is no right or wrong way to determine themes of importance; however, consistency is important.

The data were analysed at the latent level so as to explore underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A latent analysis ties in with social constructionism and seeks to theorise and understand the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that are hidden in the meaning of the individual accounts of daily life (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I listened to the raw interview data twice, once just to immerse myself in the data and then again during transcribing. I then re-read the transcribed data once coded. NVIVO was used to code the data and 640 themes emerged as I coded thoroughly. Because there was a high number of themes, I created a visual aid to group all related themes into broader overarching themes, for example sex work as work, clients, sexual assault and the body (Appendix 8).

Four major themes were based on relationships being central to a sex worker's everyday life, and also how sex workers were impacted by—but also resisted—stigma and broader structural and cultural conditions. The major themes were relationships with clients, romantic relationships, friends and family, and relationships to the self and sex work.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are important for any research project but also in particular ways for sex workers. Confidentiality and privacy are major concerns for sex workers, as being 'outed' can have very real consequences, especially in a relatively small community such as Adelaide, South Australia. For example, I already knew 20 of the participants due to being an insider. To maintain anonymity, the participants recruited were assigned a pseudonym by me to better disguise their identities. Participants verbally consented via the audio recording without stating their name, so that there was no official recording of their legal names. Participants were explicitly advised before the interviews that they could withdraw from the study after the interviews were conducted. They were encouraged to contact me after the interviews took place if they had any concerns. I did not send transcripts to participants to check over, however one participant independently contacted me after the interview and asked to look over their transcript, which I sent to them. That participant did not ask to amend anything and was happy with the transcription of the interview. All participants were fully informed about the aims of the research, and an information sheet and consent form were included in the initial contact stages (Appendix 9). As per the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007*, there was and is an adequate plan in place to protect the participants' privacy by keeping their recorded data safe and secured. If anything arose during the interview that I thought might identify the participant or put them at risk I specifically asked them if they would like it left out of the transcription. For example, when someone spoke out about problematic management at the brothel they worked at, this was redacted to ensure their employment was not put at risk and that their confidentiality was maintained. Several participants spoke about sexual assault, and again I asked if they wanted their account redacted and also offered to direct them to support services.

Accountability

To ensure this research was ethical and that I could be held to account by other sex workers I consulted with SIN, Scarlet Alliance and sex workers at key points throughout the research process and in various ways, both formally and informally. I consulted with SIN during my research proposal, then again mid-way through. I also consulted with both SIN and Scarlet Alliance in the lead up to presenting my findings and recommendations and also after. I submitted all chapters to both SIN and Scarlet Alliance at various stages during my PhD so that they could be kept up to date with the progress of my research, although I understand that for people in overworked and underpaid organisations this could be unreasonable. I also knew that if there were any concerns later that they could read over my work at any time and address them at that point. Additionally, I organised teleconference meetings with both organisations to verbally update them on my progress throughout, but especially after my findings were finalised as this is what will inform publishing. I conducted additional formal consultations before completing my thesis, specifically outlining the findings and recommendations to SIN and Scarlet Alliance to minimise risk to the sex work community, for example, from erroneously interpreted findings. This was presented online to ensure that it was accessible to both SIN and Scarlet Alliance during COVID. It was also important to emphasise that no participants could be identified even with the assigned pseudonyms and that precautions had been taken to ensure participant anonymity. Both organisations recommended further consultations with sex workers of colour and trans and gender diverse sex workers, which I conducted online before submitting this PhD. I did consults with 5 sex workers of colour and 2 trans and gender diverse sex workers. I paid participants fifty dollars for their time or they participated in the consult during SIN work hours. I recruited participants through my networks and through SIN. Some recommendations were made, all of which have been incorporated. For example, two migrant sex workers wanted me to include that for sex workers of colour sex work is not only defined by racism but also that there were also many business advantages.

Risk

The criminalisation of sex work in South Australia was a concern, as I did not want to incriminate or risk the identity of the participants. This was raised as an issue by the university ethics committee. To alleviate these concerns of risk to participants, I argued as part of the ethics application that the research was focused on the everyday lives of sex workers and who they are, rather than on parts of the work that were criminalised. The participants were being provided with numerous opportunities to opt out if they felt uncomfortable at any point, and at no point would a sex worker be 'outed' or identified during recruitment or the presentation of findings. Participants consented verbally while being recorded. This was done to ensure that their safety, privacy and confidentiality were protected. The participants did discuss their sex work; however, not enough information was collected that would criminalise people in the face of the law. The *Summary Offences Act (1953)* and the *Criminal Law Consolidation Act (1935-1976)* target the acts around sex work, such as people living off the earnings, soliciting or being on the premises of a 'bawdy house'. The interviews did not provide the evidence necessary to criminalise any participant, even if they did discuss the above. Furthermore, discussing sex work is not currently considered illegal.

Limitations of the study

This research recruited 30 sex workers and is therefore considered a 'non-representative sample' and cannot be used to make generalisations about South Australian sex workers more broadly (Walter, 2019). Although this is a limitation, this sample does indicate what the everyday life of sex workers can look like. However, to mitigate this community consultations occurred with SIN, Scarlet Alliance and 5 sex workers of colour and 2 trans and gender diverse sex workers to ensure that the findings were representative of the everyday life experiences of the South Australian sex work community.

The findings from this thesis are also consistent with other sex work and sex worker research literature (see Shaver, 2015 for example), where the findings are not able to be generalised due to differing demographics (due to 'snowball' sampling for example), individual legal frameworks in which sex work occurs and the socio-economic circumstances of sex workers.

Conclusion

Sex work is criminalised in South Australia; however, people continue to engage in it despite criminal sanctions and stigma. As researchers we must be critical when engaging with constructed concepts such as criminality, because criminalisation occurs in order to control 'undesirable' groups within society (Jochelson et al., 2017). Sex work remains criminalised because of stigma and morality; therefore, researchers must engage with this community ethically and respectfully, and a sex work feminist approach is a way in which this can be done. This research aims to create, and contribute to, the narratives situated around sex work to challenge harmful stereotypes and break away from binary depictions that over-simplify the lives of sex workers. This makes a contribution to the disciplines of social work, social policy, gender studies and social theory by providing an example of sex work feminist research conducted by a sex worker, with sex workers and for sex workers.

It is important to understand the everyday lives of sex workers in order to create new narratives around sex work. Research must be informed by sex workers, which is what a sex work feminist and phenomenological enquiry aims to achieve. Sex work research often focuses on large-scale issues where everyday life is overshadowed, therefore these rich and illuminating accounts of life are lost. This research aims to uncover rich and detailed narratives about the everyday lives of sex workers to challenge the stigma situated around sex work. The study was undertaken in South Australia, therefore contributing to a new field of enquiry as little to no research has been conducted in this

state. It is necessary to explore the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers to build a contemporary understanding of this population, which is criminalised. To date no research has been conducted in Australia exploring the everyday lives of sex workers.

This chapter shows how sex work research that is underpinned by a sex work feminist approach is better able to value and highlight lived experience. It also demonstrates the benefits of insider status (Jochelson et al., 2017) in that it allowed me to conduct data-rich interviews with 30 sex workers, successfully recruiting them in three and a half weeks. This chapter also demonstrates how I was able to combine my insider status and sex work activism and situate it within my research while carrying through my sex work feminist values into both the epistemology and design of this research. I did this whilst remaining reflexive, aware of power dynamics and understanding the risks and limitations of my research. Most importantly, I have considered the ethics of sex work research and deeply reflected on how I can best be accountable to the sex work community through a collaborative and transparent approach to research.

Chapter Four: Introduction to the Findings and Everyday Life in Adelaide

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an introduction to the findings chapters, situating the study within the events and sex work regulation system of Adelaide, South Australia. As the data for this research were purposefully collected during a short period of time so as to inform a specific period of sex worker activism, they capture a snapshot in time. It is pertinent that the context within which this research is situated is outlined.

Sex worker researchers, amongst a plethora of other sex worker-positive researchers, argue that sex work research focuses on problematising sex work and sex, rather than positioning sex work as work (Agustín, 2005; Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Brents & Sanders, 2010; Brewis & Linstead, 2000a; 2000b; Chapkis, 1997; Doezema & Kempadoo, 1998; Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2006; Jeffrey, 2006; Nagle, 1997; Pheterson, 1996; Sprinkle, 1997a; Sullivan, 2010; Treloar et al., 2021). Some of these researchers also argue that the research has neglected to explore the daily challenges involved with sex work, for example, 'managing money, juggling family and other intimate relationships, dealing with legal restrictions and policing, confronting social stigma, and challenges to them organising collectively' (Ditmore et al., 2010a, p. 1; Treloar et al., 2021). Everyday life, as Henri Lefebvre describes it, is often mundane. And because of this, it is taken for granted and little understood (Lefebvre, 1971). The theoretical lens applied to everyday life has the power to showcase the ways in which cultural and institutional structures impact people on an individual level (Merrifield & Muschamp, 2006). Lefebvre

argues that a 'politics without the everyday is a politics without a constituency' (Merrifield & Muschamp, 2006, p. 5), meaning it is without real-life representation. Lefebvre further argues that lived realities directly expose the society and structures in which we live and are specific to time and place. For example, in the Australian context everyday modern life is dictated by capitalism and colonisation (Davies, 2016).

Exploring the everyday life of South Australian sex workers through narrative interviewing uncovered rich accounts and highlighted how important relationships are to the participants. Importantly, it is within these relationships with clients, romantic partners, friends, family and the self where tension, stigma and cultural and structural inequalities were exposed and navigated by sex workers. The order of these relationships is not based on the level of their importance to the participants; rather, it reflects how the participants spoke about their lives. They discussed work first, then their more personal relationships and finally—towards the end of their interviews—became more reflective about their own relationship with sex work. Overall, participants demonstrated resilience and autonomy at the individual level despite stigma, power imbalances and discrimination being deeply embedded in their everyday lives. Like the other findings chapters of this thesis, the exploration of relationships in the everyday lives of sex workers adds complexity, nuance and new findings to academic understandings around sex work and sex workers.

The value of exploring everyday life, especially for marginalised communities such as sex workers, is that it positions people as the experts on their own lives by giving them a platform and valuing their individual stories. It is also important because 'life at its most mundane level is as epic and spiritual as any official history or religion' (Merrifield & Muschamp, 2006, p. 8). However, eurocentrism has meant that European and western understandings have shaped how history is told in order to secure power and political superiority, therefore stories and interpretations of historical events that undermine dominant accounts are purposely overshadowed (Araújo & Maeso, 2015). For example, historical

accounts of sex work are often situated around disease and morality, which are evident in the British *Contagious Diseases Acts*, where sex workers were targeted as the major carriers of venereal disease. The Act was created (and extended a number of times) not to protect sex workers but to guard the fitness of the nation's military personnel (Lovejoy, 1994; Perkins et al., 1994).

The findings chapters expose nuanced phenomena that were uncovered by talking with participants about their everyday lives. Overall, the participants demonstrated that regardless of stigma, they manage their relationships and the challenges that arise with humour and a critical outlook in order to understand, balance and navigate their everyday lives as sex workers. A critical outlook and humour also helped participants to contextualise their experiences of stigma and other intersections they faced with what is occurring elsewhere in society. For example, Ani, determined to dispel the idea that sex workers are vulnerable and have no autonomy stated that 'I think what's important for me is pushing back against that idea that sex workers are just pawns in a game that they don't really understand.'

Adelaide, South Australia 2018

Sex workers living and working in Adelaide, South Australia, experienced a particularly tense time during 2018. This was evident throughout the interviews where fear and distress were expressed by most participants. As stated in Chapter Three, sex work is criminalised in South Australia (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017), and hence it is important to note that participants' stories about their everyday lives were shaped by this political context. It was almost inevitable that participants discussed criminalisation and policing because they form part of the sex work diaspora (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). However, police raids were more frequent than usual at the time that interviews were being conducted, and sex workers described feeling incredibly fearful of the police. Policing was one of the

most referenced themes to emerge from the 30 interviews: 27 participants specifically spoke about the police. They shared stories relating to direct experiences with the police and second-hand accounts of raids, especially within brothel settings. In addition, police harassment was discussed as were their fears associated with policing, both within the work context and in other areas of participants' lives. Not all participants experienced police raids, though several did, and many shared stories of how policing directly, tangentially or symbolically impacted their everyday lives. Stigma was identified by the participants as directly connected to criminalisation and contributing to discrimination by police against sex workers.

In previous research, I interviewed 10 South Australian sex workers and found that working in a criminalised setting raised many concerns for them. It led to heightened fears around policing and policing practices in particular (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). Those interviews took place in 2015, and in that year 36 sex work-related charges were laid (Diamond, 2019a). Interviewees at that time discussed their inability to report crimes to police, police harassment, discrimination and racism. For example, one culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) sex worker discussed how fearful her community was and that this had created a barrier to reporting crimes committed against them. This was also exacerbated due to stigma, language barriers and racism (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). One notable difference between the interviews conducted in 2015 and 2018 was that although sex workers were overall fearful of the police regardless of when the interviews took place, in 2018 more individuals personally experienced police raids, and the fear associated with the police was not second-hand or symbolic. Rather, police posed a more direct and personal threat to sex workers' safety. This was due to the period of heightened police raids, where charges increased from 27 in the previous financial year to 211 in the 2017-2018 financial year. Through exploring participants' everyday lives and experiences it became clear how dangerous the policing was, that the police created and exacerbated harms and that they did not protect sex workers when needed. The participants spoke about

criminalisation, their fears around policing and the impact of these at a time when many were hoping for legislative change and law reform. Hannah, who was interviewed for this study stated how she wanted to feel safe.

Hannah: It's just sad here how backwards we are. It's fucked... I'm like, just think about the freedom and the safety... that these girls are lacking because... because of how backwards we are. It's actually ridiculous, like the only state. Makes me actually really angry... So hopefully it changes soon.

Many participants had directly encountered the police at work, including on raids and as part of routine surveillance. One participant was fined at a brothel, which was subsequently shut down and she was consequently forced to work interstate because the police threatened that if she was found on brothel premises again they would charge her. Another participant was arrested while working on the street; however, the charges were dropped because the police were found to have misused their powers. Another participant was raided by six undercover police officers at her home, leaving her traumatised after they had checked her body for track marks and commented on how she was not worth her rates (Diamond, 2019a). Dolly explains how non-uniformed police raided her house.

Dolly: The law though, scares the shit out of me. Because those that should serve as our protector actually are the most dangerous ones of all... I have no criminal record whatsoever. I have all my demerit points. I have never been in trouble for anything in anyway at any time. Not even when I was a teenager. Nothing drug related, traffic related, nothing... And um, I was home alone, and it was the middle of the night, and this was about six months ago. And I had six men in casual clothes that were armed surrounding my house, bursting in and tearing the place apart. And at first, I thought I'm getting robbed. They were in hoodies, track pants and sneakers. I was terrified. They physically restrained me so I couldn't leave the hallway, coz

they thought I was going to flush evidence, hide something... They made a lot of disparaging remarks about me, and searched my house, and come up with nothing. They left me with no report number, no file number, no calling card, no nothing.

Another participant, Drew, also experienced harassment by the police and noted how policing practices had recently changed.

Drew: Sex work hasn't been legal here the entire time I've worked in South Australia. We never had any problems with the police... The cops would come if we called them and deal with horrible clients. Or like they'd come in and they would check that we were of age... That you know, there weren't warrants out for our arrest. They would ask us if we've been treated well. Sometimes they come through and ask for girls they were maybe looking for. If a girl had gone missing, they would be like, have you seen her? They would always come through, and they were lovely, and you got the feeling like they were fine with it. Like they knew that we were there and what we were doing. No one cared. And you know we weren't hurting anyone, and they seemed respectful of us, and we were respectful of them and then there was like a change. A sudden overnight change and I still don't know what prompted it?

Other participants who had never come into direct contact with police were still nonetheless fearful, as they knew people who had interactions with the police and were fearful themselves of being targeted. These findings are consistent with earlier research in 2017 (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). It was clear that policing had an impact on participants' daily lives. The police, using their powers to enter suspected brothels—including private residences—recorded 176 instances during the 2017-2018 financial year (Dayman, 2018). Furthermore, many brothels were forcibly shut down from the 2017 period onwards (Dayman, 2018). Prior to this increase, it was believed that a local gonorrhoea epidemic in Adelaide identified between 2006 and 2010 was in part caused by increased policing and

convictions against sex workers, where 78 offences were laid within the 2007-2008 financial year compared with 450 in the previous 12 years (Li et al., 2016). This highlights how dangerous policing is because when sex workers fear being targeted clients become fearful too, impacting client numbers and the amount sex workers earn, therefore impacting the kinds of services sex workers provide, Such as, for example, offering uncovered services to earn more and account for the loss of income during a police surge. It is not yet fully understood how this increase in policing during 2018 impacted the sex worker community. At this time there was much media coverage reporting on the increased policing, and concerns around police corruption were raised (Diamond, 2019a). At the time of writing, the *Statutes Amendment (Repeal of Sex Work Offences) Bill 2020* was under referral to a Select Committee of the Legislative Council that inquired into and reported on the Bill, which aimed to explore policing practices and corruption (Diamond, 2021). Recently, it has been shown that when police pose as clients they breach the *Covert Operations Act (2009)*, which only allows undercover operations for the purpose of gathering evidence of serious criminal behaviour (Henson, 2021).

Police corruption within sex work is common and was evidenced in both the Wood Royal Commission (New South Wales) and the Fitzgerald Inquiry (Queensland). In NSW it led to the decriminalisation of sex work. In South Australia, a Member of The Greens in the Legislative Council (MLC), Tammy Franks, disclosed to the Legislative Council that:

When SAPOL (South Australian Police) did not get their way and found that a decrim bill for sex work had passed the upper house, they actually raided brothels and used uncorrected, off the record Hansard from this parliament, from select committee proceedings, as evidence against those workers in those brothels, contrary to the parliament's processes, contrary to good policing process. (SA Parliamentary Debates, 2019)

The FOSTA-SESTA legislative changes in the United States have also impacted participants in South Australia. In March 2018 these two Bills: FOSTA, the *Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act*, and the Senate Bill, SESTA, the *Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act*, passed in the United States and these have had a disastrous impact on sex workers globally (Mia, 2020; Musto et al., 2021). The interviews with sex workers for this thesis were conducted over a three-and-a-half-week period in July 2018 just after these laws passed. This meant that again, in addition to anxieties around policing and criminalisation, the global shutdown of adult online advertising platforms, such as Backpage and Cracker—which resulted from the enactment of SESTA-FOSTA—had led to some participants losing work over night, and clients were scarce. This left sex workers vulnerable as they were also struggling financially (Mia, 2020; Musto et al., 2021). Jill, a participant, stated that ‘FOSTA-SESTA laws came in and I’ve barely had a phone call since Cracker. Not even a time waster... I’ve had two bookings since. Completely dead, absolutely dead... And I am feeling the financial stress of not having that extra cash, you know?’.

Local media also actively politicised and sensationalised sex work because the Bill to decriminalise sex work in South Australia had been introduced in May 2018; however, unfortunately the Bill failed to pass in November 2019 (Diamond, 2019b). The media actively debated whether sex work ought to be decriminalised, and opponents of decriminalisation proposed alternative models that would further criminalise sex work. Street-based sex workers were targeted throughout the period of the debates, and unfounded, non-evidence based fears were purposefully circulated, for example, that decriminalisation would mean an increase in street-based sex work despite research in New Zealand indicating otherwise (Abel et al., 2009). It was clear that class-based discrimination was used to undermine the Bill. However in 2019, a Facebook poll conducted by ABC Adelaide (2019, June 5) showed that of the 5355 people who voted, 93% supported the decriminalisation of sex work, and participants in this study also indicated that they were feeling a cultural shift around how sex work was publicly viewed.

Drew: Over the years of me doing it. Over the 12 years it has become way more socially acceptable. Do you know what I mean? I think there's more positive representation about it in media, or it being a more normal thing.

Conclusion

Situating the context of events that occurred during the timing of the interviews highlights the importance of exploring the everyday lives of sex workers and that peer research is key. For example, participants discussed how they would have been much less likely to agree to be interviewed by, or in an interview situation to disclose as much to, a non-peer during such a politically turbulent time. The data are richer for having been collected during such a critical period of time.

The following chapters present the common themes that emerged from the stories of sex workers. By positioning sex workers as the experts of their own lives, nuanced understandings of sex work are exposed where the connections between everyday life and structural and cultural stigma become visible. Throughout the interviews it was evident that relationships were important and central to sex workers. Through talking about multiple relationships, sex workers demonstrated how they navigated the nuances of the mundane, personal and professional moments of everyday life in the political context described above. Each of the following chapters presents the everyday lives of sex workers through stories about their relationships.

Chapter Five: Sex Workers and Client Relationships

Introduction

This chapter explores the relationships formed between sex workers and their clients. I explore the concept of clients as 'everyday men'. I then discuss everyday violence and stigma, situating it within participants' experiences of safety and defensive work as these pertain to the everyday. This is followed by other key themes identified by participants, including class and racism as well as 'performing' sex work and the concept of 'sexpertise', which are followed by the conclusion.

This chapter highlights that when sex workers speak about their everyday lives, the sex work-client relationship exposes the social and structural power dynamics that create and reinforce violence, stigma, inequality and discrimination in everyday encounters. Gender was discussed at length during the interviews, and although clients were described as 'everyday men', sex workers also highlighted how everyday men, including those outside of the sex work context, perpetrate violence, that is, that violence is a societal problem rather than a sex work-specific problem.

Everyday men

Participants described their clientele as 'everyday men' partly because their participants were mostly male. Couples' bookings were also sometimes catered for, and there is a small body of literature that has explored women who seek out sex workers' services (Caldwell & de Wit, 2020). Historically, sex workers' clients have been culturally tolerated and viewed as 'ordinary' men exercising their naturally robust libidos (Durisin et al., 2018; Khan, 2018). This perspective has shifted, and the

'problematisation' of 'the client' is now prevalent and has led to models of sex work regulation, such as the Nordic or Swedish models, that further harm sex workers and which sex workers oppose (Barry, 1996; Bindel, 2019; Khan, 2018; Tyler, 2016). The problem with criminalised and partially criminalised systems of regulation is that sex workers are unable to share stories around violence or harassment due to the fear that abolition advocates will use these accounts of violence to justify criminalising sex workers and their clients (Khan, 2018). This means that sex workers are pushed out of discussions around violence and clients are left positioned as sexual deviants, thus pathologising the purchase of sex and obscuring the reality that clients are no different to other everyday men (Benoit et al., 2014; Sanders, 2008).

Participants told stories of clients as everyday men in two main ways. First, they spoke about men as ordinary, everyday people in the context of attempting to dispel stigma around sex work. Second, many participants were critical of men and described 'the everyday man' as a figure who symbolically perpetrates violence and inequality. The tension between these two narratives demonstrates how sex work in the everyday is transactional labour, offering both the sex worker and client expressions of freedom including financial freedom and agency. On the other hand, stories of violence show how the everyday lives of sex workers are also shaped by gender constructs and power relations that are reflected elsewhere in society.

In drawing on the construct of their clients as 'just ordinary' or 'normal' men, participants were depicting the 'everydayness' of sex workers and their clientele. For example, when describing sex work to a friend Tami used this analogy, explaining that she often tries to counter harmful narratives about sex work by drawing on the 'boring everydayness' of her clientele.

Tami: And the way that I explained it to a friend, coz she was just like, naturally curious and asking questions, and I was like... people have a concept in their head of what a sex worker

will look like and work like and what a client will look like and I'm just like, just go to Westfield Marion and just press pause, and like all the women you see, workers look like that, and all the men you see, clients look like that.

Stigma works to construct a stereotypical image of what a sex worker is like, and this means that when people enter the sex industry their perceptions of sex work are shaped by these stigmatised constructions (McCausland et al., 2020). Similarly, Andie commented on how 'normal seeming' clients were, which defied their initial thoughts upon entering sex work.

Andie: Most of them were just like really normal seeming dudes, just like regular people who you see in the street. There weren't that many people who I saw who were like, like weird creeps who like, you know, weren't able to, you know, have a sex life in their personal life. Like that, yeah, it really wasn't like that at all.

Participants described their clients as 'ordinary', 'everyday' men to defy stereotypes of who a client is. 'This is a space of contradictions that argues that sex work can be empowering and exploitative, safe and unsafe; as well as a space that can involve free and restrained choice while both resisting and reinforcing gender stereotypes' (Smith, 2016, p. 346). It can be argued that the concept of the everyday was drawn upon by participants in an attempt to normalise sex work and mitigate stigma. For example, Andie tried to highlight how 'normal' their clients were and how stigma contributed to misconstrued understandings about sex work and clients.

Andie: I think working would be totally different if there wasn't so much stigma and stuff attached to it. So that was a real surprise for me, and working demystified sex work and clients. It's not what the movies depict and how people talk about it. All the clients that I saw,

most of them were just really normal dudes. Like, a lot of them were just like dad types you know? Every now and then you, you'd get a bunch of guys coming in together coz it's like it's a cool bro thing to do or whatever.

Such contradictions emerged in the stories of sex workers as the interviews stretched longer, with participants recalling and remembering clients, re-living feelings, thoughts and emotions through their stories of everyday work. For example, several participants casually expressed a general distrust of men but also enjoyed their work, the money and freedom it gave them. However, work was not always depicted as enjoyable, money was not always in abundance and work not always flexible, especially after the FOSTA-SESTA legislation was enacted (Jackson & Heineman, 2018; Stern, 2019). For example, Tami spent time during her story speaking about men as ordinary and normal, but she also laughed about her male clientele, saying, 'Over-confidence of the mediocre. Hashtag misandry' (laughs).

Enid however, explained that she overcame poverty and found financial freedom through doing sex work, despite having a complicated relationship with men due to past trauma.

Enid: Yeah, well ironically, I hate men. And I went, I love working. I love, you know, I want a house. I want money and you know, this day and age, it's just too expensive. And it is really hard to have, you know, a high enough paying job, unless you know, you go get a degree or whatever. So, I'm like what the hell am I going to do? I'm sick of working in retail, working 40-hour weeks, and living week to week. It wasn't for me.

Power and imbalance can be understood to mean the power that people have over others and how this can limit one's potential (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). Ani's everyday experience of misogyny (below) was alleviated when she experienced earning more and gaining power through sex work, thus highlighting her agency at work. For her, sex work was symbolic and represented a feminist ideology

that helped her identify power and use it to her advantage. This also demonstrates how power is fluid, not fixed (Paxton et al., 2020; Williams, 2019), and despite her position as a lesbian, woman and a sex worker, she still felt empowered through sex work and in control at work.

Ani: Um, something that I really noticed was like my tolerance level for putting up with men was a lot higher. Like coz I just felt like at least I was getting something out of the patriarchy. So, if I'd gone to work and I'd had a really good night, and like, felt um, like I'd achieved what I wanted to financially I would be um, like I felt like, if men looked at me on the street, or whatever or I've like got catcalled or whatever, I would feel like at least I was having a payoff to that. Like you know, kind of, it was a weird thing of, like my tolerance level for um, the male gaze I guess was upped a bit because I was like, yeah, this is working for me, you know bring whatever that is, being a woman or being attractive in a certain way, or whatever, being sexualised, is working for me financially, so I can put up with it. Um, which now I struggle with, coz now I'm like you can't fucking look at me, like no one is even paying for me (laughing) to like, you know, wear certain clothes, or look a certain way, so, like this is not for you.

Jessica, who managed and worked at a strip club stated that despite being critical of men and being angered by them, similar to other participants who described 'hate', she felt sorry for men and attested to the humanity of her clientele and found that many of her clients had difficulties expressing their emotions and pain. She distanced herself from her feelings about men and at work enjoyed providing a service that relieved this pain. She felt that her work made a difference to the lives of men, and this gave her work 'meaning' and helped mitigate stigma. These findings are consistent with those of Khan (2018).

Jessica: I still actually really feel sorry for men more than anything um, you know? Like I'm frustrated by them, and I'm angered by them, and yeah, I mean that's a whole other

conversation, but when they are coming in there, I still see that they're at their core really in a bad place, and if I can do something to like help with that, then I feel like I've had a good night, you know? Whether that's to help them escape, um, connect, reconnect them to their arousal, or to talk to them about why their wife doesn't fuck them anymore or you know, whatever. Or that they're a virgin and they don't know how to talk to girls, or whatever it is.

Gabriel spoke about vulnerability and that many of his clients in their daily lives were closeted or unable to explore their sexuality. He highlighted homophobia and how repressive heteronormative culture was for queer and questioning men. Furthermore, he had himself also experienced internalised homophobia and whorephobia and this served as a point of connection between him and his clientele.

Gabriel: But you know for gay male sex workers seeing men, I think it's a fascinating insight into how repressive our culture is, right? Coz we get to see all of these people who in no other space or very few other spaces do they get to express this part of themselves, you know? It's something that they hide you know, as much as I'm hiding from so many people, they're hiding this thing that they're sharing with me from workmates, from partners of decades, from children, from their children, from um, you know, and the only other time they're sharing it with someone is with themselves when they're watching some gay male porn in the toilet you know? Or maybe at some point they log onto Grindr and you know, how fascinating is that and what the fuck does that say about our culture?

The participants demonstrated an understanding of gender and power, where despite critical and complicated feelings about men and patriarchal heteronormative culture they were generally comfortable with these strange bedfellows. Being critical about men and being a sex worker existed together; however, sex workers also felt they had to depict clients as everyday men to mitigate stigma.

Some participants showed compassion for their clientele whereas others were less forgiving, even while enjoying aspects of the work such as making money and the flexibility it afforded them. This adds complexity to the cultural understandings of sex work, where sex workers in their everyday lives are critical and aware of gendered power dynamics and demonstrate feminist values. Furthermore, it demonstrates that reconciling their own values or feelings about men or clientele was not incompatible with being a sex worker, that it was a complex space where multiple truths and realities coexist.

Everyday violence and stigma

Violence, especially physical and sexual violence, is well documented within the sex industry (Brewis & Linstead, 2000a; Campbell et al., 2019; Davies & Evans, 2007; Durisin, 2009; Krusi et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2005; Perkins & Bennett, 1985; Sanders, 2005b; Sanders & Campbell, 2007). However, violence is rarely explored outside of extreme examples, and those experiences along the sexual violence continuum are often omitted (Kavanaugh, 2012; Powell, 2010). Everyday accounts of sexual violence are important to explore as they are more commonly experienced, for example, harassment via text messaging (Nelson, 2021; Sanders et al., 2018a), and are obscured because they are normalised within society and rarely acknowledged within the criminal justice system (Kavanaugh, 2012). It is also important to understand that patriarchal forces do not operate in isolation and form part of an interlocking system of power that works in conjunction with capitalism, racism and colonial histories (DeCat, 2019; Durisin, 2009; Mac & Smith, 2018; Paxton et al., 2020). Exploring gendered violence and notions of power in isolation without considering how society normalises everyday violence means that sex workers continue to be stigmatised and their experiences of violence continue to be invisible or misunderstood. Skewed accounts of violence explored through radical feminist rhetoric and

research do not reflect how sex workers speak about violence or how it manifests in their everyday lives. The participants within this study spoke about everyday kinds of violence and harassment, and their stories did not reflect 'extreme' forms of violence.

Participants spoke about having to manage sexual harassment and violence routinely, such as clients removing (or attempting to remove) condoms during the booking or asking for 'bareback' services (penetrative or oral sex without a condom). Gloria retold an incident where a client became physically violent, and for her that moment stood out because it left her particularly frightened, whereas normally she felt confident managing clients. She highlighted how sex workers endure a spectrum of gendered violence and how she managed boundary pushing to mitigate escalating violence. She did not go into explicit detail and was mindful of how she shared her story.

Gloria: Like I wasn't physical hurt, but he was just rough and like, just, like holding my head down... So that's about the one situation that just made me be like, no, never gonna see this person again... I wouldn't say no one's gotten violent. Like I have had people try not to use condoms and I'm like no... that's easily shit I can handle, but that one situation, that just made me feel scared.

Radical feminist, or sex work-exclusionary radical feminist (SWERF), discourses serve to reinforce sex work stigma and have a political purpose (Bateman, 2021; Scoular & FitzGerald, 2021). For example, Bindel (2019) advocates for law reform that criminalises sex work, such as the Swedish or Nordic models, and she is exemplary of outsiders who use their power and privilege to influence policy—often exacerbating harms in the lives of sex workers. Politicians have also been influential in debates around law reform, and opponents of decriminalisation use emotive language and only speak about extreme violence over the everyday violence that is more common (Weitzer, 2006; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2020). For example, references to anal sex and rape are common and executed to present sex

work as inherently violent (SA Parliamentary Debates, 2019). However, research with Sydney-based brothel workers found that of the 128 sex workers interviewed, 80% of them had not experienced rape in a work context (Perkins, 1991). In this study, only one participant spoke about rape at work, and another spoke about stealthing (removal of the condom by a client). These stories were outliers overall in terms of the kinds of sexual violence experiences that participants shared.

Explanations of violence in sex work are often problematised and divorced from the root causes of societal inequality and presented in such a way where sex work itself is positioned as a violent institution (Bateman, 2021; McGarry & FitzGerald, 2019; Ward & Wylie, 2017). This leaves little room for sex workers to speak freely about violence within their everyday lives due to fears around reinforcing stigma and harmful stereotypes. Furthermore, accounts from survivors have been manipulated and used as evidence by those opposing law reform, such as those espoused by Norma and Tankard Reist (2016). For example, a South Australian Member of Parliament, the Hon. Clare Scriven, told this story during debates around sex work law reform where she advocated for a criminal model to govern sex work and opposed decriminalisation.

Many of the women are forced to do anal sex, whether they want to or not, which leads to health problems, e.g., continuous bleeding from the anus. Some women are drugged to keep them compliant on their shifts. In some massage parlours young women wait naked in a back room, waiting for clients. Many women who are prostitutes experience mental illness... Please bring these matters to the attention of members of the upper house and ask them to reject the current bill (SA Parliamentary Debates, 2019).

Sex workers do experience violence and harassment; however, when violence is explored and presented by outsiders, especially those with a political end goal such as criminalising sex work, stories of violence are presented in a certain way that do not reflect how the sex work community

contextualises, discusses or experiences violence. This creates a problem for sex workers and sex work activists where these issues are misrepresented and used to further criminalise sex workers. Sex workers have been forced to be strategic about how they speak of every-day violence. And in the past, sex workers have purposefully left out narratives of violence due to this political climate, instead focusing on empowerment over violence. This has forced the community into a binary paradigm where stories of violence and empowerment are in opposition to, rather than operating on, a continuum or together. This leaves little room to address violence against sex workers, and more recently sex workers have rejected this paradigm and have spoken out about everyday violence. For example Stardust (2019b, p. 456) highlights this in her review of Mac and Smith's (2018) book, *Revolting Prostitutes*:

Mac and Smith distance themselves from narratives of sex work as a form of empowerment, sexual expression, sex-positivity or self-actualisation (p. 3). Empowerment, they argue, is a 'red herring' (p. 218) that detracts from the complex conversations we must be having about colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy.

Everyday accounts have the power to highlight how colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy operate together to marginalise sex workers and show how these operate at the day-to-day level (Mac & Smith, 2018; Merrifield & Muschamp, 2006). Everyday interpersonal violence is made invisible because it is both culturally and institutionally imbedded and normalised (Hollin, 2016; Merrifield & Muschamp, 2006; Suruchi et al., 2016). Participants highlighted everyday instances of violence, stigmatisation, harassment and sexism. No one in the cohort reported any crimes to police and independently chose—either with other sex workers or organisations—to manage their safety at work. Sex workers are not considered to be 'ideal' victims and less empathy is offered to sex workers who have been assaulted (Sprankle et al., 2017). Additionally, police subscribe to stereotypes around who is 'deserving' of justice and who is a legitimate or 'ideal' victim (Johnson, 2017). A cultural shift

needs to occur around how violence is framed in order to address the everyday violence against sex workers because a focus remains on more visible accounts of violence that overshadow and normalise everyday accounts, which are much more common.

Everyday forms of violence that sex workers experience include persistent, repeated and unwanted contact or attempts to contact through email, text or social media, for example doxing, when clients publish private or identifying information about sex workers on the internet (Sanders et al., 2016; Sanders et al., 2018a). Sex workers also receive threatening and harassing texts, calls or emails (Sanders et al., 2016; Sanders et al., 2018a) and are often at the receiving end of verbal abuse and attempts to underpay for services (Sanders et al., 2016; Sanders et al., 2018a). Both Jaz and Tami spoke about the harassment and fatphobia they experienced from clients. Jaz found it distressing and it was detrimental to her mental health and self-esteem. Online forms of violence pose new risks to sex workers; however, sex workers continue to be targeted by online censorship campaigns and cannot rely on police protection. Therefore, any attempts at implementing online safety strategies for sex workers are undermined and compromised (Sanders et al., 2016). Jaz describes the online harassment she experienced.

Jaz: And then you get some dickhead, some troll, that will just randomly send you a message, telling you that you're way too old and fat to charge the rates that you charge and it's like, it really cuts you.

Violence against sex workers can be subtle and difficult to identify. Ani spoke about everyday violence she experienced at work and described an incident when a client purposefully withheld his own orgasm to push out the time limit of the booking. However, because Ani felt confident in her own boundaries and was supported by staff she was able to safely leave the booking. This is consistent with the findings of other literature (for example, Knudson-Martin, 2015; Knudson-Martin and

Mahoney, 2009). It has been shown that when management acknowledges, validates and addresses the experiences of sex workers experiencing violence, sex workers feel safer at work (Buschi, 2014).

Ani: He wouldn't get to the point of orgasm within the session, and I knew that we were running out of time...To push that time... So, I was like, he's already a wanker... and the second knock on the door came and I knew at that point that if I had walked out that the recep would have my back because I'd done my part of the deal... I think he thought that I would stay longer, as like a power play, and so I just got up and left.

Like other survivors of sexual assault, sex workers are reluctant to speak out about their experiences (Quadara, 2008). Fiona described a client who was stalking them outside of the work context and they felt frustrated as they felt that they could not report the crime to police. Sex workers who report crimes to police are often questioned, ignored or silenced due to the prevailing idea that sex workers bring sexual violence upon themselves (Quadara, 2008). Furthermore, police officers are also perpetrators of violence during raids.

Fiona: I've currently got a stalker client and I can't do anything about it because I can't call the cops... And he's one of these emotionally needy clients and he wants you to want him! And he started off doing the 'I wanna look after you and I wanna take care of you, and you don't have to be doing this type of thing'. For the most part, I actually really enjoy being a sex worker. One day I get the phone call, 'there's a present on your doorstep' and I'm still on the phone to him and I go out and check my doorstep and sure enough there's another bag of fucking cheap perfume... And then on the other end he's like, 'what's on your head?' And I'm wearing this fox-eared beanie that I've made and I'm like, a beanie. So, he was in my street you know, watching me go to my door, while on the phone to me.

Participants commonly spoke about clients pushing for full service (when they did not offer it) or other services, especially within erotic massage. Most participants experienced clients who tried to push their boundaries in this way. For Jaz, it was easier to manage client expectations when doing full service because she felt that managing massage clients was more difficult.

Jaz: And, um, eventually I started doing full service, and I find that it's kind of, it's better in that you know what you're offering them, they know what they're coming there for. They're paying the price for it. You're getting the money for it and that service is given. Whereas when it was massage, they just pushed for more. They'd pay and they'd book for massage, but they'd still push for full service.

FOSTA-SESTA has created a new layer of vulnerability for sex workers in their day-to-day lives and perpetrated more violence. Clients have been given more bargaining power as sex workers become financially insecure and frightened (Mia, 2020). It has also led to increased harassment as clients understand, and seek to take advantage of, this new level of vulnerability. 'Well intended' policy has quickly undermined the everyday security of sex workers, and combined with criminalisation and stigma means increased apprehension around work has been experienced as work has been scarce and the cost of advertising has gone up.

Lucie: Some clients are definitely afraid and because of this I've had clients ask me if this is the police... and I was like I don't know if you're the police. Then they're like just send (nude) pics.

Cher: For another thing, you have to spend a lot more on advertising.

The policing of sex work also contributes to the anxiety sex workers experience on a daily basis. Gloria spoke about how a client tried to use the increased police raids against her to manipulate her into a

booking. This shows how policing contributes to the vulnerability of sex workers and that clients are able to take advantage of it. This is consistent with other research in South Australia (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017).

Gloria: I had a client try to take advantage of that (policing) the other day... I only do CBD outcalls and to hotels... He just sent me a text the other day and was like, yeah I just heard on the radio about how they're targeting sex workers, and then he was like, I'd like us to come to an arrangement. And instantly I knew, his arrangement will be me going to his house. I'm not coming to your house, I'm never coming to your house... you've asked me numerous times, I've always said no, it's not going to change any time soon.

Sex workers of colour are positioned differently to Caucasian sex workers within the sex industry and stratification occurs due to structural racism and colonialism, which disadvantage sex workers of colour (Brooks, 1999; 2010a; 2021; DeCat, 2019; Durisin, 2009; Kempadoo et al., 2012; Mason 2013). Additionally, 'solutions' to sex work and trafficking focus on increased criminalisation, policing and imprisonment. These are used to profile and discriminate against workers of colour and working-class sex workers, such as street-based workers (Brooks, 2021). Overall, sex workers of colour, trans sex workers and street-based sex workers experience more everyday violence, hypersexualisation, lower pay and work in more precarious and unsafe environments in comparison to Caucasian, cisgender women who work indoors (Brooks, 2010a; 2021; Doezema & Kempadoo, 1998). Five sex workers of colour were interviewed for this study, and each worker spoke about racism within the sex industry, fetishisation, being 'othered' and white privilege. Tami spoke at length about the violence of racism she experienced daily and how pervasive white privilege was within sex work.

Tami: We don't live in a social vacuum unfortunately so there are attributes in this industry that get valued more, and that workers that possess those attributes get valued more because in society there are qualities that if you possess them, you get valued more... I don't think it's an industry-exclusive problem.... Yeah obviously you know, younger workers, white workers, cis workers, thin workers, conventionally attractive workers, they have a different experience.

Andie spoke about having to accept racism and the fetishisation of Asian women because it was deeply imbedded within the sex industry. Whilst being Asian was a selling point for them, consistent with the findings by Raguparan (2018), they still felt it was racist and that it did not align with their politics.

Andie: I was born in Australia, and this is my home, kind... it's just this perpetual feeling of not belonging... I understand that in the sex industry it is a different story because it is a selling point and people will tell me, well that's just what you have to do because that's what people wanna know. I understood that I wasn't going to change anything. I wasn't going to be able to change every client's mind about you know, sexualising Asian women... So, it was something that I had to take on the chin.

Sex workers contend with harassment, violence, stigma, whorephobia and racism daily both in and out of work. However, criminal law and discrimination undermine sex worker safety strategies and mean that sex workers refuse, or feel unable, to seek support from the police because they too pose a threat (Bungay & Guta, 2018). In this study, participants confirmed these findings and expanded on them. They spoke about everyday client harassment as part of the work yet they were mindful about how they spoke about violence so as not to feed into stereotypes about sex work. Everyday violence was reported to be common although it differed from the dominant assumptions of rape within the sex industry. The participants reported that they managed everyday violence day to day. Violence was experienced in everyday power relations that intersected between gender, class, race and ethnicity;

however, it reflected what women, gender-diverse people and people of colour outside of sex work also navigate every day.

Safety and defensive work

Navigating risk was a daily issue for participants due to anticipating and coming to terms with stigma, criminalisation, racism and gendered violence. Overall sex workers were most fearful of being 'outed', second, of being raided by the police and then last, of experiencing violence at work. Robbery, non-payment, financial exploitation and privacy violations have been shown to be everyday forms of violence perpetrated against sex workers by clients (Bungay & Guta, 2018). 'Defensive sex work' is when participants work in ways that avoid violence through remaining alert and calculating any potential risk. For example participants, through anticipating risky scenarios, used techniques to avoid risk and put strategies in place to stop them from occurring including using their 'informed' intuition and blocking clients that 'seemed off'.

New sex workers to the industry needed to develop those skills ,and this was shown to take time as it was part of a sex worker's professional tool kit. Additionally, new sex workers are more likely to be unaware of the existence of sex work organisations and that they play a role in peer education and helping to develop these strategies (Brewis & Linstead, 2000a; Sanders, 2004). For example, when COVID-19 was first declared a global pandemic, Scarlet Alliance and the National Cabinet of Whores, created by Scarlet Alliance to deal with the crisis, developed strategies and guidelines around working safely during COVID and assisted people starting out in online sex work (Diamond, 2020).

Prevention safety strategies are an important part of a sex worker's everyday life, and defensive work ought to be regarded as expert knowledge and the reason that sex worker peer organisations are so

successful at harm reduction (Bates & Berg, 2014; Quadara, 2008). However, prevention strategies are often in conflict with the laws controlling sex work. For example, criminalisation discourages sex workers from reporting crimes to the police (Quadara, 2008). This limits the ability of sex workers to control their safety, and they often must navigate potentially risky situations without any formal protections. Participants reported using defensive sex work skills and labour when speaking about their everyday work lives. Dolly commented on how she worked 'defensively' and anticipated the kinds of violence she might encounter at work. She achieved this through talking to her clientele at length about their boundaries and mental health to ensure that hurt feelings did not turn into violence. She felt that hurt men were especially prone to violence and this scared her.

Dolly: A dude who thinks that you have ripped him off, that's dangerous... I'm very careful... It's real scary but incels and resentful, rejected dudes are super dangerous. To prevent that I'm very open and I have repeated discussions about emotional health to know where their boundaries are.

Similarly, Jessica commented on how strategic she was and made sure she appeared authentic and not driven by money, as this took away from the 'fantasy' and was perceived by her to be another trigger for violence.

Jessica: And I don't lead them on for the money and so sometimes I could have made heaps more money, but I've also kept myself safe by not, and a girl actually was raped and strangled in our club about eight years ago. She was okay, and the guy's in jail now

The police are an everyday threat to sex workers: this was clear, as each participant spoke about the police, violence and fear. When Dolly was raided at home, she was unsure if she was being robbed or

if her intruders were in fact police officers. She used a 'defensive' mindset and knew that to protect herself from harm she had to 'shut up, sit down, stay calm, be polite and cooperate'. She had to think quickly in this situation and was able to identify risks and acted accordingly to protect herself. Furthermore, this raid was exemplary of how police can use their police powers to harass and intimidate sex workers in everyday work situations with no accountability or transparency.

Dolly: It occurred to me that if they are police, well, be polite and cooperate, if I am getting robbed, be polite and cooperate. So, either way, shut up, sit down, stay calm, be polite and cooperate.

Several participants spoke about having to develop and change their screening practices to avoid being arrested during the increased police raids in Adelaide. Julia felt safer at work before the raids; however, she felt that she had to reconsider how she conducted her work to stay safe. For example, safer sex products are necessary in everyday sex work, but increased policing influenced sex workers to hide safer sex products to avoid being charged.

Julia: Then there's been all the private worker raids recently in Adelaide, and just thinking about it last week I started feeling a bit sketchy about it and realised if a cop comes, they're gunna search. They're gunna look through everything I guess, um, that made me think that, when I first meet new clients, I should like at least have my safe sex stuff in the cupboard so I play some naiveté. You know been working privately for over two years and never considered not having condoms and lube right next to the bed, but now with the police maybe I have to. You kind of feel like you're safe and then wait, maybe I'm not safe.

Theresa managed difficult clients by disclosing that she was married, which she felt sent out the message that she was 'taken' and 'not available'. She found this mitigated client harassment and

boundary pushing, including outside of bookings. In addition to receiving more respect, she felt that this also showed clientele that she was a complex, multidimensional person; that she had a life outside of her sex work and was a 'real' person, therefore not available at all hours.

Theresa: I had a couple of clients in Newcastle who were a bit clingy, and I just dropped, you know I've got a husband right? And they were like, they looked at me like I shot their dog... They see me as multidimensional, and they just don't fuck with me between texts. There is no pestering because they know.

Several participants spoke about developing an intuition over time and using it as part of their day-to-day defensive strategising. For intuition to be reliable, it needs experience to draw upon and is better developed over time. Intuition is a non-conscious process where the facts that are readily available about a client or a situation are used and combined with previous experiences to assess a situation at hand (Juni, 2013). Participants demonstrated that intuition is a useful and informed tool that can keep sex workers safe, especially when in a criminalised setting.

Bianca, a dancer, succinctly discussed the relationship between intuition and boundaries, and that this was a skill she had learned over time and used in her everyday work.

Bianca: I think that's how I personally orient myself as a dancer and I'm very good at vetting people on the floor before I even get close to them in a lap dance. Which is just something I've developed over time and I'm very clear about my boundaries, especially with regulars and stuff like that.

Jaz also discussed following her 'gut feeling' and trusting it (Bryce et al., 2015) when she felt that a client might be an 'ugly mug'.

Jaz: I guess I, if someone comes across at all pushy or disrespectful in their messages or phone calls, I just won't see them, full stop. That's pretty much the number one. I follow my gut feeling.

This theme highlights how sex workers were forced to incorporate defensive work strategies within their everyday lives to protect themselves from both their clients and the police. The police were feared, and this created barriers to focusing on screening clients because sex workers had to also screen for police. As previously explored in this chapter, everyday clients were described as normal men; however, this view was articulated with the intention of curtailing stigma. Clients were found to perpetrate everyday forms of violence and harass sex workers, but this was also managed and contextualised, highlighting that participants routinely navigated a complex and conflicting reality despite criminalisation and stigma. Developing an intuitive practice was shown to be part of 'defensive work', where intuition was shown to be an important part of becoming an experienced sex worker and was necessary due to the lack of sex worker rights and workplace protections in place. Using intuition was still risky; however, it was not used alone and was combined with other safety strategies. Participants often screened heavily despite the barriers police created, connected to community (for protection and peer education) and worked in ways that felt safe to them.

Because sex work is criminalised and stigmatised, and sexual harassment and assault are not taken seriously by authorities, sex workers are forced to be self-reliant (Cossins, 2020). Additionally, 'rape culture' and the social, cultural and political processes that excuse violence against women also blame sex workers for violence committed against them (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). Structural violence, such as criminalisation, has been shown to increase violence against sex workers; therefore sex workers and sex worker organisations are left responsible for identifying and enacting harm-reduction

strategies. This is done in an often-volatile environment for sex workers that is perpetrated by the state itself.

Class and racism

Sex work operates under capitalism, and this was reflected in how participants spoke about their relationship to work and money. While there were tensions around privilege, class, racism and poverty, they still chose sex work (Raguparan, 2018). The participants worked to attain an improved quality of life; however, to increase their earning ability a juxtaposition around identity and other enabling or constraining factors were present that were unique to race, gender and class (Raguparan, 2018). For example, sex workers of colour spoke about fetishisation and how racism in the sex industry meant they had to advertise in particular ways that often did not align with their politics. Relationships with money varied and defined some of the daily struggles for participants (Simpson & Smith, 2018), whereas for others sex work was clearly a business, and financial success was a major aim. The amount of time and effort that goes into sex work advertising on a daily basis, in addition to doing the actual work itself, is little known or understood (at least from an outsider perspective) (Simpson & Smith, 2018) and often performed on top of the paid service. Some participants accounted for this labour and added it to the cost of their service. For example, Nina spoke about how often the work that happens between bookings is often unnoticed.

Nina: I might charge \$650 an hour, but I take an hour to get ready before every booking, I make sure everything's spotless, I clean sheets, towels, everything like that between every booking. I'm spending the time messaging clients, I'm spending the time updating my website, and photo shoots, and um, running myself, like doing my taxes, and things like that. So, it's

quite a bit of admin. When I'm on tour I have to book my flights, accommodation. I do all this by myself. Like I said even my taxes I do by myself.

It was evident there was a group of participants, often more privileged private workers, who spent much of their time thinking about their work through a business model lens and saw their work as a product, whereas for others work was more casual and operated more informally.

When discussing their businesses, participants spoke about the amount they charged and how this also correlated with the 'quality' of clientele they attracted and therefore the amount of respect they received (Vaughn, 2019). Regardless of what sex workers charged, participants often felt that clients always expected more from their service. When participants charged comparatively less for their service it highlighted how class, racism, ageism and fatphobia stratify the sex industry, privileging predominantly Caucasian, young and traditionally attractive cisgender women. These findings are consistent with those of other researchers such as Kempadoo & Doezema (1998) and Vaughn (2019).

Both Jaz and Nina described how the amount a sex worker charges correlates with the amount of respect they receive from clientele. This highlights how whorephobia intersects with perceived class and privilege, where clients place a higher value on sex workers who charge more. Jaz came from a massage parlour background and found that her boundaries were constantly being crossed, but when she went full service and charged more, she felt that she was afforded more respect.

Jaz: I find that full service, probably one of the reasons why I charge slightly above average rates, is I'm trying to attract respectful guys and I find that doing that, like keeping your rates higher, generally does attract more respectful guys. I don't know why that is. It just seems to be my experience with it.

Nina talked about pricing and respect in similar terms.

Nina: Also, I find the different price ranges have got different types of clientele. When I was a little bit cheaper, I had a lot more guys try to barter me, try to push my boundaries, they didn't respect me. Not saying that, girls that charge a lower rate do get disrespected all the time. The clientele that are willing, willing to pay that amount, or they might have the mentality that we don't deserve the higher rate. So, they might look at escorts that charge a lower rate in more of a disrespectful way.

Tami explicitly pointed out that relative privilege correlates with how much a sex worker charges and additionally said that she felt that she could not address classism, racism, fatphobia and ageism with privileged workers or clientele because her experience was not valued. This also highlights how the hierarchy in the sex industry marginalise sex workers of colour and working-class sex workers and prevent them from fully participating in the industry (Raguparan, 2018).

Tami: Privilege does have an impact of your experience of the industry and what you can charge. And as an Asian worker, as an older worker, as a bigger worker, you sometimes can't say something, especially to like someone who's like you know, white, thin, conventionally hot or whatever. Because if you do then you'll just get accused of being jealous.

Tami was critical of Caucasian, western beauty standards and was able to challenge these; however, when clients made classist and racist comments relating to the amount a sex worker charged, this impacted her self-esteem.

Tami: I know that my look is not my worth and the only times I get low self-esteem about being a worker who charges less than other peers do is when you do sometimes see snobbery amongst clients and workers. On Twitter recently, a client was talking about, 'you pay peanuts you get monkeys'. Then said 'I've never seen someone who charged below this' or 'if a worker's not charging this much then there must be something wrong with her'.

Jaz felt that if she were to lose 20 kilograms her business would pick up and she would be able to earn a higher wage. Participants also expressed their belief there was a definitive link between body size and workplace discrimination, consistent with findings by other researchers such as Stryker (2015) and Tovar (2018). For example, sex industry businesses often decline to hire or roster sex workers on who do not fit in with western beauty standards (Sullivan, 2010). The sex industry, whilst catering to all sexual needs and desires; nonetheless, still reflects normative society and sex workers who sit outside of this are disadvantaged.

Jaz: If I want my business to pick up, I need to lose 20 kilos or something, and maybe I'm just imagining things, maybe it wouldn't make any difference, but I think if I was smaller than my business would pick up.

Robyn and Drew both worked in a brothel; however, they spoke about sex work differently, and this was based on their earning ability. Robyn was frustrated that she was unable to earn a basic living wage from sex work and felt shame regarding this, whereas Drew felt empowered and was able to live off her sex work comfortably and travel overseas yearly.

Robyn: Making no money for like the last six months and I'm not here to get 500 bucks a week, that's Centrelink pretty much. I had a lot of money saved last year but I had to go through it because I was making next to no money. I might work a few shifts a week at the broth and make no money, and then one shift I might make 200 bucks. It's so up and down lately.

Drew: I've been in the industry for quite some time, and I still feel so young. It's just continued to be a good fit for me. Continued to make me happy. Continued to be really financially empowering to me.

These participants highlight how capitalism interacts and intersects with sex work and that the amount a sex worker charges correlates with relative privilege and fitting in with western notions of beauty. Clientele value certain attributes that are often based on western standards of beauty. This means that sex workers with relative privilege can feel 'more respected', and especially when they charge more; however, this underscores how privilege and class benefits or disadvantage sex workers. Stratification and racism are evident, where Caucasian beauty standards such as thin privilege dictate 'quality'. Sex work was shown to be competitive, where marginalised sex workers—especially sex workers of colour and working-class sex workers—felt disempowered within their everyday work lives.

Performing sex work

An 'authentic' approach to sex work has been shown to help secure a regular clientele base (Carbonero & Garrido, 2017; Sanders, 2008). Intimacy and connection are a normal part of everyday life (Resnick, 2019), and providing a 'girlfriend experience' was seen to foster an 'authentic' experience for their clientele. Some participants positioned the girlfriend experience as an honourable and skilled service and in doing so, 'othered' workers—especially migrant and brothel workers—who were seen

to provide a 'different kind of service'. However, in addition to 'casual racism' and classism, and performing respectability politics, these individuals were aiming to alleviate stigma and their own internalised shame around sex work. For some, providing a girlfriend experience was less onerous as it was easy to embody the 'perfect girlfriend'; however, for others it was more taxing and required more emotional work. The porn star experience, and bondage and discipline and dominance and submission (BDSM) (Carlström, 2019), were viewed as niche skills that required a specific kind of preparation, where sex workers inverted power dynamics. Two participants spoke about providing a 'kinky' girlfriend experience, and this reflects a cultural shift in sex where BDSM has become part of mainstream sex practices (Ling et al., 2022; Tomazos et al., 2017). BDSM services were also perceived as authentic and a way of providing intimacy by clientele, similar to the girlfriend experience.

Theresa showed how an everyday kind of authenticity at work meant working in a way that aligned with her personal preferences. Being a 'cheeky girl next door' meant that her work persona was more believable and organic because it was also enjoyable for her. Theresa felt that embodying this persona meant that she also attracted a regular and reliable clientele who would seek her out because they could comfortably fall into a fantasy that was believable.

Theresa: So, I've got a good reputation... I'm a very cheeky girl next door. Like I'm not a glamour. I'm not the prettiest, I'm not the youngest, but they have a lot of fun. I think also they like anything that is real, someone they can go home with. One client said to me, coz he's in his 50's, one of my favourites, he said, 'I go, and I see these glamorous girls in Sydney'... He said, 'they are beautiful, and you can't fault them, they're flawless. But I'm on top of them with my hairy gut and I'm thinking they aren't going to be here' (in their minds). He said 'at least with you, either you're a good actress or I can suspend the disbelief and go, she's a bit sweet and cute looking'.

Hannah provided a girlfriend experience and demonstrated a high level of trust between her and her regular clientele. Despite previously experiencing non-payment, she felt that due to this high level of trust, that her regular clientele would not take advantage of her. Sex workers and their clients develop 'real relationships' that are based on mutual confidence, where some participants shared their real names with clientele or worked from their own premises.

Hannah: I have two regulars in Adelaide and I was like, can you transfer, one was \$500, and one was \$900 into my account for my bookings and I'll see you next week? Anyway, they were like, sent, sent. I didn't check because they were regulars. Anyway, I did my bookings, went to Bali and my accommodation was declined... I'd given them the wrong BSB, so luckily, I could text them and be like, hey babe, can you transfer the money? And they were like sure, no worries. Whereas there are men out there that would be like, ha, ha, ha, got laid for free, bye. And that's also happened to me as well.

Ruby felt that providing a girlfriend experience was easier for her because it felt more 'natural' and she did not provide any BDSM or porn star services. This helped conserve her energy at work and meant she was able to provide services in which she felt confident.

Ruby: I'm probably predominantly a girlfriend experience sort of stuff. Like lots of intimate stuff. I guess I'm a lot less, like I don't do porn star experiences because I don't feel like it's my, I can't get into it. And it's not something I feel like, it feels really fake to me. Like I can't get into that space, and I feel silly. It makes it harder, it's not part of my nature.

Coming across as authentic is part of everyday sex work; however, it can be complicated. Bianca went into detail describing the complexity of maintaining professionalism whilst also appearing genuine.

Bianca: It's more about that personable connection... You've gotta be very down to earth but it's almost still superficial. Because you can't say what you would say, you've still gotta have that working brain. You've still gotta be professional but you've still gotta come across authentic so I think that in itself is very taxing at times.

Enid found that providing a porn star experience was easier because the girlfriend experience meant that she had to be intimate in ways that made her feel uncomfortable. She did not enjoy sex and outside of work did not have sex, and this meant that she chose to work in ways that had the least impact on her emotionally.

Enid: I do offer a girlfriend experience, and a kinky girlfriend experience now, it's kind of, obviously it's girlfriend experience, just a few extras, like they might want come on body, or you know titty fucking or something like that. I kind of have the porn star for the guys that want full-on rough face fucking and all that, coz I fucking hate that, and if I do that I wanna be paid more. So, I find my girlfriend experience my only issue is I'm probably not sweet enough. Like, I've got girlfriends that do proper girlfriend experience and they're into the cuddling, and kissing... I, when I'm in a booking, if that's what they want, I do have to concentrate, and focus really hard to do that. Um, because it's not me, I'm just so, I find that extremely difficult. I can fake passion really well, but passion like in sex, the whole caressing and cuddling, kissing is just so not me. I really struggle with it, really struggle with it. Um, realistically, I'm definitely a porn star provider.

Nina spoke at great length about the business aspects of her everyday work and preparing for bookings. She specialised in providing BDSM, porn star and kinky girlfriend experiences, and these required a 'particular head space' and expertise. She provided these services because she practised

BDSM in her personal life. Providing BDSM services meant that she had to create boundaries with clients to ensure she was safe at work.

Nina: So, then I created a middle ground, which is my kinky girlfriend experience. So, it's a mix between the porn star and the girlfriend. Then you have the extras. And then I was including my BDSM in my porn star. Then I realised something—that what I was doing was, it really pushed my boundaries and I had to limit my bookings. I needed recovery time. I needed to sit down and discuss with clients about boundaries beforehand to make sure I'm safe being a sub.

Some private workers positioned private work and the girlfriend experience as more virtuous due to its 'authenticity'. However, brothel, parlour workers and dancers in this study showed that they too provided a girlfriend experience, had regular clientele and provided 'authentic' services. Furthermore, BDSM workers also provided authentic services, based on vulnerability and connection. Some participants believed that when sex workers charged or earned more the quality of their service was better; however, other factors contributed to this, such as class, migration status and racism.

Dolly: Like I don't think I could do typical brothel work. I've not done it, but I don't think there's a purpose for me. Not much talking, no kissing, not really a lot of touching, not really a lot of connection. It's here you go, this is it, good, thanks, cool, bye. Not saying that it's bad, it's just that's not what I'm about. You know, there's nothing wrong about it.

Authenticity was connected to providing a 'quality' service regardless of how and where the participant worked. Deciding how to work and what services to offer was often an organic process defined over time and one that also usually reflected their personal taste or levels of comfort. When participants were comfortable with what they provided, they were better able to facilitate a more

authentic experience for their clientele, and this meant attracting more regular clientele. Some participants who provided a girlfriend experience spoke with moral undertones, positioning their work as more honourable and caring. However, other providers, such as BDSM or porn star providers, also had to mentally prepare for work and exerted much emotional energy and care in their performances. Participants that 'othered' other sex workers often did so to manage their own internalised whorephobia (Dewey & Zheng, 2013a). For example, 'many strippers consider themselves superior to escorts, but some escorts (and many—if not most—escorts who command multi-hour, high-cost appointments) believe the reverse' (Dewey & Zheng, 2013a, p. 61). These constructions or performances showed how sex workers in their everyday work contexts ensured that time was made within their schedules to prepare for work and decisions about work were made based on 'good business', safety and their own emotional safety.

Sexpertise

Sex workers are believed to 'segment' their worlds to protect themselves and those around them from stigma (Abel, 2011; Smith, 2016). However, several participants shared that understandings of sex and sexuality at work informed and enhanced their own sexual relationships. These understandings helped them break down heteronormative scripts, and several participants demonstrated an elevated understanding around sexuality, boundaries and relationship management. Additionally, participants spoke about helping guide clients to find their own sexual voice and expression, which was connected to compassion and understanding.

The idea of sex workers as 'sexperts' has existed for millennia (Avenatti & Jones, 2015). Clients often visit sex workers in preference to psychologists due to a greater sense of safety and vulnerability and have found that they are better able to explore their own struggles with sexuality, internalised shame,

trauma, anxiety, 'coming out', self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, aging and even death (Avenatti & Jones, 2015). Christian values that are culturally embedded have influenced how the everyday person navigates their own sexuality and romantic relationships. People often draw on heteronormative representations of both, and relationships are assumed to be heterosexual, monogamous, enduring and reproductive (Van Acker, 2017). People struggle to divide sex and love; however, the participants reported navigating this as part of their everyday work lives and managing this tension despite societal stigma around sex work, sex and romantic relationships. For example, Julia spoke about how differently she conceptualised sex after working as a sex worker and once understood sex through a heteronormative and reproductive lens. However, after working in both massage and full-service sex work she better understood how broad and varied sex was. For Julia, sex work taught her that sex did not have to be viewed through a reproductive lens.

Julia: If you haven't done sex work it's hard to understand but once you've done it, you realise the kind of concept of what sex is, and to me it's so different now. Because I actually think, you know, before I really thought in like a heteronormative way about sex, that sex is penis-in-vagina, or like, it's penetrative, whereas now I don't. So, to me it's all the same, like what's the difference between doing a massage where it ended up in 69, that was like, really intimate experience or having a full-service booking where I didn't kiss at all? It's all the same.

Similar to the findings of Avenatti & Jones (2015), Gabriel spoke about sex work expertise, how sex workers helped facilitate sexual exploration and were successful at this due to being understanding, non-judgmental and able to create safe spaces for their clientele.

Gabriel: We don't judge, we make no comment. Certainly, most of the time it's just a facilitation of pleasure and expressing this stuff... That in its own way is kind of basic but it's

kind of like, you know the shit we see, the repressed things that we see and it's like, wow, like we're kind of, we're ahead of everyone else with this stuff.

Like Gabriel, Toni spoke about experienced sex workers understanding that sex work is not just penetrative sex. She felt that compassion was the cornerstone of sex work because it was more than just sex and relating to clients in other ways throughout a booking was important.

Toni: I'm a good sex worker, because there is that compassion there. This is only my personal opinion, that the best sex workers do have a high level of compassion, because what we do is not always just penis-in-vagina. There's so much else involved, isn't there? There's your counselling, there's your companionship, there's your de-escalating of situations, there's so much else that goes on.

Participants also spoke about how clients often struggled to communicate their sexual desires and that over time, sex workers develop the skills required to help facilitate clients on their journey through sexual exploration and self-discovery. Ani felt that sex work taught her how to tune in to both her own and her clients' sexual wants through body language. She spoke about navigating their pleasure and her safety as connected.

Ani: and being able to get those really nuanced... like there's a flicker of eyes, or someone's body language, just like goes back a little bit and I can read that so much better now. I think that has to do with being in the brothel and you have to do that because you know, coz you're in a sexual capacity so all that stuff is intensified. You need to be able to know what someone wants and sometimes they can't tell you verbally, you just have to be able to read is this good for them? Or it is not good for them? And sometimes it's just a slight movement that they make, and you know you've got the spot, so you need to keep doing that you know....? And

you're kind of more in tune with like, your safety as well as for their pleasure. You have to be in tune with what someone else is feeling or thinking.

When participants spoke about sex, they often positioned themselves as both sexperts and relationship experts. Sex was part of their everyday work and it required skill and understanding to perform sex work. Participants valued that they created an environment for clients that facilitated a deeper kind of sexual encounter and hence demonstrated sex work expertise, professionalism and care.

Conclusion

Client relationships exposed the cultural and structural power dynamics that create violence, stigma, inequality and discrimination in everyday life for sex workers. Issues with harassment in the workplace were shown to be connected to constructions of masculinity and were reinforced more broadly in society. The findings also show how sex workers speak about violence differently from how the literature often portrays violence within their lives and contrast with abolitionist arguments. The participants in this study spoke about violence in non-emotive ways and provided everyday examples of violence. This shows that sex workers navigate violence in their everyday lives but not the kinds of violence that the research often focuses on, for example, rape.

Participants often tried to counteract stigma associated with violence. They did not label their experiences as violent; rather, they mitigated, anticipated and countered this through strategy and experience. They managed violence through creating boundaries and working defensively and also used their intuition to avoid dangerous clientele and police detection. Sex workers spoke about their everyday work lives being underscored by capitalism, class and racism; which created a highly

competitive and stratified industry with Caucasian and privileged sex workers at the top. Despite criminalisation, heavy policing and uncertainty due to FOSTA-SESTA, South Australian sex workers demonstrated autonomy and navigated a complex and often-contradictory everyday life.

Chapter Six: Sex Workers and Romantic Relationships

Introduction

In Chapter Five I discussed my findings on sex workers' relationships with clients. When sex workers speak about the sex worker-client relationship their everyday experiences expose both cultural and structural power dynamics that create and reinforce violence, stigma, inequality and discrimination in everyday life. Criminalisation, policing practices, racism, classism, as well as gendered and normative constructs all play a key role in dictating how power is distributed between sex workers and their clients. The narratives of violence and harassment, whilst present within the interviews, do not however reflect the dominant literature exploring violence in sex work. Instead, they highlight broader societal issues of everyday inequality that many marginalised groups face.

In this chapter I explore and discuss findings with respect to the views of participants on romantic relationships. Key themes identified by participants were 'coming out', managing stigma and resistance. Within the broader theme of 'coming out' the key issues identified were 'secret keeping' and managing romantic relationships. The broad theme of managing stigma was broken down into a number of identified issues: stigma and microaggression, jealousy and insecurity, as well as compromise and relationship avoidance. Resistance was broken down into a further two themes identified by participants: boundary creation and resistance to heteronormativity.

Research has rarely explored sex workers and their romantic relationships from an everyday perspective (Matos & Haze, 2019; Murphy et al., 2015). This research did not set out to focus on sex workers and their romantic lives; however, when participants spoke about their daily activities issues around romance and dating arose. While romance, love and dating are features of everyday life, the

interview data show that stigma complicates the romantic relationships of sex workers. This complication means that 'work' is always required to manage stigma within sex workers' everyday lives, especially within their romantic relationships (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013; Weitzer, 2010b).

Sex work stigma and criminalisation create an unsafe environment that makes it difficult for sex workers to not only navigate and come to terms with their identities as sex workers (Link & Phelan, 2001) but also creates additional difficulty around disclosing their sex worker status to partners, family and friends (Grittner & Walsh, 2020; McCausland et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2015; Sanders, 2004; Warr & Pyett, 2001). Participants spoke at length about 'coming out' and most were open with their partners or lovers about sex work, albeit to varying degrees. For example, some participants were guarded around their sex work and selective about what they did and did not share with their partners. This was done to safeguard their partners from discomfort but, consistent with the findings of Murphy et al. (2015), was often detrimental to the participants. This highlighted the level of emotion work required on behalf of sex workers to maintain harmony within their romantic relationships due to sex work stigma.

The romantic experiences of the participants were not uniform, and how sex workers structured their relationships influenced how they experienced them. The different relationship styles could be broadly divided into those who were partnered, single, dating, monogamous, polyamorous, in open relationships and those who prioritised their work over dating. There was one participant who was in a long-term, committed platonic relationship.

Love and sexuality are socially constructed through the institutionalisation of heterosexuality and bolstered by law, the state and social conventions (Jackson, 2012). Participants described how sex work exists as a marginalised, discredited identity. Because sex work is situated outside of normative constructs, their romantic lives inevitably became a site of anxiety, especially for those who subscribed

to heteronormative ideals (Rich, 1980). Sex work can disrupt the institution of heterosexuality; but heteronormativity creates tension, justifies criminalisation and creates additional stigma for sex workers. Additionally, social scripts are often readily accepted due to socialisation, and these set out the boundaries and roles that dictate relationships and determine control, power, initiation, pleasure and courtship (Sanders, 2008). However, because social constructs problematise sex work and position it as a threat to society and social order, sex workers often face obstacles regarding their partners' understanding of their work.

All participants represented and reflected different values and ethics around romantic relationships; however, all were still subject to stigma within their personal everyday lives, albeit in different ways. Monogamous relationship structures by their very nature reject sex taking place outside of the couple. Jealousy and trust often proved to be a major issue for participants and their partners in monogamous relationships. According to Rissel et al. (2003, p. 118) 'the sexual attitudes of Australians largely support a heterosexual paradigm with no sex outside the relationship' as acceptable. This was evident when participants reported that they stopped sex work due to a partner's discomfort. However, many participants were defiant and stated they would never quit sex work for a partner as a matter of principle. Four participants did not date and prioritised sex work over romance to avoid the complications that those romantic relationships invited. Nine of the participants were in non-monogamous relationships, which was a significant portion of the sample (almost a third). The non-monogamous sex workers tended to speak less about sex work impacting their relationships, and this could be because through non-monogamy they had already started challenging normative ideas of sex and fidelity. Social scripts are useful for understanding sex workers and their romantic relationships because they highlight why some participants either 'accept' stigma and relationship norms or reject and resist stigma within their everyday romantic lives. Furthermore, to breakdown stigma, the partners of sex workers had to be willing to deconstruct it. Much can be gained from understanding how sex workers, especially polyamorous and queer sex workers, navigate stigma

within their personal romantic relationships. These findings have implications for non-sex workers because these insights may help highlight how marginalised communities resist and overcome heteronormativity and its constraints on everyday life.

As this research shows, sex work attracts a queer demographic where sex workers are not only marginalised as sex workers but also due to their queerness (Cole et al., 2015; Laing et al., 2015; Toone, 2018). Seventeen participants (over half) identified as being part of the LGBTIQ+ community. Sex work *is* queer work (Stardust, 2015), and much can be learned from how queer sex workers and non-monogamous sex workers experience, navigate and resist sex work stigma and marginalisation. When sex workers as a group are positioned as solely heterosexual, gaining accessibility to queer spaces becomes more challenging for LGBTIQ+ sex workers and isolates them from accessing solidarity and support. Stigma and stereotyping create a rigid archetype of who sex workers are, marginalise queer sex workers further and mean that their romantic experiences are erased. This chapter presents the everyday experiences of participants' romantic relationships across a diverse range of sexualities. Through exploring the everyday experiences of participants, this chapter explores 'coming out' and 'secret keeping', as well as managing stigma and resistance to show the varied intimate ways sex workers experience romance, dating and love within their everyday lives.

'Coming out': Navigating disclosure

Sex workers are forced to navigate romantic relationships differently from non-sex workers, largely because of stigma. However, sex work challenges taken-for-granted understandings about sex and love, namely fidelity, where over time sex workers develop an expert understanding of sex and relationships and how social conventions dictate romantic life. But being 'out' or 'honest' about sex work in romantic relationships was not straightforward or simple for participants. Traditional ideals

associated with romance and monogamy created tension for them due to the 'sex' aspects of the work. 'Coming out' was always seriously considered because romantic relationships are defined by mutual trust and honesty, meaning that staying closeted felt dishonest. These findings are consistent with other literature, such as that by Bowlby (1973) and Uysal et al. (2012). Overall, 'coming out' as a sex worker to a partner was seen as important, but developing trust with their partner was difficult. When participants stayed closeted, their everyday lives became more stressful due to 'secret keeping'. However, 'secret keeping' can be reframed as a resistance strategy, and strategic disclosure was used to maintain privacy around work and create boundaries for some participants. This protected individuals from their partners, and their partners from stigma. Despite fears associated with 'coming out', many of the participants in this study were out to their partners or lovers; however, to varying degrees.

Overall, participants demonstrated anxiety when discussing 'coming out' and disclosure because outsiders to sex work often stigmatise participants, even if they do not intend to do so. Furthermore, predicting how a partner would react to their work was difficult to ascertain and sex workers wanted to maintain control of their stigmatised identity. The fear of being outed without their consent was a prevalent fear, and 'coming out' in general was associated with fear, insecurity, danger and ostracism. For example, Tina spoke about how fear created a barrier in her daily life and that it prevented her from 'coming out' to those closest to her. She also felt that outsiders to sex work would struggle more with her work than those who had been in the industry, thus also showing how sex work can be socially isolating.

Tina: I think it's just a fear. Which would make me more comfortable if I can be open with people about this stuff but you know, you can't really. I mean I would like to tell people about it but it's hard for people who haven't actually been in the industry.

Drew emphasised how normative communities are often fearful of the 'other', and due to sex work stigma she felt isolated from her non-sex work community. Drew struggled to trust her partners because whorephobia meant she might face danger and risk losing her relationships. On the one hand she felt a sense of security and safety through being closeted, but on the other it caused additional complications for her, such as anxiety and guilt due to keeping her work identity hidden from her partner, as this also closely correlated with her own identity.

Drew: I didn't feel like I had someone I could tell. No one. I didn't have the people in my life who I thought could understand or be open minded or supportive about it or would get it. My social circles were so different... That always felt isolating. I felt different and I felt wrong... So I would date boys and I wouldn't tell them coz I didn't trust them, do you know what I mean? Like, I don't know their feelings on it... And how much I thought that would damage my life and you don't know what happens when you break up.

Several participants questioned whether it was ethical to stay closeted within a romantic relationship, but 'coming out' was also seen to be dangerous. This was complicated by 'romantic' social scripts because they are incongruent with sex work. For example, honesty regarding sex work can risk individual safety. Jaz felt that she owed partners honesty and transparency around sex work despite it risking her everyday safety and security, but to avoid 'coming out' she chose to date clients.

Jaz: I find it easier to meet a guy like this because they straight away, he knows what you do. There's none of that like, when do I tell you? How is he going to react? If I tell him too soon is he just gonna call me a slut and run off? Or will he just use me for a one-night stand and run off? Or if I let it develop into too much than he's gonna be upset and I'm going to be a liar that didn't tell him earlier on. It's like you don't know when the hell to bring it up and to tell them, and I'm not the kind of person that could be doing sex work and keeping it from a partner.

'Coming out' was complicated for sex workers due to fear, but many took the risk and often did disclose their sex work to their partners. Participants had to weigh up their own safety with traditional ideals regarding romance that encouraged transparency and honesty. This made 'coming out' more difficult as sex workers wanted to be 'good partners', but sex work stigma meant that trusting their partners was challenging. Furthermore, predicting how their partners would react to the disclosure was difficult. Deciding to disclose was often weighed up against their own values. The everyday lives of sex workers meant constant negotiation around if, when and how they would 'come out' to their partners.

'Secret keeping'

To navigate stigma and 'secret keeping', selective disclosure was utilised and formed a significant part of participants' safety strategies. They told stories of managing their partners' feelings about sex work in addition to their own emotional wellbeing, and hence 'secret keeping' helped mitigate conflict within their relationships and helped them resist stigma (Davis et al., 2020). Research has shown that concealing information from loved ones can negatively impact one's own mental health and can be detrimental to relationships (Davis et al., 2020); however, for sex workers it also helped mitigate harm and was adopted by a number of them as a strategy combining agency and resistance.

Toni refrained from discussing sex work with her long-term partner because she did not want to put him through any 'emotional turmoil'. However, by prioritising her partner she put her own needs aside.

Toni: I don't necessarily want to put him through that emotional turmoil, where he starts questioning why I would do that, or, whether I'm getting something from a client that I'm not getting from him or whatever crap goes through men's heads.

Drew was in a relationship for seven years and internalised whorephobia prevented her from disclosing her sex work to her partner. She felt that she could not trust him and struggled to predict how he would react. Over time she felt it was too late to disclose and anticipated that he would lose trust in her, creating an impasse. This highlights how traditional moral values, such as honesty, cannot always neatly apply to sex workers because stigma risks a sex worker's personal safety (Bellhouse et al., 2015). Drew's everyday life was fuelled by an undercurrent of stress and guilt, even after breaking up with her partner.

Drew: And like I started dating a boy who I really loved a lot and I didn't tell him for this reason. Like it was such a big secret I never told anyone you know. I didn't know if I could trust him. It would be so huge for me to tell anyone ever, so I didn't tell him. When you start dating someone, you don't know if you can trust them and tell them. Like the way I saw it, it was such a big, deep, dark secret really, and then so by the time I'd been dating him long enough that I wanted to tell him and I thought he would be cool about it, and I trusted him, I'd been lying to him for so long. Then I felt like I couldn't and then I had times I thought oh I could bring up, oh I guess that I want to start doing it or whatever, you know. And I thought of doing that, but I think I'd just fallen into this pattern of hiding it. And before I knew it, we were dated for seven years, and I never told him, and it's like so fucked it. It's like the worst thing I've ever done to anyone.

For Gabriel, staying closeted was not about 'secret keeping' but purposefully creating strict boundaries around his sex work in order to keep himself safe. He seldom risked 'coming out' to partners or lovers

unless they could prove themselves to be trustworthy. Several participants felt that their partners or lovers did not automatically deserve to know about their sex work because they felt they were often incapable of appropriately dealing with it and anticipated conflict, emotion work and pressure to quit. Gabriel felt entitled to a 'nice time' free from whorephobia and was tired of navigating other people's discomfort around his work.

Gabriel: I've fucking experienced it and I know that some people will flip out. I don't know, maybe that's a fucked relationship politics or something but I'm just like, I don't need to tell you. Or you need to prove yourself significantly to me and show me that this is going to be worth 'coming out' to you. I'll save myself a whole lot of heartache, you know. And maybe that's shit on him and not giving him the benefit of the doubt but I don't feel like I owe that to anyone. Like I've been through this enough times to know. Or fuck, I mean does that already tell me that it's not the right person because I'm having doubts about whether they're whorephobic or not? But also I feel like I'm just entitled to have a nice time and worry about that later.

Additionally for Gabriel, keeping sex work hidden meant creating a framework to avoid disclosing sex work and this prevented him from connecting with people romantically within his everyday life.

Gabriel: I just do not tell people, you know. What I'm doing means that I tell a bunch of lies and it really creates a barrier for me to become close with people you know. I have a friend, inverted commas, who literally has been trying to get to know me over the past few months but this week has kind of come to a point where you know, because I can't share that stuff with them, they have backed off.

Jill's partner did not know that she had started sex working from their home. She made sure that she did not leave out anything suspicious but did not like working behind his back.

Jill: He had a 9-5 job and I knew that I had Monday and Tuesdays available. I was very strict with my time frame, which made it really difficult because I had to set up, put the condoms and lube and the other stuff out quickly and then put everything back again. Make sure all the towels were washed and so forth and so on and on the line. And find an excuse why we've used so many towels. And it took a lot of courage from me coz I really didn't like going behind his back either, but I needed the money, but I wasn't too sure how he'd feel.

Julia was open with her partner about her sex work but only to an extent, as he knew she did erotic massage but not that she had started doing full-service sex work. She described an incident where at work she was manipulated into doing a booking she felt uncomfortable with and how keeping her work hidden meant that she could not receive support from her partner.

Julia: And this client like really wanted to be my first full-service client and he was like quite manipulative, mentally manipulative about it. I did it. So, I felt weird about it and also I never told my boyfriend at the time. My partner at the time knew I was doing massage but didn't know that I was doing full service. I mean there was a lot of things about it that were really hard to navigate as well like, you know, managing your stories that you tell people.

Emotion work, 'secret keeping' and selective disclosure helped maintain boundaries and kept participants safe from stigma and whorephobia within their everyday romantic relationships (Hochschild, 2012). But it also meant that participants carried guilt, created barriers that prevented them from connecting with people romantically and were not able to receive support from their

partners when they needed it most. This highlights how isolating sex work can be, and how important it is for sex workers to develop trusting relationships in order to be able to 'out' themselves to people in their lives although this was not easy due to stigma.

Managing romantic relationships

Many participants demonstrated that whilst 'coming out' was risky, it was nonetheless worthwhile because when they invited their partners in on discussions around sex work, their relationships benefited because trust and closeness grew. However, this did not mean that the partners of sex workers always understood sex work, and communication about work was shown to be challenging and often difficult. To manage discussions around sex work participants had to support their partners through emotion work. According to Hochschild (2012) emotion work takes a toll on one's mental health and wellbeing because in order to maintain it one must silence one's own feelings, and this was the case when participants prioritised their partners. Sex work as a topic of discussion was already uncomfortable within their daily lives, but especially within the context of their romantic relationships, therefore sex work was rarely discussed at home. And if it was, it was often stilted and difficult to navigate.

Evita worked privately from home, where she also lived with her partner. When a work request came through, her partner would leave so she could work. However, managing sex work from home whilst living with a partner raised some concerns for Evita, especially around communication. Evita worked sporadically and without a schedule, which meant she often worked at the last minute. She tried to talk to her partner about their arrangement; however, he was reluctant to discuss it in any depth. While this upset her, she understood that it was hard for him. Although, in understanding her partner's

discomfort she had to put aside her own needs around open, transparent communication. She was queer and felt that because he was a heterosexual, cisgender man he would never really understand sex work or her needs.

Evita: Like he's pretty good. Um, we haven't really spoken about sex work. Like I've tried to talk about it with him, but he's always been like, oh it's fine. Um, and he's been, he gets a bit weird when I'm like you have to go now. Coz I'm gunna work. And then I get really shitty but then I need to understand that it is a really hard thing, so then I'm like, let's talk about it. And he's like no I'm totally fine with it. It's like no, you're not. And it's okay that you're not because you're a straight dude who has no idea about like you know.... anything. But as far as like, like cismen go, he's pretty good.

Toni also described her partner's 'typically masculine behaviour' and how communication would often break down and result in stonewalling and silence (Gottman, 2014). Toni was unable to discuss her work life with her partner and found that it was easier to keep it hidden from him rather than approach the topic. This meant that Toni could not look to her partner for support around her work.

Toni: To be perfectly honest with you we haven't unpacked it at all. We just don't talk about it. Sometimes it's the elephant in the room. But we just don't talk about it and I don't know that we ever will. I'm not one hundred percent sure about how he would feel but I'm sure about how he would react. He would be calm and he would be diplomatic but he would probably close off and shut down. He's just that kind of man, you know? I don't have no feelings!

Drew's everyday work life shifted dramatically after a police raid. Because she felt too scared to work in Adelaide she decided to work interstate. However this put a strain on her relationship, and work

gradually impacted her home life as she was often away for weeks at a time. Whilst she was away she often felt a distance grow between her and her partner, which left her feeling unsupported.

Drew: So now I can't work here. I can't work in the city I live in and have like a nice integrated life and I can't have a safe space to work. So, I started to do work trips and work out of state in Victoria where it's legal. It's pretty disruptive to my life. Like there are things that I love about it, but it's also hard to like have to go for out of state and like be away from home... I worry about like, the impact it has on my relationship. Last time I came home early almost like out of guilt. My boyfriend was like, when are you coming home? You said you were going to be home. I felt like he was getting a bit down about it... I feel like we do drift, I feel like we do get distant. He's not great at texting and calling and stuff, and I get really needy when I'm away.

Participants often had to be understanding of their partners' feelings regarding sex work to avoid conflict, and due to this reported compromising on their own needs. Sex workers struggled to receive support from their partners because sex work was often an emotionally charged topic.

Often participants, despite stigma, chose to 'out' themselves within their romantic relationships because they wanted to be honest with their partners; showing how much they valued transparency. This took a lot of bravery. However, several participants also questioned how important honesty around sex work was when it was often detrimental to their romantic relationships and risky. Participants wanted to surround themselves with people who were supportive of sex work; however, they struggled to find partners who were not whorephobic. This meant that often sex workers were strategic around who they dated and selectively disclosed parts of their work to 'feel honest' but also

to maintain important boundaries. Drew described how compartmentalising her daily life to separate work and home created more stress because keeping sex work hidden from her partner weighed heavily on her conscience.

Drew: I can't believe I even lied to him for that long. It's hard for me to talk about this. I feel so bad and like don't think it's cool. But you just get in the habit of completely compartmentalising your life, and you get in the habit of lying I suppose. And then you know, I just decided I didn't want to do that anymore. So, after we broke up I was just ready for a change.

Drew discovered however that when she was transparent from the outset in a new relationship it benefited her relationship.

Drew: If people know from the beginning, it's just part of their impression of you, there is no bomb, no scandal. No, oh my God! So yeah. I live 'out' now more than ever.

Maisie felt it was her responsibility to tell her lovers she was a sex worker because she felt there was an STI risk. However, trust was nonetheless important and she disclosed when she felt it was safe enough to do so and that a relationship was getting serious. For her, disclosing her status was more about her own values regarding consent and safety rather than actual risk, and it demonstrates how seriously she navigated safe sex in her everyday life.

Maisie: I tend not to bring it up, unless it's sort of heading that way and I feel safe. So, I'm not just going to blast it out on Tinder you know, but I feel like it's my responsibility. Like if I'm

going to sleep with someone that they should know. This is slightly riskier than usual. I take all the precautions I can but um, you know, I just feel that it would be fair, and you know, sort of dangerous to have sex with someone without them knowing.

Nina spoke about her values and about being an open and honest person. She did not risk dating someone who was not comfortable with sex work; therefore, she was strategic with disclosure.

Nina: I'm a very open, upfront and honest person. That's why I tell them before we even set a date. Because I prefer to give them the choice to walk away if they can't handle my work. I'm so open about it because I've got a big following on social media and people know who I am and what I do. So being honest was a calculated risk. When I 'came out', I decided fuck it, I'm gunna go all out. So, when people ask me about it I'm open about it. It makes dating harder because I'm so out there. It's like he needs to have thick skin to be able to handle that.

Drew built up resilience and felt that being transparent and proud about her sex work became easier over time.

Drew: I have naturally moved away from people who have a problem with it. That's naturally happened to me as I got older. I feel good about my life with who knows and who doesn't know and not caring as much. The more people know, the less I care. But I'm more attracted to them too, boyfriends who are maybe a bit more alternative in their approach to life. I've been impressed that once I started telling people, how lovely everyone is about it. I haven't been met with a sense of shame and it's really cool. I don't know if it's changing society or the people I now surround myself with.

Participants reported that staying closeted inevitably meant that extra emotion work was required to manage their work and private lives. Traditional ideas of romance meant that honesty was highly valued, but participants also understood the dangers of 'coming out'. Staying closeted meant that they were not able to receive support from their partners, and this created extra stress within their daily lives. Additionally, keeping sex work hidden meant that relating to potential romantic partners was difficult because hiding work was challenging. 'Coming out' as a sex worker was still tough, and emotion work was required as partners often felt uncomfortable about sex work, but often worth the risk. 'Coming out' represented values like transparency and highlighted emotional resilience to stigma. Navigating sex work and disclosure within romantic relationships represented a challenge but one that ultimately resulted in relief.

Managing stigma

Stigma is ever present within the day-to-day lives of sex workers, and the partners of sex workers are not immune to this: they too experience 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman, 1986). However, they were found to also perpetrate stigma and grappled with complicated and uncomfortable feelings that arose due to their partners' sex work. These feelings often reflected jealousy and underlying fears, and they were entangled with compulsory gender norms, a struggle for power and heteronormative social conditioning. These kinds of tensions for the partners of participants were considered socially appropriate because sex work was associated with infidelity. To counter this, sex workers managed work and their partners by creating boundaries to maintain tranquillity and avoid conflict. However, this often also meant compromise. Several participants anticipated their partners' discomfort and communicated about work in ways that avoided conflict, for example through withholding upsetting information such as any detail about sex with clients. Rather, they spoke about disliking clientele. Communicating about sex work was challenging and was often shut down or met with unease.

Emotion work was frequent within participants' everyday lives, especially within their romantic relationships (Hochschild, 2012; Murphy et al., 2015; Theodosius, 2008). Some participants consciously chose not to take on this kind of emotional responsibility however, and felt it was their partner's task to manage their own feelings about sex work. Participants who maintained open and non-monogamous relationships felt that their sex work was better understood as work and was not confused with 'cheating'. Regardless, most participants spoke about difficulties relating to sex work within their everyday romantic lives.

Stigma and microaggressions

When discussing everyday experiences participants often referred to stigma and microaggressions; however, they did not always explicitly label them as such. Microaggressions are subtle forms of discrimination that are hostile or derogatory in nature and target marginalised social groups, such as people of colour, the LGBTIQ+ community and sex workers (Nadal et al., 2016; Sue, 2010). Often people who stigmatise and communicate microaggressions are unconscious of them and unaware that they have done so (Goffman, 1986; Sue, 2010). According to Sterzing et al. (2017), the power of microaggressions rests in their frequency and ambiguity, therefore they are also difficult to understand or address. Jessica spoke about how stigma prevails in sex work and is seldom challenged despite how damaging it is to the everyday lives of sex workers.

Jessica: I want there to be more understanding and destigmatising and normalisation of the fact that sex work is real work. We deserve to be recognised for the emotional labour that we do. Um, and how potentially damaging it is for our lives, for people to have those stereotypes that are perpetrated by the media, just continue on without being challenged.

Stigma and microaggressions were difficult to recognise, especially within romantic relationships and especially when partners were viewed through 'rose tinted glasses'. Gabriel was only able to identify and label the whorephobia he had experienced after a relationship ended. He also felt that for someone to work through whorephobia, they had to be willing and able to break down and understand stigma and normative social conventions.

Gabriel: I had a pretty sex worker-shamey boyfriend and even I didn't realise that until probably looking back on it. But you know, I 'came out' to him pretty quickly and um, he was seemingly fine with it, but I think it later became clear that he really wasn't. I think I came across a lot of sex worker-shamey people. You know, for someone to really get this stuff and be a great person about it they need to be an excellent human being you know? They really need to rail against all the bullshit that we get fed so um, and that requires great people.

Tina spoke about wanting to find acceptance around her sex work and struggled to find supportive partners. Without specifically naming stigma, it was clear how much it impacted her everyday life, even as a past sex worker.

Tina: I guess wanting to find a partner and finding someone who's willing to accept what I've done is hard. If someone's been comfortable doing it and happy with it then you know, you should accept it.

Nina felt that she attracted men who struggled with sex work; however, she understood that it had more to do with her and her self-esteem rather than the men she dated. She displayed internalised stigma and felt that dating was difficult.

Nina: I seem to attract the type of guys that will always struggle with my work. But that is more something to do with me, not something to do with the guys. So, I had this thing in my head that I thought no one's going to give me a chance. So, this guy I was dating, even though it was a bad relationship, I put up with it because I didn't think I could do any better. So, I just stuck it out and then when things ended it was really hard for me psychologically because then I had to wrap my head around the fact that I could probably be single until I am ready to retire from sex work.

Stigma dehumanises sex workers. It reinforces the idea that sex workers are inappropriate partners and only exist within the realm of sexual fantasy. Jessica highlighted this; however, she felt it was a flaw in her partner's thinking.

Jessica: I didn't tell my partner at the time, I told him I was a waitress even when I'd gone back to dancing and actually that went on for a very long time, until it kind of came out. He was getting excited by the idea of strippers coz he was getting older, and he had this sticker on his car that was like, I love strippers, because it was cool. But then he still didn't want me, his girlfriend, to be a stripper. And I was like hey, now there is some like serious issues in your brain if you can promote that you're into them, but that you don't want your partner to be one.

Participants struggled with stigma in most aspects of their everyday lives and within their romantic relationships. It was both subtle and overt. The partners of sex workers often reflected society's views of sex work and therefore struggled to understand and support their partners.

Jealousy and insecurity

Jealousy is an everyday phenomenon that occurs in all kinds of relationships, not only romantic ones. Jealousy and fear can arise when there is a lack or breakdown of trust and communication between people. Alternatively, it can occur when there is a real threat within a relationship (Fern, 2020). Jealousy can also be used to justify controlling behaviour and is not indicative of any wrongdoing (Fern, 2020). Furthermore, individual insecurity can fuel jealousy. For the participants, it was difficult to navigate a partner's feelings and support them around sex work because stigma rendered their work a threat, but individual partners also had to 'do the work' to manage their own feelings.

Jealousy and discomfort around sex work is an everyday issue for sex workers, and to prevent this participants developed strategies to manage stigma and the impact that this had on their partners. In addition to strategies such as keeping their sex work and their partners separate and only disclosing 'safe' work-related topics, many participants chose to share work stresses with trusted friends or sex work colleagues over their partners. To prevent jealousy, Cher purposefully did not share any explicit details about her work that might upset her partner.

Cher: Yeah I just don't share explicit details and am pretty well fine with that. You know, don't ask, don't tell. And he's fine with that and I'm fine with it. If I do need support, if I have a shitty client or a shitty week he's there. And he will listen when I really need to tell him about something. So, he really does try his best, he's very supportive.

Cher's partner was more accepting of her sex work when there was more 'separation' between work and home, for example, when Cher worked interstate. However, this 'compartmentalisation' did not work as well when Cher worked locally, and her partner's jealousy increased. This meant that when Cher worked locally she was unable to share details about her work with her partner.

Cher: For him, when I was working interstate more it was pretty easy for him because there was very much definite separation. No jealousy or anything like that. But he does struggle a little bit with jealousy sometimes when it just comes to working here. Knowing details and stuff like that.

Robyn's partner looked through her phone and saw a text message describing a 'hot' client. She felt that her boyfriend was insecure and that this was an issue for them within their relationship. However, she was dismissive and did not take on her partner's jealousy.

Robyn: He read through one of my text messages, me talking to my best friend, oh the hottest guy came in, so like, he knows it's not as sterile. I think he gets more jealous of the guys that I'm potentially attracted to and things like that. That's the only issue we really have. That's not my fault.

Hannah's partner struggled with depression and felt deeply insecure about her work. This led to Hannah quitting to support her partner and his needs, but in doing so she sacrificed her work and sexual needs. However, when his depression worsened and he stopped working altogether, she reasoned with him and suggested that if she went back to work their money struggles would lessen. She was unsuccessful in her appeal and became resentful as a result.

Hannah: And I just said to him, why do you wanna live like this? Why when we could literally have a very comfortable life, um, with me just doing what I do and just you know, you know, just turn your back. Like, just, it's literally just physical, there's no love involved. But I think to be honest, I think because he is having struggles in the (penis) department he feels very

insecure that I am very, very openly sexual. And I've had all those experiences and I've shagged about 1.5 million men and loved it. You know. I could see how that would make a man feel very insecure.

It is difficult to reason with jealousy, and whilst it could at times reflect real danger, for many of the participants jealousy from their partners instead reflected insecurity influenced by sex work stigma. The participants reported that the partners of sex workers must be able to understand their own whorephobia and better manage their feelings about sex work in order to better be able to support their sex working partners.

Compromise

Compromising sex work for a partner was common, as it was also a successful way to manage stigma and jealousy. In the extreme, compromise meant that sex workers stopped working altogether. This was often done to assist partners to feel more secure within the relationship; however, it also meant that sex workers put aside their own needs, especially financial independence. Several sex workers spoke about quitting for a partner and this was a narrative many participants anticipated and tried to avoid. Of those who quit sex work for a partner, all missed working and felt that in the future, if it were possible, they would start working again.

One participant felt angry and resentful that she quit sex work for her partner. Hannah stopped sex work when she got into a relationship; however, she quickly mourned the loss of freedom sex work offered. She described feeling resentful towards her husband and felt her life was much simpler when she was single because she did not have to navigate her partner's feelings. She frequently questioned

if it was worth stopping sex work for her partner and sought out therapy to work through her complicated feelings. Sex work put her relationship at risk; however, quitting also risked her relationship.

Hannah: So, relationships and sex work, that's a whole other kettle of fish (laughing). Like he gets really insecure and so I had to give it up and it was so sudden and so instant that I feel like its unfinished business for me. It was a liberating time of my life and I miss it (sex work). I literally wake up every day and I miss it. It's awesome when you've got no one to like, you know, like, have to kind of answer to. Or you know, consider, but yeah, when there's someone else involved, it's really tough. Like I could be that bad-ass bitch and be like, no fuck you, you don't tell me what to do, what I can and can't do. Um, I guess I'm just a lot more empathetic I guess, or respectful. Or is it worth it?

Ani quit sex work when she formed an intimate relationship. Ani's partner found her having sex with men 'challenging and upsetting' as they were in a same-sex relationship. Ani rationalised it as her partner's past traumas and that these contributed to her feeling triggered. She therefore chose to empathise and support her partner by quitting sex work.

Ani: I formed a new intimate relationship within that time, and um, my partner kind of, was on board, um, was on board with sex work as a concept, um, but um, struggled with like, her own trauma background and stuff and so the idea of me sleeping with men was challenging for her, and like upsetting. Triggering. So um, that was probably like the, the main reason that I stopped.

Andie quickly 'outed' themselves because they did not want to risk dating someone who felt uncomfortable about sex work. When dating got serious and discussions around monogamy arose, it

was identified that Andie's sex work would be an issue for their relationship moving forward. Their partner also felt uncomfortable lying to his family. Andie was disappointed and did not like being told what they could and could not do; however, quitting sex work showed their partner that they were committed to the relationship.

Andie: But after a few months when we were dating a bit more seriously it came up in conversation again. They're like strictly monogamous I guess and before we were kind of dating seriously it was okay because we weren't sure where things were going but after we had some discussions about what this relationship was and what we wanted it to be, then we identified that maybe it would be an issue if I were to continue to work. Which was a bit disappointing to me just because I'm not someone who kind of likes to be told what to do (laughs). And yeah it was something that I kind of fitted with. I think I had a choice and I could have just picked, whatever, I don't care about this relationship and, you know, I'll continue doing sex work. But for me in the end obviously it was that I cared more about the relationship than I did about sex work.

These sex workers demonstrated that the ultimate compromise for a partner was not always an easy decision. All felt a sense of loss after stopping work, mostly due to the loss of financial freedom and independence. Participants were often placed in a position where they had to show commitment to their relationship. Quitting sex work was ultimately the 'easiest' option over leaving the relationship or challenging their partner's discomfort. Regardless, once becoming a sex worker, and even after the participants left sex work, they still felt stigma within their everyday lives.

Relationship avoidance

Remaining single as a lifestyle choice is gaining popularity and is attributed to greater individualism and changing gender roles although satisfaction is dependent on whether being single is a choice or not (Abela et al., 2020). This trend was reflected in this study, but for sex workers remaining single was often attributed to relationship avoidance, mainly due to fears around being 'outed' and having to compromise their work. Several participants avoided dating altogether to protect themselves from pain, whilst others casually dated but avoided deeper connections and did not disclose their sex work. By not dating they were better able to manage their fears, work freely and focus on the business aspects of sex work rather than on managing a romantic relationship. However, this also demonstrates how stigma left sex workers with limited options when dating, and that they often felt 'forced' to prioritise their own security before romantic connections because they did not feel prospective partners would support them.

Tami discovered that her previous partner had disclosed to his mother that she was a sex worker. She felt betrayed and fearful because this posed a great risk to her safety, as she was not 'out' to her family and his mother worked with her mother. Due to this she decided to abstain from dating while working.

Tami: And I found out later after we broke up. I ran into his mum at a shopping centre, and she was really weird with me. And so, I left it for a day, but then I couldn't leave it, so I asked him have you told people? And he replied that as part of his recovery he had to be honest with people. So, he was honest with his family. I didn't realise until I did some research into the 12 Steps, and other people who have been through the process told me, that that's not what the honesty step's about and that you're only meant to be honest with people if it's not

gunna cause harm! So I realised from that that he must have told his mum. I was just very lucky that his mum obviously decided to keep that information to herself rather than tell my mum, because they work in the same department.

Because of this incident, from that point on Tami decided that she would remain single for the 'foreseeable future', and that if she ever did date again she would not put herself at risk and would refrain from disclosure. Sex workers struggled to trust their partners and also anticipated that when their relationships ended, confidentiality would cease.

Tami: And that also made me decide that, I'm single currently, and I see myself as being single for the foreseeable future. But if I do ever become involved, one, I'm never going to become involved with a client again, and yeah, I'm just not gunna do that, and if I do date again in the future I'm not going to tell people I'm a sex worker. I don't expect them to tell me everything about their sex lives in the past and I'm not gunna tell coz I just think that's, that's just too much bombshell and I'm not dating now because I don't have the time or the emotional energy.

Work was very important to Nina in her everyday life and she recognised that starting up a romantic relationship would take time and energy away from her work, in which she had heavily invested. She was better able to focus on work when she was not in a relationship and found that it was easier to maintain a healthy work and life balance when she was not in a relationship.

Nina: I don't need to be single but I choose to be single. Basically, I'm that focused on my work that whenever I start dating someone I start to focus on them. Away from work and I can keep balance depending on what's going on.

Several participants were adamant that sex workers did not owe their partners any disclosure. Margaret struggled with relationships, and despite efforts to compromise for a partner she felt that disclosure was not worth it.

Margaret: We don't owe them shit! I feel like I'm too busy to be dating now, like I can't prioritise dating. So I stated dating when I first started advertising for private and I said to the guy this is what I'm doing, obviously I wanted to make time for him, I liked him or whatever. He didn't work Thursdays and Sundays, so I was like I'm not gunna work Thursdays. And then we were seeing each other for not even a month and he's like, oh every time we have sex, is she genuinely into me? I hadn't really spoken about work with him, I told him what I did, and that was kind of it. And I said, oh you know, I got work tonight, and that was that. And then he was kind of like, yeah I don't know if you're being genuinely intimate with me. I'm like well, I'm here voluntarily, like, you're not paying me so clearly if I didn't wanna be here, I wouldn't be here. He kept, not thinking about me with other guys, but more thinking if I was genuine with him. And like, well, you're gunna have to get over it, or get out. He did try, I'll give him that.

For others, independence, particularly financial independence, influenced their decision to refrain from entering into an intimate relationship. Fin's primary focus in life was making money and securing her future, and only once it was secured would she consider dating again. She enjoyed having sex with multiple men and was satisfied with casual sex and sex at work. Therefore, a committed romantic relationship was not a priority for her.

Fin: I did entertain it for a little while coz some people wanted to like spend time with me, and I was like, oh okay, I'll entertain this, um, and I was like no, I do my work to have, you know, fun times with a huge amount of average guys (laughing). If I, in my private life, if I'm gunna

have a relationship, I, you know, it needs to complement all areas. And I've got this, you know, idea in my mind that um, you know, one day I'm just gonna have all this money there, and someone's gonna come into my life, and I'm gonna be like, cool, I can do life with you for a bit. Let's, let's, but I'm financially sound and I'm not reliant on you for anything but how you make my life better, rather than having someone there that I need to discuss things with.

Nina spoke about putting up with unhealthy relationships because she did not think she deserved any better. This showed how internalised stigma impacted her everyday life and impeded her access to respectful relationships (Goffman, 1986).

Nina: I started dating someone just after and for me just new to sex work, it was really hard to wrap my head around that fact that I am now a sex worker, dating is going to be really hard. So, I had this thing in my head that I thought, no one's going to give me a chance. So, this guy I was dating, even though it was a bad relationship, I put up with it because I didn't think I could do any better. So, I just stuck it out and then when things ended it was really hard for me psychologically because then I had to wrap my head around the fact that I could probably be single until I'm ready to retire from sex work.

Gloria struggled to find open-minded partners and her lover, who was previously a client of hers, was not comfortable with her sex work. She purposefully kept up boundaries to protect herself.

Gloria: But I know for a fact that I don't want to commit to someone like a hundred percent. So, like I'll still date, but I don't think that I'll let anyone get close enough to me for them to ask what is it that you do for work? I feel like not enough will be open minded. Not people I've dated in the past anyway, they haven't been. I've had an ex literally tell me if I ever find out you're doing anything dodgy, I'll fucking kill you.

There were many different reasons for not dating whilst doing sex work, ranging from a fear of being 'outed', especially after a breakup, to anticipating an unworkable compromise. Several participants predicted needing to manage a partner's feelings and emotion work. However, several participants felt that dating took away from their own personal autonomy. The downside of stigma and avoiding dating meant that sex workers struggled with vulnerability within their everyday lives, but by enforcing strong boundaries they were adamant they would maintain power and resist sex work stigma.

Resistance

Resistance is critical to countering stigma; however, the literature has overall failed to explore how sex workers resist it in their everyday lives (Grittner & Walsh, 2020). Grittner and Walsh (2020) found in their scoping review that female sex workers resisted stigma on the micro (everyday) level through peer support systems, being critical of dominant discourses, reframing sex work, controlling the disclosure of their status and fostering empowerment. This study has similarly found that participants resist stigma through refusing to engage with their partners' discomfort around sex work and ending relationships when their work was not supported. They actively foster feelings of pride around their work, and this has helped strengthen their mental health. Through practising self-care and self-worth they reported being better able to navigate stigma within their relationships.

Several participants chose not to engage with their partners' discomfort around sex work. Emotion work was a strategy commonly used to enhance the emotional intimacy between sex workers and their partners. In heterosexual relationships, women have been shown to be much more likely to perform this role over their male partners, creating an imbalance (Umberson et al., 2015). However,

regardless of gender, several participants actively resisted taking on the responsibility of managing sex work stigma on behalf of their partners because they felt that it was not worth the emotional labour if their partners did not 'do the work' to unlearn their own whorephobia.

Creating boundaries

Participants thought deeply about boundaries and reflected deeply on them with respect to their romantic relationships. When Jessica's relationship broke down due to an argument over sex work she realised that she was never going to stop sex work for a partner. That was a big 'learning curve' for her, was representative of a refusal to apologise for being a sex worker and meant she asserted an important boundary for herself: that if someone did not support her work she could not date them.

Jessica: And it was kind of like eventually the end of the relationship um, you know, at that point I realised I never was going to stop for a man. So that was a good learning curve.

When a previous lover felt sorry for her, Tina felt that she was being 'othered' due to her marginalised identity as a sex worker (Ahmed, 2004). She refused to take on his pity and stated that it was his problem and not hers to address. Participants were often protective of their identities as sex workers—resisting discrimination and stigma—and were critical of their partners' or lovers' behaviour. They often saw this as a 'red flag'.

Tina: But I was seeing this guy and he kept saying at one point 'Oh I feel sorry for you, you were doing that?' And I'm like, 'Why are you sorry, why are you dating me? Because you felt sorry for me?' So, he obviously wasn't happy and he had issues of his own. But you know, I don't want to date someone who thinks like that, it's his problem.

Nina ended a year-long relationship despite having strong feelings for her partner because he wanted her to quit sex work. Nina resisted and stated that she would not give up her sex work for a partner, showing strong self-care and boundaries.

Nina: The hardest bit I found was like the guy I started dating after a year, he wanted me to quit. And I had strong feelings for him but I would never quit so we just ended things and then it was another year before I even tried to date anyone... If they really don't want me to work, I won't be with them, because I'll never quit for someone.

Drew became tired of hiding her work from partners and instead wanted to share how proud she was to be a sex worker. She felt that if a partner did not accept her sex work they were not compatible, and she would not entertain dating them. This again showed how strong boundaries were used to avoid problematic relationships.

Drew: I wanna be myself, I wanna be proud, I wanna share myself with people. I think it's a measure of a cool person. Someone who would date someone who wasn't cool with it, we are then incompatible in our views. That's almost a test for a boy then, how chill he is with it?

Gabriel was able to reflect on his ten-year career as a sex worker and see how a lack of self-worth, self-esteem and boundaries contributed to internalised stigma and poor decision making within relationships.

Gabriel: I can look back on that time and identify that some of my decisions and some of how I responded to stuff was a lack of you know, in part, maybe not entirely, in part a lack of self-care and a lack of self-worth but it's fascinating because now, you know, I'm still a sex worker 10 years later and so much of my sex work is informed by strong self-care and strong

boundaries. I sex work more and I'm much more careful with my mental health and my self-care and that's within sex work but also in the context of 'outing' myself or um, yeah. Who I tell and all that stuff. Coz it like has an effect on your wellbeing.

Toni chose her own safety and comfort over her partner's 'need to know', and this was a boundary she created to maintain harmony within her relationship. She had to reconsider what honesty looked like to her and resisted normative understandings around this.

Toni: And I hid it because, um for all of the myriad of reasons that so many other people hide their experiences as a sex worker and the work that they do because I didn't know if he would understand. I didn't want to have that conversation with him. I didn't wanna worry about those looks and, and that heaviness in the air. You know, when I got home from my shift at the brothel. I didn't want any of that. Anyway, it wasn't affecting my feelings for him and it wasn't affecting our love. I don't feel he needs to know. I think it's really important that whenever you're sharing information with someone that, particularly if it may be contentious information, you need to ask yourself: why am I doing this? Is this going to benefit anybody? And who's it going to benefit? I don't feel it's going to benefit him to know.

Creating boundaries between work and private life helped keep several participants safer and more secure within their relationships. Whilst some sex workers shared as little detail as possible about their work lives to manage their partners' discomfort. In contrast, some participants included their partners in on their daily business routine, which helped destigmatise sex work for their partners. This was another form of resistance as it broke down social conventions regarding gender, leading to the partners of sex workers, often male, assisting their sex working partners rather than struggling for power within the relationship. By sharing their workload and accepting support, these sex workers

were able to develop trusting relationships that invited a deeper level of intimacy. This brought these participants closer to their partners and made their day-to-day work lives easier due to increased support.

Jill described paying her partner to drive her to a booking. She animatedly retold the story because she found it funny that while she worked her partner sat in the car and watched a film while he waited. He was supportive of her work; however, she also highlighted he nonetheless still felt some discomfort around some aspects of sex work, namely the sex. She helped him reframe his discomfort and regardless, showed gratitude for her partner. It also speaks to how societal stigma impacts the partners of sex workers and can create a cognitive dissonance.

Jill: God bless his cotton socks (laughs). And once I had an escort to a hotel, he actually drove me there, I paid him to be my driver. He brought his laptop and watched movies in the car. He goes I can't believe I'm taking you to a hotel to have sex with some guy, and I said no, I'm paying you to drive me to work. He goes, oh yeah. Fair enough (laughs).

Due to the increased raids by police Ruby was fearful about working from hotels and with the support of her partner devised a strategy to avoid detection. Ruby and her partner checked into hotels together and disguised themselves as a couple on holiday.

Ruby: Um, yeah that's another stigma thing, I have to make sure I have a reason to be at the hotel. I usually have my partner come with me and we have like, we will say that we are on a holiday or something, you know what I mean? I'll go in to check in and we will hang for a little bit then he will head off and I'll take some booking.

Ruby's partner had also done some opportunistic sex work in the past and therefore better understood her sex work. They worked closely together to manage their home life, and she shared that he would often have dinner ready for her when she arrived home from work and did much of the housework. Ruby's partner was very connected to her everyday sex work life and actively supported her in making her work life less stressful.

Ruby: Um, well he used to do it himself when he was younger. He was a survival sex worker when he was like in his late teens, early twenties. So, his experiences are much different from mine, but that means that he does understand and is a lot more accommodating. Like he always makes sure he has dinner ready and stuff when I get home from bookings. We've discussed it a couple of times, it's sort of like the dynamic where I sort of go out and I make the money for the household, he will look after the house, Like he will do the cleaning and the dishes and look after the animals, and stuff like that. He's on a disability pension but I generally pay for everything and the stuff that he gets given on his pension is our leftovers for a rainy day.

Similarly, Jaz's previous partner, who was both a previous client and sex worker, supported her sex work and helped her strengthen her business through strategising.

Jaz: He was a stripper as well and he was like my best friend. I could be completely open with him about sex work. He was who chose my work name for me. I would talk to him about business strategies, about my clients and about the sex. I could talk to him about anything and everything. And he was totally open with it and I loved that.

Theresa's husband offered services to sex workers to support the community. She proudly described her husband's love of driving and that he enjoyed being connected to her sex work in this way.

Theresa: All my girlfriends are like he's a six-star driver coz he's just, he's such a dag. If you ever need a driver he will do it literally for a frappé. He doesn't even charge. He wouldn't take your money. He's like, 'I don't want your money, I like driving'. He's got a Ford Focus that he's in love with, a sports one, and he won't charge you anything. A friend was like, 'Are you sure?' and she's trying to give him money and he's like 'No, no, no, you worked for that'.

Participants resisted stigma within their everyday lives and demonstrated resilience by pushing back against whorephobia in several ways, namely by creating boundaries to safeguard their mental health and asserting that their sex work could not be compromised. Rather, they encouraged their partners to work on their own whorephobia. Disclosure was considered and weighed up against risk, and sex work pride was fostered to counter internalised stigma. Whilst some participants chose to keep their partners out of their everyday sex work lives, several willingly invited their partners in. This showed that the partners of sex workers did not always struggle with sex work and that some sex workers were also supported by their partners within their everyday lives.

Resisting heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is linked to social oppression (Marchia & Sommer, 2017), and this study highlights how it interacts with whore stigma, creating additional tension for sex workers and their partners within their everyday lives. However, several participants resisted heteronormativity by engaging in relationship structures outside of monogamy and found that they were better supported in their work when they did not operate within normative relational paradigms. Furthermore, the perceived flaws of monogamy, namely sexual fidelity, were conceptualised, resisted, explored and addressed through

sex work, polyamory and non-monogamy. One participant, due to trauma, strictly never engaged in sexual relationships outside of work and managed to develop a successful, long-term 'platonic relationship'.

Through their work, the participants developed an understanding that love and sex were rooted in heteronormativity and socially constructed ideals that were difficult to achieve and feel safe within. For one participant, this disrupted her 'fantasies' around love and romance. Robyn described herself as a romantic, however she understood that both 'romance' and the idea of 'love' were socially constructed. She felt deflated when thinking about encounters with men at work, especially about one incident at a buck's party where the groom-to-be propositioned her for sex. She felt conflicted about love and experienced an existential dread, realising that she could not rely on traditional ideas of love. Sex work had challenged her understanding of romance, which caused conflict for her within her own relationships because she understood how romance was socially constructed.

Robyn: And then I got to the realisation when last year at a bucks party, the buck came up to me, he just seemed like a real lovely guy, but then the buck wanted to do full service with me and I was like hang on bro, like sit down. I'm young, you're about to get married like, like I wanna get married one day, like don't ruin this for me. I already know, but like, don't ruin it for me. So that killed my confidence a little bit. Just like I think it's more of like an existential dread type of confidence, more than like a little thing here and there. So, it's kind of just more like what is it all?... It's just, I think once you come to terms with it, you just gotta come to terms with it, and you gotta get it out of your head that there's no little fantasy fairy tale, where you're like happily ever after. It's not real, it's not a thing.

Hannah questioned the practicalities of monogamy due to not feeling sexually satisfied within her marriage. Stopping sex work for her husband created extra tension. She was critical of monogamy,

and even though she wanted to maintain her lifestyle and loved her husband she missed the freedom, variety and independence that sex work and singledom offered her. Monogamy and marriage isolated her from her 'queerness' as a sex worker and she felt deeply unhappy.

Hannah: We have completely different sex drives and it's really hard because I'd been single for 11 years, and then I got with Dean, we got engaged in two months. it's been a really, really rocky road. You know, he's had some mental health issues. Then I got pregnant... Our relationship is still surviving and it's still stronger than ever; however, I think you know, and not all sex workers have a really high sex drive, you know but I do. And so, going from a life where I have had complete freedom and completely different experiences and different lovers to monogamy, it's been really hard. And I've had to have a bit of therapy on that.

Gabriel was polyamorous and identified as a queer man. He felt that gay and queer culture was more accommodating of sex work due to the heightened awareness and prevalence of it within the community. He felt fortunate and privileged to be a part of the queer community, as he felt his work was more visible and accepted.

Gabriel: I think certainly within queer culture there is more um, and certainly queer culture for men, like there's more prevalence and more awareness of sex work. So I think maybe on that level it is easier, like maybe you're more likely to come into contact with community who are already know you are sex worker or are cool with it, or doing it themselves...

Both Ruby and Lucie were in polyamorous relationships and felt that their partners did not experience much jealousy due to non-monogamy. Ruby felt her partner was open and understanding, stating that, 'We are non-monogamous anyway so yeah there's no real jealousy issue or anything like that. He's pretty open and nice'. Lucie was also relieved to find a supportive partner who was completely

accepting of her sex work, stating, 'Well we're in a polyamorous relationship and she's accepting of it. She's completely accepting and it's really good to have found someone like that'.

Theresa and her partner were in a monogamous relationship until they relaxed the parameters of it to allow for threesomes and other sexual experiences. Theresa labelled herself as having a 'high sex drive' and was interested in sexual variety. She felt sex work was particularly important to her as it allowed for her to experience more from her sex life, and that without this she felt that monogamy alone would not be sustainable.

Theresa: I did a double with my friend in 2016 and it was so fucking good, that I literally flew my husband down. Because we'd never had a threesome and we were monogamous at the time. We have a very vanilla sex life but everybody's happy. We have sex most days. But he needs a break every now and then, coz I'm quite highly sexed... I always prioritise him because that would be really unfair not to and he's one of the nicest people I've ever met. But I don't think he has it in him to you know, toss me around the room. And I have certain clients that can do that and that fulfils me. I think if I wasn't doing this, I probably would have an affair. 'Theresa' feeds me. I don't think I could sustain a monogamous relationship without her. We've started seeing sex workers in our private life. So, we're spicing up things, but I don't think I could sustain married, wife life without Theresa. She feeds me. So, I probably get more out of Theresa than a lot of escorts. It's a big part of who I am. It's a huge part. I started telling people I'm an escort more and more so, that one's work, that one's personal. It's like, it's a huge part of my identity now. I've really embraced it.

Enid also resisted heteronormativity, albeit in a different way. Due to sexual violence and trauma experienced through the foster system and from opportunistic sex work where she lived with men in exchange for sex and board, Enid did not date or engage in sexual relationships outside of work. This was a very strict boundary for her.

Enid: I'm totally, strictly, no dating. If a guy pretty much asks me out, I'm actually rude. I just go, unless you pay me, get away from me, not interested. So, sounds bad, but I think coz I have such a horrible, horrible idea of men, yeah, as soon as someone expects something from me for free, like even if they don't know I'm an escort, I get like angry. Which is silly coz, in the normal world people date, but it really has changed me psychologically, that I'm like: what, you think you can sleep with me for free? What are you even talking about? Like, what will I get out of this, and they're just like okay, crazy person!

However, Enid co habits with a friend of hers in what serves a similar purpose to a 'traditional romantic relationship'. Although, she did not label it a 'platonic' relationship, they have been 'together' for seven years and provide each other with company, share the same bed and he helps support her sex work business. They have never had sex, nor are they physically intimate in any way, and this alternate relationship suits her and her needs; leaving her feeling safe and secure.

Enid: He kind of hit on me at first, but he was not a typical pig or anything like that. I think he understood I didn't want a partner. But we got along, so he was happy with a friendship and it just sort of progressed from that. He's never used me for anything because there was nothing. He wasn't getting any (sexual) benefit and he's been around like seven years. We sleep in the same bed. I told him to come live with me and help me with my work, because he was looking to move out of home. I said you can live with me, rent free, I pay for everything. I just need you to help me with my work. I just will expect a little bit from you, like you know, take me to work.

In this study some participants chose monogamous relationships and normative lifestyles; however, this resulted in difficulties around gendered expectations and power struggles. Other participants

questioned monogamy or avoided dating all together, prioritising open relationships or financial gain over commitment to a monogamous relationship. Furthermore, compromise around their sex work within romantic relationships was seen as inevitable for many of the participants regardless of the structure. When participants spoke about their relationships, this often exposed gender and power dynamics: those who chose to abide by these for safety, and those who actively revolted against them, either because they questioned monogamy and the patriarchy, or simply because they understood that a relationship would get in the way of making money.

Conclusion

Overall, it was found that sex work stigma creates an added complexity for sex workers within their intimate relationships because it sits outside of traditional relationship structures, which are still widely practised and expected in Australia. Being a sex worker meant questioning 'love and romance', and because of their stigmatised identity, being forced to deconstruct sex, love and romance. Participants were able to defy heteronormativity due to the nature of their work. They demonstrated an elevated understanding of sexual dynamics and knew how to manage relationships, as it was intrinsically a part of the work they did. All relationships required a level of work for them to function, and the participants navigated this despite the added complexity. The nature of sex work exposes sex workers to non-romantic sex, highlighting that sex does not need to be a part of a monogamous relationship, or love, therefore leading some of the participants to question monogamy or scoff at romance, seeing it as another form of labour. Some sex workers identified that they were non-monogamous or part of the LBGTIQA+ community, and these groups navigated these identities with their sex work and stigma in addition to patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Outsiders to sex work may never fully grasp a sex worker's frame of reference or lens because it is difficult to theoretically unpack socially constructed and conditioned norms around romance and love. A sex worker's frame of reference is unique because intimacy is the trade. When this understanding comes from lived experience—or when people understand the constructed nature of romantic relationships—the concept of sex work becomes more tangible, as some participants noted. From a monogamous frame of reference, viewing sex work as work could be more difficult if the participants did not question socially constructed norms. When one can divorce sex, love and attraction, sex work is better understood as work. Sex workers and outsiders had completely different frames of reference, and this caused much conflict for participants. Whilst participants aimed to be understood and accepted, their partners grappled with jealousy, gaining power and security. This in turn meant that those participants committed to monogamy and traditional relationships had to perform emotional labour differently from those in non-monogamous relationships and showed love and care for their partners through compromise and managing the relationship. Sex workers outside this milieu, who rejected traditional relationships, were not as willing to compromise and expected acceptance around their work, though they were not exempt from stigma or issues relating to their work.

Stigma ensures that sex work negatively impacts upon the private romantic relationships of sex workers (Bellhouse et al., 2015), where sex workers can experience jealousy, resentment, disapproval and disrespect from their partners due to the nature of their work (Murphy et al., 2015; Warr & Pyett, 2001). However in addition to this, and due to the changing nature of the sex industry, pride around sex work and discussions about power, autonomy and financial independence meant that some of the participants in this study refused to compromise for a partner. This included refusing expectations around monogamy and unspoken boundaries, all of which determined who had control and power or who did not.

Chapter Seven: Family and Friendship

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored how the everyday romantic lives of sex workers were impacted by stigma, as expressed through the concepts of heteronormativity, gender, sexuality and monogamy. I found that overall, participants were more likely to disclose sex work to their 'significant others' and friends, especially sex working friends, over biological family.

In this chapter I engage with the stories of participants regarding how they managed their everyday relationships with family as well as explore concepts, issues and findings around friendship. As with the previous chapters, the broad themes (family and friendship in this case) encapsulated a number of other themes. Participants identified family culture and growing up, 'coming out' to family and the impact of gender on family dynamics in relation to disclosing their sex worker status. Under the broad theme of friendships, participants identified support, safety, and work and home as key themes, providing rich data on how friends and sex working friends support them as sex workers in their work and in managing stigma. This chapter also explores friendship because the participants often told stories of support from friends as opposed to family. Sex working friends were especially important and highly valued as they understood sex work differently to non-sex workers and family members. It is important to note that not all participants were rejected by family after disclosure, but sex work did pose a threat to family membership.

Definitions of family are socially constructed (Barnes, 2012; Karraker & Grochowski, 2012), and family life can be described as the 'common ground' or 'connective tissue' of everyday life (Gardiner, 2000; Henri, 1991). The family, in an everyday sense, represents ideas of 'unconditional love' and support.

The family as an 'institution' is still conceptually dominant in society despite being challenged and its limitations highlighted (Gilding, 2010). Traditional frameworks and constraints about what is and is not considered family have altered due to long-term cultural and economic shifts (Donovan et al., 2001). 'The family' as an institution and what it stands for is often used politically, especially against marginalised communities such as sex workers, to reinforce and strengthen conservative agendas and notions of appropriate citizenship (Jackson & Ho, 2020; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2012). It is also important to acknowledge family differences, divisions and inequalities between and within families (Jackson & Ho, 2020). Modern conceptualisations of family may include other intimate connections not only restricted to formal, blood or marriage ties. For example, 'chosen family' within queer communities are exemplary of this and are important because relationships with 'traditional family' members can be fraught due to homophobia or whorephobia (Donovan et al., 2001; Jackson Levin et al., 2020; Weston, 1991).

Like queer people, sex workers share a variety of experiences when 'coming out' to family and often choose to receive support from sex working friends or trusted friends over family because the risks of disapproval and rejection from family are high. In this study, it was found that the relationships the participants had with friends and family were in contrast, with the family often focused on problematising sex work and sex. Despite fraught and complicated experiences with family however, participants in this study often still longed for support from family and ideally wanted to disclose to family members.

Family connections and friendship have been shown to be important in everyday life, and these kinds of connections have been shown to contribute to better mental health outcomes (Karraker & Grochowski, 2012), although when these relationships are breaking down or go through a period of crisis this too has a significant impact on one's quality of life and happiness (Demir, 2015; Vernon, 2005). Research has shown that amongst the general public individuals prefer to seek out support

from friends and family, especially when experiencing stress or mental health issues, over receiving professional help from a psychologist or counsellor (Griffiths et al., 2011). However, when participants experienced work stress within their everyday lives, they chose to share this stress with sex working friends and not family because stigma complicated and prevented 'explicit' disclosure of their work life issues. Participants tended not to share detailed accounts of work, especially if they represented specific stereotypes about sex work, for example those associated with violence, especially sexual violence. This shows that the support networks that people commonly rely on and take for granted within their everyday lives are not freely available to sex workers because stigma creates additional barriers to them accessing such support. Additionally, sex workers are already less likely to seek professional support due to fears of discrimination from psychologists (Benoit et al., 2017b; Rayson & Alba, 2019; Treloar et al., 2021), and mental health professionals need additional training to engage appropriately with sex workers without stigmatising them further (Treloar et al., 2021). This also highlights the importance of the role of sex work communities and peer organisations in supporting sex workers and their mental health (Argento et al., 2011; Treloar et al., 2021). It was also found in this study that participants could not always trust that family would understand sex work or be supportive of their work choices; nonetheless, several participants wanted support from family and many participants 'outed' themselves hoping to find acceptance (Griffiths et al., 2011). Familial and friendship supports can also prove unhelpful, or even toxic (Griffiths et al., 2011), and for the participants in this study support from family members was mixed.

Participants' stories of everyday family life highlighted how traditional ideas of gender roles shaped their engagement with their families. 'Women', especially the 'mothers' of participants, tended to be either overtly supportive or obstructive. They tended to focus on safety and feared gendered violence associated with sex work, whereas 'men' within the family tended to remain silent and avoided speaking about sex work. Men often did not want to engage in deeper discussions with their partners, daughters or siblings about sex work because it made them uncomfortable due to the sex aspects of

work. One of the contradictions of western sexual culture according to Jackson and Ho (2014) is that whilst sex is highly valued and glorified as both pleasurable and fulfilling, it still elicits a great deal of anxiety within families, especially in relation to children and girls, or women's sexuality. Additionally, the discomfort around discussing sex work for men in particular perhaps highlights how cisgender men and women experience sex and sexual violence differently from each other. Participants reported discussing sex work with their mothers more due to increased feelings of trust and comfort, although this is also congruent with how women, especially mothers, often take on more emotion work within the family (Garey, 2011; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2012). Interestingly, not many participants shared stories about their sisters, but several shared stories about overprotective brothers, who, whilst showing 'brotherly love' stigmatised their sex working siblings because it was uncomfortable to talk about sex and 'women need men to protect them'. Socialised cultural understandings of binary gender roles and family were present and several participants subscribed to these. They also wanted to be close to family and hoped to receive acceptance regarding their work. Overall, participants were less likely to challenge notions of family in comparison to notions around romance (Gilding, 2001).

Throughout the interviews, the participants were observed to reject and challenge heteronormativity, as their experiences of sex work (and/or queerness) meant that prescriptive ways of being in the world, especially within romantic relationships, did not fit into their lives and could pose great harm. When the participants spoke about family however, many of them reinforced gendered family roles and constructs. Whilst sex work posed a threat to family membership, and not only through disclosure as keeping sex work hidden also created barriers between the participants and their families, they nonetheless expected 'unconditional' love and support. This is interesting, as seemingly the participants did not have to resist or break down ideas of 'family' in the same way as they did in their romantic relationships. This could be because culturally, family and 'unconditional love' is taken for granted and expected. Additionally, it was more important to participants that their partners understood sex work, as they often lived with their partners or opened up more to them about their

everyday lives and in different ways compared with their families. This is noteworthy because whilst the stigma pertaining to sex work touches all parts of a sex worker's everyday life, navigating sex work with family was different from navigating disclosure within their romantic lives, although it was still hard. The literature tends to combine the experiences of disclosure within the everyday lives of sex workers (Levey & Pinsky, 2014; Wong et al., 2011), not distinguishing between the specific relationships and the different ways in which they impact. In this study, I found that there are clear differences between the interactions of the participants when engaging about sex work with lovers, family and friends, although all had their challenges. Participants either did not disclose sex work to their family, therefore did not threaten their family membership, or they selectively disclosed and were strategic in how they talked about work to manage stigma. Some participants were rejected by family, but the majority retained family membership. Broadly, disenfranchised groups reject societal norms when they threaten their safety, but seemingly, sex work stigma and 'the family' did not threaten sex worker safety in the same way as within their romantic relationships because sex work was 'more' threatening due to the 'sex' aspects of work. Therefore, most of the participants did not actively speak about breaking down, or rejecting, the family unit from a philosophical perspective.

Family was often conceptualised using normalised social constructions of 'the family' and 'unconditional love'. This was evidenced by the way several participants talked about their families and how they hoped for acceptance regarding their work. Constructions of normative gender roles were also revealed by participants throughout their stories of family and how they spoke about their mothers, fathers and siblings.

Family culture and growing up

When participants spoke about their families, many shared stories about their family culture and how this was influential in shaping their everyday lives. Some participants shared how their family culture and upbringing influenced their path into sex work, and many saw their sex work as an overall positive influence in their lives. Of course one's upbringing does not necessarily correlate with why one becomes a sex worker, but for some, connections were made with their upbringing and for the specific purpose of making sense of who they were as adults and as sex workers. It was also clear that this process functioned as another way for participants to navigate stigma through showing deeper and more developed understandings about who they were as people, in context, divorced from stigma and in relation to stigma.

It was also clear from the stories participants shared that some individual family cultures defied wider cultural norms or upheld them. Parents were often viewed as role models and either helped challenge societal expectations and attitudes or stressed conformity (Lupu et al., 2018). For example, this could be seen through how shame was or was not reinforced within families, particularly around sex and sexuality, and then again by how they reacted to sex work disclosure. However, some participants showed that as children they were encouraged to challenge cultural norms, such as those about sex and the body. Bianca shared how when growing up, her parents taught her and her brother to question authority and to think for themselves. She felt that this had an impact on her everyday life and specifically how she navigated social expectations, which she expressed consistently throughout the interview. She chose to defy social expectations and thus felt pride in her work and did not allow her parents to 'get away' with disrespecting sex work as her chosen profession.

Bianca: So, I went to a Catholic school for the first 11 years and then I graduated from a city school, and my parents pretty much chose the Catholic system not because they were Catholic, but they wanted a more conservative private school, that sort of upbringing. Um, but they're both a scientist, they're both like, pretty open minded in some respects. Not when it comes to the sex industry really, but I don't let them get away with anything. So, like me and my parents are very different. But one thing I always liked or I always respected was that they told me when I was growing up to question everything. Question everything, you've got to think for yourself. And they always told me to question them as well. Like, just because they were my parents didn't mean that they were right... And I suppose I really did take that on board from a really young age.

Dolly felt that even before she started work in the sex industry she had an open mind about sex, bodies and nudity, and that this was directly linked to her family's cultural heritage. She spoke in detail about her upbringing and how it had a significant impact on her life. In particular, she spoke about how her family normalised sexuality, nudity and the body rather than problematising it or viewing it as a taboo subject. Dolly felt her home life and family culture differentiated her from other children growing up and also meant as an adult what was 'normal' for her differed to normative culture.

Dolly: In relation to what's normal for us and what's not for other people, that goes way back before I started sex work. My family is a very naked household. We would go as a family to the nude beach. We had a pool in the back yard. Why would you create laundry? Why would we be wearing bathing suits? We were all just naked in the pool, Mum, Dad, me, my brother and the dog. Never did I see anything sexual or anything, exposed to anything inappropriate, never ever. It would be Mum and Dad are both in the shower at the same time so that they can keep talking about who's picking up who from there and they would grab a kid and scrub their head and throw them back out again. And definitely that wasn't being displayed, but it

wasn't something hidden.... For me to just get changed in front of my friends or if I mentioned anything about sex they would be horrified (emphasised). They have never ever seen another family member, parent or sibling topless. Like, they wouldn't even wear swimsuits near them and they'd just freak out. And for me that was normal.... And so I guess it already started that I had an open mind about bodies.

Enid described how sex work gave her security, which contrasted with her childhood and the experiences she had within the foster system, which were traumatic. She did not experience a safe home life, and when she left care at 15 she continued to struggle and found alternate ways to look after herself. When she went from opportunistic sex work to formalised sex work she was then able to rely on herself for security and stability, which she did not experience growing up. She overcame poverty and trauma through doing sex work, and this gave her financial freedom and independence.

Enid: When I was young, I didn't grow up in the best environment... I was fostered out and I'd never actually really even met my mum before... But I'd seen a lot of friends with like mothers that were alcoholics and drug addicts... I was like I do not wanna be like that... I was like I wanna stay away from that... I was in a lot of abusive foster families, so I ended up leaving when I was 15 because the foster system is very corrupt. I always could only get retail jobs because I didn't get past year 10... So I met a guy, and went, this guy was a little bit abusive, but I went, he's less abusive than the foster parent I'm with, I'm gunna go sleep with this guy, live at his house. So, I did go through years of pretty much going through shitty relationships, to get a roof over my head... I got sick and tired having abusive boyfriends, and obviously, as bad as it sounds, you get a bit of low self-worth, and the guys that are gunna meet a girl and you know, living with you in two days, they're not quality people... And then I went fuck this and that's when I got into the topless work. And when I was able to afford my rent, then I could rent on my own. So topless originally saved me from that kind of crap.

One participant, Jessica, spoke about growing up in a strict Christian household where religious family values defined her childhood experiences. She experienced ritualised abuse and left home at a young age although she felt that this experience did not break her spirit; rather, it made her stronger and more defiant. This wilfulness was reminiscent of Ahmed (2017, p. 66) and the 'wilful child' where a feminist is one who is 'asserting or disposed to assert one's own will against persuasion, instruction, or command; governed by will without regard to reason; determined to take one's own way; obstinately self-willed or perverse'. Jessica did not let her father's religious beliefs break her spirit; instead, she empowered herself through sex work, spirituality and healing.

Jessica: I do have a tough story, and I did come to it (sex work) through a kind of stereotypical type of story. I ran away from home when I was 15 because my parents were very religious, and there was systematic physical abuse that was ritualised and religious, physical abuse. So, I knew from a pretty young age that I didn't, I didn't agree with their religion and anything to do with it, and so that caused a lot of problems. I'm an Aries (laughs) and I've always been very sexual, very sexually driven and that's obviously like, there's something inherently wrong with your soul right? And so that's where all the physical abuse from my dad came from. Coz he was like, well God gives us a child to raise as like a perfect child and because you're so wild and wily, I need to beat it out of you. So that was, that was not the way to break my spirit, it actually made me more defiant. I think, it was more like a quest to discover whether there was actually something wrong with me for being so sensual and so sexual from a young age. So, then I still had like these urges and dancing provided an avenue to make the money that I needed, because I wanted to go to university. I still wanted to make something of myself and get a degree and prove that I was worthy, you know, which is definitely religiously inspired. But also, I think I liked the control, and I liked the power right away because religion takes all your power away.

Several participants spoke about what it was like for them growing up, how their family cultures were connected to their everyday lives as adults, and how this influenced their lives as sex workers. Some looked upon their childhoods fondly and felt that they contributed to them becoming critical and open-minded as adults, which therefore supported them in deflecting stigma. In addition, when participants felt connected to their childhoods and families through shared marginalised identities, they felt more secure in their connection to their families. For others, it was despite their childhood and trauma that they came to sex work and found independence, security and healing. It made sense for participants to speak about their childhoods and connect them to sex work because family life is a defining feature of everyday life and how people make sense of themselves (Hedegaard & Fler, 2013). The participants presented complex family lives and sex work was not an inevitable outcome of this; rather, sex work made sense for them as each reflected on their life as a journey.

‘Coming out’ to family

Some participants disclosed they were less likely to trust family members with disclosure when compared with friends and romantic partners. This meant that the participants created barriers around them to protect themselves; however, it also prevented them from connecting to their families about their work lives. They were primarily concerned about having to lie to their families, as this went against many of the participants’ personal values where they valued honesty but also feared being ostracised from their family if they disclosed their sex work. This presented another difficult challenge for the participants in their everyday lives, where stigma impacted how they connected to people in their lives. For example, Lucie was open with her partners and friends about sex work however did not disclose it to her family. Lucie felt her family would disown her if they found out she was a sex

worker but felt guilty about lying to them. The participants had to balance keeping themselves safe through keeping their work lives hidden, alongside the societal values and expectations of being a 'good person'.

Lucie: But um, yeah I don't tell my family anything coz I know for a fact that they would just disown me or be extremely disappointed. And the rest of my family, yeah. I don't think they would want anything to do with me. And I hate having to lie and I don't want to lie to them about what I do but I know it's, it's better off that way.

Drew felt her family would not understand her as a sex worker because of stigma and their disconnect from sex work in their everyday lives. She felt her family had no real reference point or conceptualisation of what sex work was and that this was a big barrier to them truly understanding her and sex work. She felt they would never understand how sex work was a 'healthy, happy' decision for her and that they would be 'heartbroken'. Although she knew it was not because they did not love her for her, this was the consequence of working in a stigmatised profession and something she had to accept.

Drew: But I'm so not content with my family knowing, I'd be devastated. My family just wouldn't understand. It's not for like lack of love, or it's not even a judgment or meanness, they just truly would not understand. And I guess this is part of the problem with stigma of sex work. I think the shit people have with it is because they don't understand. They would see it as something that was so unhealthy and damaging to me. They would be heartbroken by it. But it's just purely because they don't have any interaction with it, they just wouldn't be able to fathom that it's not that. That it's a healthy, happy decision for me.

Nina felt that her immediate family was supportive of her; however, this support was conditional and based on her happiness. She was limited in what she could share with her family, and this made it difficult to share the realities of her work life with her family. They expected her to be happy in her work and feeling otherwise would reinforce their fears and concerns about her safety in sex work. This demonstrates how sex work in particular can incite conditional support where family members will more readily support 'happy' sex workers because ideally their child would not be doing sex work. She stated that, 'My immediate family is supportive, as long as I'm happy. If I stop being happy, if I stop liking what I do, then they'll say something'.

Cher stated how her family were somewhat supportive and not obstructionist. They openly voiced disapproval but also did not try to stop her from doing sex work, although she saw the irony in being 'tolerated' by family. The participants sometimes had to accept the bare minimum in terms of support because otherwise they might experience rejection.

Cher: Yeah, yeah. They are quite supportive. When they're not supportive at least they're at least, well sometimes they're not necessarily supportive but they are certainly not obstructionist. Like they will disapprove and voice disapproval, but they will never try and stop me. And they do understand that I am my own person. So, um it's kind of weird that that is considered supportive nowadays. With how a lot of girls get treated in the industry, they are quite supportive as far as things go. Good people.

Cher was very close to her family and when she 'came out', firstly as trans then as a sex worker, she discovered that she was not the only queer person and sex worker in her family. She had an aunt who had done sex work and several of her family members over several generations were queer. She spoke

in detail about her family's history and lineage and how after 'coming out' she felt more connected to her family. Having a marginalised identity may mean people feel isolated from society and especially their families; however, Cher felt more connection to her family after 'coming out'.

Cher: I ended up 'coming out' to most of my family pretty soon after I started working because, well, I'm bad at keeping secrets. Ever since I 'came out' as trans and I was just kinda like I'm not gunna keep secrets anymore. And, I had a few somewhat high-profile mental health breakdowns. It was like, well, now that my gender and sexuality stuff is all out there, and my mental health stuff is out there, I'm just not going to bother anymore. So I don't bother keeping secrets from my family. So, I 'came out' to them pretty early and I found out that my family has some history in the industry. Also, I only found out when I 'came out' as trans actually, that I have an uncle who was probably trans and definitely queer. Yeah, and another great uncle who was also as 'out' as he could be out in the 60s and 70s. He had a partner he lived with in their own house. But yeah, involvement in the queer community in the family has been, we've always had someone in every generation. There's always been at least one person. In this it's me and my sister.

Gabriel spoke very highly of his aunt and shared how their relationship was based on trust and respect. However, he reflected on one incident where his aunt 'dropped into the stigma' where she saw his frustration with work as a sign that he should stop sex work. Succumbing to stigma meant that she missed out on 'truly seeing him' when he was depressed and struggling. Because he trusted his aunt and they had a secure connection he knew it was not intentional and forgave her.

Gabriel: I was having a really rough time and I tell this as a joke because I think it says more about our culture and less about her (his aunt) as an individual you know, but here is someone who has always been incredibly supportive. Certainly, she'll gently and respectfully challenge

me when she sees issues, and this is not what that was but, so I'd been having a tough time and I was just saying, the thought of doing a job just makes me feel ill. And she was like ohhhh maybe you should think about finding another job? I think I said it makes me sick to my stomach, and I was like, I'm pretty sure it's because my boyfriend of five years just dumped me, I've been in bed crying for a week and I just had a house fire (laughing). It was just one of those rare moments where she kind of dropped into the stigma you know, which she rarely does, but I'm like, well you can be forgiven for that.

The everyday lives of the participants meant that people had to balance sex work stigma and risk, and it meant managing who they 'came out' to, with the understanding that they may or may not be accepted as sex workers. This presented the most risk in their everyday lives in relation to family because for many participants their families knew them within the context of family, which was at times limiting due to expected gender roles or discomfort with sexuality. This hindered understanding of them, their work and sex work as work. This was not easy for some to accept, and several participants had to contend with guilt and ultimately knowing they could not trust their families to accept them and their lives as sex workers. Ideally, people wanted their families to support them regardless and not reduce them to narratives around 'prostitution'.

Gender and family

Through the everyday lives of the participants, specifically focusing in on family, it was clear to see how social constructions of gender are reinforced through 'the family' (Husso, 2021). This was shown by those to whom the participants chose to disclose, in addition to those from whom they expected care, which was namely from women within the family (Donovan et al., 2001; Garey, 2011; Husso, 2021). Gender is a social construct and how people present, as either typically 'masculine' or

'feminine' for example, informs how people are socialised and treated within society, especially within family, where family membership is based on gendered roles and unspoken rules (Donovan et al., 2001; Garey, 2011; Husso, 2021). In this study, when participants referred to their family and especially 'mothers' and 'fathers', binary and gendered language was used. Gendered constructs were reinforced within family, though this ought not to be viewed as an isolated phenomenon but rather in relation to broader social and structural intuitions and how these relate to power (Ferree, 2010). When familial relations are tied to gendered scripts and codes, any violation that is considered to have collective consequences for the family means conflicts may arise for individuals who violate these scripts and codes (Husso, 2021; Lidman, 2021). A conservative family ideology restricts many aspects of sexual and gender identity as well as choices related to them, in this case, sex work (Lidman, 2021, p. 32). For example, Nina's description of how her family reacted to the disclosure of her sex work clearly highlighted dominant ideas about gender. She listed how different family members reacted to her disclosure of sex work and discussed that the men in her family did not want to know any details and were uncomfortable speaking about sex. On the other hand, Nina talked about her mother being worried about her safety and how her sister did not understand how she could enjoy paid sex for work. How her family members reacted was broadly consistent with socialised gender roles where men stay silent and women worry (Hochschild, 2012).

Nina: They know, I just don't shove it in their face. Like my sister-in-law, I talk to her about everything. My brother's just like, 'I don't wanna know the details, lalalala'. My dad, his literal response when I told him I was a sex worker was, 'it is what it is'. So, my mum, she was concerned about my safety. But once I explained my security and screening and my safety measures, she was a lot more put at ease. My sister's not really that psychologically adapt to... She can never put herself in someone else's shoes. That's just the person she is. So, it's hard for her to understand why I do it and why I enjoy it. So that's, yeah it was hard for her to wrap her head around. Um, but yeah, most of my immediate family know.

It was clear that gendered scripts influenced how people reacted to sex work, but especially within the family (Bancroft, 2000; Gagnon & Simon, 1973). This could be because experiences of gendered inequality and violence can inform people's relationships to sex and violence, and therefore how they feel about sex work. However, studies have shown that parents tend to communicate more about the risk associated with sex over discussing topics related to sex positivity, with mothers overwhelmingly taking on this educational role (Evans et al., 2020). Additionally, fathers communicated the least about sex-positive topics (Evans et al., 2020). When participants spoke to the men in their family, their inability to speak openly about sex work related to discomfort around sex and sexuality, whereas for women within the family—notably mothers—fears around violence and risk associated with sex work were common.

Fathers

Understandings of 'fatherhood' have shifted culturally in recent decades where 'new masculinities' have now incorporated more shared responsibility regarding care and domestic work within the family home (Churchill & Craig, 2021). Additionally, traditional ideas of fatherhood have moved away from being associated with the father figure being the 'moral guardian, disciplinarian, educator and financial provider' to being a co-parent who provides equal care (Churchill & Craig, 2021). However, contemporary fatherhood does not necessarily mean gender equality within the family home has been achieved and mothers still spend more time caring for the family (Churchill & Craig, 2021; Garey, 2011). Participants highlighted this through speaking less about their fathers and not being as open about their work lives with them compared to their mothers. Whilst some participants did have good relationships with their fathers, many also described typically 'masculine' traits, where communication was stilted or 'not emotional'. Participants seemingly expected more support from their mothers over their fathers, again highlighting how culturally dominant notions of gender

continue to be reinforced in everyday settings and unintentionally so. For example, Cher's father was the only person in her family to whom she did not disclose her sex work. She felt her father might understand but also contended that he would find it shocking. She described him as an awkward man who was easily spooked. She felt he meant well; however, he was not always able to respond appropriately or thoughtfully.

Cher: My dad still doesn't know. He's the one person who doesn't know. He might understand. Um, he's had a lot of various characters in his life, of all walks of life. It's just the kind of conversation I wouldn't wanna have with him. He's an awkward man and um, very daddish, if that makes sense, you know? Like anytime I say anything that's remotely shocking, imagine like you spook a bird and its feathers get ruffled. And then he will say something that sometimes are terrible but well meaning, other times not so terrible.

Lucie had a good relationship with her father although he was 'old fashioned'. She described an incident where they were watching television together, and when sex work featured he stated how he felt sorry for sex workers and that it was shameful. She wanted to share her sex work with her father, but after witnessing his response she felt it was safer not to. She wanted to share her everyday work life with him, but stigma and his 'old fashioned values' prevented her from doing so.

Lucie: I have a very good relationship with my dad, and I know he has old views in a way. He's not against it, he understands why sex work is the way it is, and but just having his daughter do it. We were watching *Cops* once and they set up a raid of this sex worker, and he's like isn't it a shame that girls feel like they have to do that to make money? Like I feel sorry for them. I was just thinking, I've never felt like I have to do this before, like it was my choice to do it, and I'm very proud of that, that I can do what I can do. It's easy for him to say that about someone

else, but actually knowing that I did it, yeah, I don't know how it would turn out. I wish I could tell my dad. Like I would never talk to them about the sex, but I wish I could share personal stories, funny things, or if I'm having a bad day. Just talk to them about it.

Evita only referenced her mother and how she reacted to her sex work as they shared a close emotional bond. Her father had been abusive growing up, but when she came back to Adelaide and saw how much both her parents had aged, she decided to forgive him. Evita valued family and wanted to be accepted by her parents, but this made being a sex worker more complicated as it directly compromised her relationship with her family and how they saw her.

Evita: My dad was pretty horrible. Like he was abusive physically, super angry. Pretty absent, like he lived in a small town and we grew up here. And then whenever I saw him, he was super shit to me. It was just always shit. But I've forgiven my dad. You know, like when I came back, I saw how much they had aged. Since I last saw them and I shat myself and I was like I need a new start.

Participants rarely spoke about their fathers and it was clear that they were more open about sex work with their mothers. The everyday lives of participants showed that 'motherhood' was seemingly still marked by more emotion work than 'fatherhood'. However, due to this participants also experienced either more support or tension with their mothers around sex work, whereas their fathers did not feature as much within the interviews. There could be many reasons for this; however, it is also consistent with traditional socialised family roles where men culturally are not expected to engage in personal discussions with their children, especially 'female' children, and particularly ones relating to sex (Evans et al., 2020).

Mothers

Nineteen participants specifically spoke about the relationship with their mothers and how they reacted to sex work disclosure. Overall, 'women' were found to have a different response to sex work when compared with 'men', where there was often more overt disapproval and a greater focus on safety. This highlighted that motherhood and fatherhood were presented by participants in distinctly different ways. Many participants highlighted that their mothers' responses to their sex work were underlined by risk and fear, yet they still disclosed more to their mothers. Not all mothers were disapproving however, and several participants described trusting and open relationships where sex work did not undermine support and care. Lucie thought that as a woman her mother might be more understanding of sex work; however, due to a limited understanding of sex work this was not the case and Lucie felt let down. This, in part, contributed to a breakdown in their relationship.

Lucie: She's like, are you having sex with people for money? Like she just went from there's photos of me naked online to assuming that I'm escorting. I'm like Mum you can't even show your vagina on *Suicide Girls*, it's just boobs. So, once it happened, I was like screw it, I'm just going to keep going. And like I said, I don't speak to my mum but just like, Mum being a female, you'd think she'd be more understanding?

Evita recalled a conversation with her mother about sex work where her mother was explicit about not supporting her as a sex worker. Since that discussion they have avoided the subject altogether, and Evita feels that her mother is in denial about her sex work in order to cope with it. Women have been socialised to view sex work as shameful rather than as work or a way that women can monetise their sexuality in a capitalist and patriarchal society (Aimee et al., 2015; Mac & Smith, 2018). Outsiders do not see sex work as an avenue through which one can enjoy flexibility and power, especially as a woman.

Evita: Like I'm pretty sure my mum knows I work, well she knows that I used to. She's talked about it but then denial's a really strong thing with my mother. Like I found a message in my phone, like a screen shot of a message in my phone the other day where she said like, out of 100s of jobs you choose the lowest of the low. You choose to be a prostitute.

Evita often felt that she was given ultimatums and if she did not follow her family's wishes they would cut her off from financial support. She was in a difficult position because she wanted a relationship with her family, but sex work threatened this connection. She felt successful as a sex worker, but she could not share this with her family. She therefore felt misunderstood, highlighting how sex work stigma contributes to mental health and depression (see Sanders et al., 2017 and Treloar et al., 2021).

Evita: My mum all my life has just been like you just need to get a degree. Like we will support you in whatever you're doing, just get a degree. So I was studying all the way up until I was 30-something. When I started using the ice I was like feeling super trapped in this fucking house. Like it was a prison. My mum started, she's always done this, guilt me and give me ultimatums. Like if you quit studying then we're going to cut you off. Or if you quit studying, you're not our daughter anymore. I've got depression and mental illness stuff. Why are you unhappy? You've got this house, you live in this beautiful house, we give you everything that you want. Like what the fuck is wrong with you? And then I was like doing real well in sex work and was really proud of myself, but they can't see that. That like really sucks because it just seems like I'm doing nothing.

Ruby felt that her mother was the most likely person in her family to worry about her safety as a sex worker, specifically because her ideas of sex work were informed by stigma.

Ruby: I feel like my mum in particular would just not, she would worry more than anything. Coz her idea would be that I'm in danger and I'm sort of like in some sort of seedy, sort of underground environment where I'm at risk, you know what I mean?

When Quinn 'outed' herself, her mother was quick to form judgments. Her mother was concerned about what other family members would think if they found out she was a sex worker. Culturally, families are judged based upon producing 'disciplined' and 'normal' children (Taylor, 2016) and society quickly blames parents when trying to understand 'difference'. In this case Quinn was not met with support, rather judgment, and this meant a strained relationship.

Quinn: Mum at first was like okay you've told me this information, thank you for telling me this information, and then she sort of like flipped, like, what's your dad going to think? What would your grandfather think if he was alive?

Hannah selectively shared palatable information about sex work with her mother because she knew that love, especially within the family, was conditional and based on conforming to societal rules.

Hannah: My mum knew I had a sugar daddy... But I never told her about the other stuff. Sometimes I wish I could, but I don't wanna cross that line. You just don't know how that, you know, parents are supposed to love you unconditionally but...

Robyn's mother was a professional dominatrix and warned her from a young age about men; however, for Robyn, this culminated in conflicted feelings about love and romance. Robyn felt like she could not trust men although she wanted to believe in a fairy-tale romance. Her mother did not discuss sex in a sex-positive manner; rather, she framed it around risk and problematised men (Evans et al., 2020). This impacted Robyn's relationship with her mother and sex work.

Robyn: But she kind of wouldn't rub it in my face (being a sex worker) but then be like, use men, men are gunna do this to you, men are gunna want it, they see you this way, marry a man with money, that kind of stuff. Like she put all those ideas in my head from a very young age. So, yeah, that was basically my life. I didn't realise until later on how much it did affect me. I had to go to some therapy for it coz it was like, I need to deal with it now. It's weird to put a thing like that on your little kid.

Some participants shared stories about supportive and understanding mothers. These parents displayed a pragmatic approach to how they supported their sex-working children. For example, Margaret was not sure how her mum personally felt about her sex work, but she knew it did not compromise their relationship. Other participants shared stories where their mothers tried to dissuade them from working whereas Margaret's mother was rational and measured in her response.

Margaret: It's funny, my mum's like you gotta do what you gotta, and I was like, what I want to do! I don't have to do anything. I kind of got more, I think I got more mad at her than what she got at me, just from that comment. So, she kind of went like, oh you're really passionate about this and kind of went like, good for you. So, I don't really know how she feels about it. But it's not like she was like, I'll disown you.

Despite not taking much about sex work with her mother, Ani felt supported and that her mother would also likely support the decriminalisation of sex work. They had an open relationship where they would discuss social issues in detail and shared similar values.

Ani: My mum, she knows that I'll do what I want regardless of her opinion (laughing) and you know, I just challenge any of the stigma stuff that comes up. When we're talking in more broad

terms like, rather than talking about my own work. We don't really talk about that, but you know, we might talk about something that's on the news, or something, and I think she's pretty understanding. I think she'd probably be pro-decrim.

Dolly was open about her life with her mother, however she was initially nervous to share that she had started doing sex work. When she did disclose, she was pleasantly surprised by how understanding her mother was. Once her mother was able to understand she was safe, she felt relief and supported her as a sex worker.

Dolly: I said Mum, I've got to talk to you about something, and I told her and she was so relieved. She was like thank God. I had never not been open and honest with her. Even though I know she might not like to hear something. There's no reason to hide anything from her. So, she knew I'd been shady and I was exhausted, and I would come home and she would be like how's your day? And I would be like (speaking faster) yeah good, bye, bye, goodnight, I'm tired, goodbye, snore. The only reason I didn't tell her was one because she was sick, but I needed some time to figure out how I felt about it before I got everybody else's opinion on how they felt about it. So yeah, she was like oh is that all it is. I thought you were in trouble. And obviously she was fine. She's like: Are you safe? Are you well? Are you okay? And I'm like yep! Okay, so that was cool.

Maisie trusted her parents, especially her mother, and knew she was not going to feel judged for her choice in becoming a sex worker. The non-judgmental nature of their relationship enabled Maisie to be more open about her life with her parents.

Maisie: When I went in for the interview (at the parlour) I messaged my mum. I'm like hey I'm going in for an interview at this massage parlour place. I'm pretty open with them with pretty

much everything. Even though we don't live together and I don't talk to her every day, but if something important happened she's gunna know about it. Because she's not gunna judge me, even if she is judging me a little bit, she's not gunna love me any less. Worst comes to worst she's just gunna call me an idiot then give me a hug. I just messaged her hey I'm going for an interview at this place, and then afterwards I was like: hey I got the job start next week. Mum's like, okay, be safe.

Participants often disclosed to their mothers over their fathers, and inadvertently highlighted how gender and 'motherhood' was characterised by emotion work and care (Hochschild, 2012). The point is to not highlight that 'women' still perform this kind of care as such, but rather, that one's socialisation influences how they conceptualise and perform care within the family, including romantic relationships. For example, participants, through who they disclosed to, highlighted how traditional gender ideologies influence family dynamics and that men perform less emotional care work and women do more emotional care work (Garey, 2011).

The participants showed that 'outing' themselves was not always met with a breakdown of trust and a withdrawal of support, as was feared by many. Whilst gender and stigma did impact how sex work was framed by women, notably as unsafe and undesirable, many still received support from their mothers. However, when mothers did not support their sex working children it was clear that stigma and constructions of gendered violence in sex work was a contributing factor. Additionally, because sex work was criminalised it was often associated shame and danger. Judgment from parents highlighted how support was conditional within the family but also that participants often wanted acceptance as sex workers from their family.

Siblings

Sibling relationships have been researched less than other relationships within the family despite being a significant relationship throughout the life course (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2021). Participants shared stories about sibling relationships; however, they seldom spoke about their sisters. Rather, the brothers of participants featured more heavily. Brothers were shown to perpetrate stigmatised constructions about sex work. The stories told showed that the brothers of participants were overall more uncomfortable than their sisters with their siblings doing sex work. The participants highlighted how their brothers were often protective of them and overall were less likely to be supportive of sex work, and their fears were associated with discomfort around sexuality, sex and homophobia. These findings, whilst not conclusive, do highlight that traditional gender roles within the family remain intact and are reflected in the everyday lives of participants.

Gloria briefly mentioned her sister and that they were best friends. Her sister was the main person in her life to whom she was 'out' and expressed how important it was to be able to share with someone. Her sister did worry for her safety.

Gloria: My sister knows, yeah the only person in my family who knows (laughs). She's like literally my best friend. So I was just like, yeah this is what I'm doing (sex work). And then she's like okay, look, as long as you're safe... It's nice to be able to tell someone.

Ani similarly briefly mentioned her sister and how she supported her when she was working by looking after her child. She felt lucky to have that kind of support. However, both these accounts, whilst less common throughout the interviews, still highlight similar attitudes to how mothers within the family reacted to sex work, that their reactions were based on fear and worry.

Ani: Same as my sister, she was living with me at the time so she was looking after my child when I was working. So, she was very aware of that and she was all cool with it. I've been pretty lucky in that regard.

When Gabriel spoke to non-sex working friends, he was advised to pick the right moment in which to disclose his sex work to the rest of his family. But he did not see the point as sex work stigma and homophobia within society prevented him from doing so. He also highlighted how outsiders to sex work did not always understand that conversations about sex work are often not advantageous or even possible with family.

Gabriel: I think that's one of the reasons why my brother despises me. I'm pretty sure after I told my sister years ago and the times that I saw my brother after that, he said that I was an embarrassment. I've had various conversations with friends, mostly non-sex workers interestingly, where they have talked to me about picking the right moment to tell my mum and dad, and again I don't really see the point.

Some participants spoke about their male family members feeling discomfort around their sexuality and refrained from engaging in discussions about sex and sex work. Lucie felt that if her brother knew she was a sex worker he would struggle to understand. Speaking openly about sex with family is often considered taboo, and when disclosing sex work—especially to male family members—sex work often brought up discomfort, specifically around women's sexuality.

Lucie: And I'm pretty sure my brother knows about the videos but he chooses to not say anything. But if he were to find out I was doing escorting, it would be just like cut you off. See you later. Even when we were younger and I would talk about finding people attractive, he

would be like I don't wanna hear that, you're my sister, like just, thinking she's sexual and it's too much.

Jaz looked up to her older brother and wanted to be sure about sex work before disclosing to him. When she did disclose to him his support was conditional and paternal. He stated how 'no one wants their sister doing sex work'. This highlighted the cultural discomfort about sex and women's sexuality.

Jaz: I kept it from my brother because I really look up to him. So, I didn't tell him until I'd been doing it for a year. So, he reacted to it really well. He said obviously, no one wants their sister to be doing this. And he said as long as you're not doing it and into drugs and as long as you're smart with your money, I can have nothing but respect for you for doing it.

The brothers of participants expressed discomfort around women's sexuality, whereas women overall were concerned about the dangers involved with sex work. This highlights that the everyday lives of the participants are marked by gender. How family members responded to sex work could be influenced by gender and therefore how socialisation intersects with sex work stigma is important to understand, as not only does stigma impact the daily lives of participants, heteronormativity and the family unit, it also breeds discrimination and disparity, especially for women and LGBTIQ+ sex workers.

Friendship

While participants spoke in detail about clients, romantic relationships and birth, family or origin, they did not focus as much on friendships. This could be because friends were overall the most accepting of their sex work. Moreover, participants in the study, when talking about their everyday lives and the

people in their lives, often focused on the 'negatives' and how stigma impacted their relationships. Additionally, participants spoke about how they contextualised and managed risk, and friendships did not pose a risky space for participants in the same way as their other relationships did (Sibley, 2018). Overall, friends were supportive and provided safety in ways that family and partners often could not. This correlates with the literature around the importance of friendship and families of choice, where often members of marginalised groups receive support and acceptance from their friends rather than their biological family (Donovan et al., 2001).

When Enid started sex work, she was initially fearful about disclosing to her closest friends. She devised a plan where she would present her sex work as 'sugar baby work', and when this was met with a positive response she felt safe to completely 'out' herself. Her friends eventually became her biggest source of support and assisted her in her everyday work life.

Enid: I had a couple of friends that I was unsure what their reaction would be, so I kind of played with the idea of saying I would do sugar baby stuff. I had full intention of just doing escorting but I thought, oh hey, thinking of getting like, going on a site and getting like a rich boyfriend um, you know, just to give me an allowance and see what they thought. And they were like yeah cool, whatever. So, I kind of went okay, they seem okay with that. So, it took me another month to tell one, then two months to tell the other one, and then um, they've just become my support group. Literally helping me with it. Like get to work, set up for work and things like that. So it's just flowed really nicely.

When Andie spoke about disclosing their sex work to friends, they described it as a 'non-issue'. Andie described their friends as mostly progressive and therefore sex work was an accepted form of work that was not met with overt stigmatisation.

Andie: I've 'outed' myself to some friends yes, coz some of my friends are sex workers, so that was easy. Um, but I have been open about it to a few close friends, like a handful of close friends who are not sex workers um, but yeah that hasn't really come up either. I mean like most of my friends are pretty progressive anyway so that's like not really an issue.

However, even in friendship trust was still an issue for participants as sex work was seen to be salacious, especially to outsiders. It was difficult for Tami to believe that the people to whom she might choose to disclose would not share the information with others.

Tami: The reason I told my friend is because I trust her to keep it to herself. Whereas there are others who would be cool with it but you just can't guarantee that they won't then go to someone and say, now you can't tell anyone this... And then they go to someone and say you can't tell anyone this, and then it's out. Because there are people who would not be okay with it and I would not be able to control the cross over between those, so... Just coz it's Adelaide, Adelaide is small.

Bianca felt that sex work was a useful tool for her to filter out people in her life with whom she no longer shared similar values. She was not willing to pander to sex work stigma and therefore was happy to part ways with people who were not willing to be educated or support her in her work. This was how Bianca protected herself and ensured that she had support in her everyday life.

Bianca: When I first started, for the first four weeks I was petrified of anyone finding out coz I think I wasn't even sure of what I was doing. I was like I don't really know why I'm doing this, or what I'm doing, or what this even is. I was so lost and it was so foreign. And then after that I was like, nah, I love this. And I'm not letting anyone get away with telling me otherwise. And I think like I found it a really good way to actually filter people out of my life that I sort of

already had a bit of dissonance with. So it was like either an opportunity to educate people, and if people weren't willing to be educated it was like okay, we will pleasantly part ways.

Ruby spoke about how she chose her friendships carefully and felt that it was crucial to surround herself with friends who shared similar beliefs. Therefore, she was able to disclose with her close friends and knew they would support her.

Ruby: I don't think I've had any really bad responses from friends. But I think it's because I choose my friends very, very carefully. Um, and I already did beforehand. I'm sort of the kind of person that if someone has differing opinions to me in any way that I feel is something that is crucial to my beliefs then I probably would have a hard time connecting with them closely and I probably won't have a close friendship with them. So, every close friend that I know pretty much is aware of what I do and is okay with it, which is great.

Participants were often happy to cut out friends who were not supportive of their sex work, and often had clearer boundaries regarding their friendships in comparison to their family or their romantic relationships. Not many participants were so quick to cut out unsupportive family, though some were quick to break up with partners who stigmatised them. This highlights that participants have more power within their friendships in comparison to their other relationships, that is, people can choose their friendships but not their family.

Nina: There's one of them, that she's very closed minded and she cut me off. But she is a stuck-up bitch and she always has been and I've never really vibed that well with her anyway. So, there was no big loss honestly and if someone doesn't like what I do, there's the door! I don't need you in my life. So I've got plenty of awesome people in my life and I don't need anything else.

Participants showed autonomy and clear boundaries around friendship and were not as conflicted as they were within their romantic or family relationships. Cultural scripts around friendship differ to those around family, and friendship can be viewed as an alternative mode of sociality (Vera-Rosas, 2018). This was a space that represented the most choice for participants, where they often experienced support within their everyday lives, and if a friend stigmatised them they were happy to leave the friendship (Vera-Rosas, 2018). Additionally, participants felt like they deserved supportive friendships.

Sex work friends and colleagues

Participants highly valued their sex working friends, especially because several of them were largely closeted within their daily lives or could only share some aspects of their work with those closest to them, such as their partners. It was clear that relating to other sex workers was important and that participants shared more detail about their work lives with other sex workers as this was a 'safe space' to openly share about work. The theme 'sex work friends' related to support, safety, criminalisation and the home. McCausland et al. (2020) also found that sex workers were unable to fully disclose sex work to those closest to them and that establishing friendships outside of the industry was challenging. Whilst participants in this study did not report this challenge, many did feel that sex working friends understood their lives better and they trusted other sex workers like no other.

Support

Participants shared rich stories about the friendships they developed at work and described these as important support systems. Maisie spoke about her brothel in depth and how safety was prioritised.

Staff wellbeing, such as issues pertaining to mental health and burnout were considered important and necessary to support overall work health and satisfaction. Staff encouraged each other to take time out if they needed to and would provide assistance to each other if they needed time out.

Maisie: We tend to try and keep each other safe. If someone's starting to look a little worn out and life is getting to them a bit then you know, we can always just say, hey it's alright, just take the week off and one of us will come visit you and bring you some food, it's okay. The girls I work with are wonderful.

Additionally, Maisie conceptualised work as a social space where the work environment facilitated a closeness between work colleagues. When work was slow and she made no money she reframed it in a positive light where she was given the opportunity to spend time with her friends and saw it as a 'win, win' situation. This also helped her better cope with 'slow times' at the brothel.

Maisie: We go out to dinner every now and then. It's incredibly special. Half the reason I go to work is to just see the girls. I'm not even disappointed at the end of the shift any more if I don't get a single booking because, okay I didn't get paid but I got to spend eight hours hanging out with my friends so you know, win, win.

Some of Drew's best friends were sex workers and she stated how bonding it was to share aspects of her life that she was not able to share with non-sex workers. She felt connected to people at the brothel she worked at and appreciated the mundane, everyday aspects of work in addition to the support system work provided.

Drew: I've always worked in brothels. Brothels really suit me. I really like the friendships I make there, the sense of support. People to just talk with, pass the time with, pass the

boredom with. Um, even if you're not on with your friends or people who you're close to I love the sense of them. The feel of them. I love a girls' room. You meet all kinds of different girls. Some of my best friends are hookers. Some of my best friends I've met in the industry. And that's cool to be around friends because even if you're not on with friends, even if you're on with girls who are really different to you, I kind of love that too. Perhaps that's what I love so much about brothels, I was in the closet about it for so long. So good to have someone know, and it's so bonding. I think I've developed some close relationships with girls at work for that reason. Like we're in it together. I didn't have anyone to talk to about it for the longest time with exception to the girls at work.

Participants often shared their work lives with other sex workers and felt a unique kind of closeness to them. Having work colleagues to share their trials and tribulations with took pressure off them needing to share their work lives with friends and family, as they inevitably would not understand sex work due to stigma. Research has shown that some sex workers, for example private sex workers, do experience more isolation at work, highlighting how important access to a sex working community is in order to address isolation and that it enables much needed support systems for sex workers (Perkins et al., 1994; Treloar et al., 2021).

Safety

Sex workers were framed as the guardians of the sex industry and were also integral to ensuring that safety protocols were followed. They taught other new workers how to stay safe within the workplace, for example, how to avoid police detection or navigate safety at work, especially regarding safe sex and client interactions. When new people entered the sex industry other sex workers were quick to teach them 'the ropes' to ensure that not only the individual was safe but also their place of work was

protected, especially from the police. This highlights how sex workers provide an important support system and that sex workers work together to keep each other safe. When Drew started sex work at 17, other workers looked out for her and cared for her rather than taking advantage of her naiveté as a new worker. They taught her how to stay safe and she felt protected despite working in a criminalised industry.

Drew: They looked after me pretty well. They could tell my youth and my naiveté and the girls really like made an effort to take me under their wing. And everyone really explained to me a lot about safety and looking after myself, and I think maybe I always felt they were a little bit protective of me.

When Ruby started sex work she was very nervous, but a close friend of hers inducted her and supported her intensively for two weeks. She looked upon these memories fondly and it made her first experiences of sex work educational, enjoyable and unforgettable.

Ruby: I was lucky. I had one of my good friends who was already doing it help me get into it, which I'm extremely grateful for because I know not everybody has that opportunity. For like two weeks she helped me out and then I was off on my own. I was extremely, extremely nervous. She was answering all my phone calls and text messages for me on the first night because I was freaking out, you know I had so much anxiety about it. And I would just sort of crash at her place and stay up all night and take as many bookings as I could. She would work at the same time and it was really fun. We got to stay up and have like movie nights and stuff and just have our phones with us and then like 'ohhh got a booking', run and do that then come out again. That was really good, yeah. Definitely have good memories about that.

Sex working friends were integral to safety at work and shared important information concerning how to avoid police detection. This was especially important when participants did not have access to sex worker organisations such as SIN, which often provide peer education to sex workers. Margaret found out about the brothel raids from other sex workers, and at a time when she did not know how to avoid police detection or keep herself safe. She lived in fear every day due to the increase in police raids and stopped working for nine months.

Margaret: Um, and then, yeah, all these raids and stuff started happening, I didn't get raided, so it was fine, but it did freak me out a lot. Yep, and then, I stopped working. I stopped working for maybe 6-9 months. Just coz I didn't know what to do. I was doing everything on my own, I didn't know about SIN, or any of that stuff, coz I went just brothel hopping, they don't really tell you any of that stuff. So, I didn't really know any of that til, yeah, like, friends that I worked with at brothels saying oh like we got raided, oh girls got arrested and all this other stuff. Oh my God what do I do? Um, and I didn't really know, I knew it was illegal, but I didn't realise how I can protect myself as such.

Robyn spoke about avoiding police raids because other workers informed her when the police were on the premises. This was an important strategy and one of the many ways that sex workers kept each other safe at work.

Robyn: I've managed to miss about six raids because I came in two hours late or you know, coz straight away one of the girls that we work with would be like don't come in just yet, the cops are here.

Andie spoke about the important role that sex worker organisations play in keeping sex workers safe and informed, especially when working in a criminalised setting. When they first started sex work they received support from SIN.

Andie: But it was comforting to know, I guess that my first kind of serious foray into sex work was with someone who was very experienced and really knew what they were talking about, and was like able to offer to share that information. It was comforting to me to know that there was that support available. So I knew that if I did come into any trouble or did have any questions that I could go to SIN, you know, that there was someone I could talk to.

The kinds of everyday support that participants offered each other were reciprocal and differed from the other kinds of support they received from family and non-sex working friends because of their insider status and knowledge. Sex working friends were able to help new sex workers and taught them safety strategies specific to sex work. It was imbedded within work cultures that sex work could be social and provide much needed support, where not only did workers at times socialise outside of work, but also warned each other when they looked burnt out or when there was a risk of police raids. The sex work community was important to participants and was often the only space that participants could share openly about their work lives. Unlike the relationships with family, friendships and sex working friends were not dominated by themes of discrimination or stigma.

Work and home

One way that the reciprocal support system was highlighted between sex workers outside of work was when sex workers lived with each other. Several participants lived with other sex workers and formed family units outside of the 'traditional family home' and found increased support through

shared understandings of sex work. For example, Lucie lived with a housemate who was also a sex worker, and this meant that she was able to safely work from home without fears of discrimination or stigma. Together they strategised and found ways to stay safe at home. For example, when Lucie was in a booking her roommate would often come out of her room and walk about the house to make sure the client could hear someone else was home, therefore mitigating isolation and vulnerability.

Lucie: I make sure I'm safe at home, like I'll only ever take clients when my housemate is home. Just so if something happens. And there's been two occasions where, she hasn't had to come out and, coz I always say if you hear me like calling out, then just come out so they know there's another presence there. Or a lot of clients will ask, oh is there anyone else here? Or when I've taken a client into the room, she'll take a walk to the kitchen just so get a drink so they hear someone walking around. She's started dancing now, but she was also seeing clients. I wanted to get something like pepper spray, just for my own peace of mind just so if something were to happen...

Janine also lived with other sex workers, and eventually as a household they started doing cam work together. It was an easy and enjoyable way for the household to bond and make more money as a collective through cam work, as individually working cam was tiresome and hard work.

Janine: I was at one place living with an ex and I needed to move out. I went and lived with some house mates and at one point I told them I was a cam worker. One of the girls actually worked somewhere in Adelaide doing massage, and um, so eventually we were like why don't we try doing it together? And it was really fun. Camming with them was great coz there was so much more we could do together and made more money.

Fin initially felt like she could not trust other sex workers because she felt they were unreliable. However, eventually she moved in with another sex worker and felt safer. She was able to trust that her money was safe, and she felt understood and supported. It was important to her, as she worked so much, to have her housemate understand sex work, her hours and the kinds of specific supports she needed in her everyday life.

Fin: She was there the day I had my interview at the first place, and I always said I'm never gonna live with a sex worker because I think that they're all loose and unreliable. I'm part that myself but um, yeah, it's worked really well. Um, having someone at your house that um, just knows. My shit's safe and we both know what we do for money. Um, and you know, I have this weird desire to need to work 50, 60 hours a week and then just crash out in between. I burn the candle at both ends um, and then so it's great, she just helps to like help me maintain the house and with the dog and stuff like that. So um it's been good to have someone understand for sure.

As sex work can be an isolating profession, living with other sex workers proved to be a resourceful way of receiving specialised care and support outside of work and within the home. When sex workers lived with other sex workers, working from home became safer and participants felt that they could be more transparent about their work lives and not hide who they were.

Conclusion

When participants spoke about family and friendship it was clear the two were in contrast. Overall, 'family' posed a barrier to participants receiving support and feelings of acceptance, whereas friendship proved to be a space of security and increased understanding. These findings are in contrast

to other research on the subject as sex workers did not combine friends and family (Begum et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2011). Rather, these relationships were distinct and separate, unless the participant did not have a relationship with their family. Additionally, it was clear that gender roles were highlighted within the family, and that constructions of gender influenced family members' reactions to sex work. As far I am aware, this has not been explored within the literature to this extent and adds depth to the understandings about sex work and stigma within the family and how constructions of gender contribute to discrimination within the family. This points to how gender may be influential and must be considered when exploring law reform, because men and women view sex work differently based on their own experiences of gender and disparity or power, which could inform lobbying and targeted educational programs. For example, when campaigning for law reform messaging might consider how gender and power influence decision making.

These findings highlight how overall, participants want to participate within family life and want support from their families as sex workers. Stigma proved once again to be a barrier and meant that participants were often not able to receive the support they needed from family in everyday life. But some participants did share stories of supportive family relationships, which added to the complexity of the findings relating to family. Fortunately though, participants who had supportive friendships and connections to the sex work community were better able to receive the support they needed. Additionally, if participants were isolated within their everyday lives, work was framed as a social space and provided the emotional care and support that romantic relationships and family could not always provide. Sex working friends and sex work organisations were highlighted as integral to the community and helped keep sex workers safe, especially from the police.

Chapter Eight: Relationship to the Self and Sex Work

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have demonstrated how the stories of participants exemplify that in their day-to-day lives sex workers identify, manage and resist stigma and power. Stigma creates an additional burden for participants, where part of the work also means having to actively challenge stigma and learn to identify, manage and resist discrimination in everyday life. Participants did this through interrogating their lives and reflecting on 'who they were', 'where they came from' and 'what their values were'. Stigma forced participants to be clear about why they did sex work in order to challenge it, and this process highlights how important reflection is as part of developing expertise as a sex worker (Kong, 2006). This reflective practice was shown to relieve internalised stigma and promoted resilience (Carmichael et al., 2020; Kong, 2006; Scott, 1989). In this chapter I explore participants' relationships to self and sex work. By creating a strong sense of self, I found that participants were able to identify and challenge harmful narratives about sex work, which was a form of resistance. Everyday resistance however was not always explicit and obvious, especially to outsiders, as it was often specific to sex work culture and conducted through work settings that rendered it covert, indirect and invisible (Kong, 2006; Scott, 1989).

Additionally, participants explored intersectional identities and how these interact with sex work and sex work stigma. This highlights how cultural and structural stigma impacts more overtly on some participants than others. For example, all participants of colour spoke about racism within the sex industry and how this impacted their everyday lives. This showed that participants understood how power operates and spoke of it in their everyday lives through stories about who they were and how they experienced different forms of oppression (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). The findings of this

thesis have shown thus far that participants have a strong understanding of self through this self-reflective process, which they use to mediate the effects of stigma within their everyday lives. For participants, participating in this research was also a form of resistance because sharing their everyday lives with me was both cathartic and empowering, as they felt they were being given an opportunity to influence narratives and understandings about sex workers' everyday lives (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). This chapter focuses on stories that depict participants' relationships with themselves, and how awareness of the self, influences their everyday practice and lives. These final themes of resilience and intersectionality provide insight into how sex workers engage, embrace or resist constructions of race, the body, queerness and class. Their stories highlight the nuanced impact of intersectionality on the everyday lives of sex workers. This chapter ends with the final theme of dispelling stigma and critiquing politics to highlight the commitment participants made to bettering the everyday lives of sex workers as a community.

Mental health, reflection and resilience

Participants thought deeply about their everyday lives as well as how they interacted with society more broadly. This is important to highlight as sex workers are often depicted as passive and subject to violence and harm without any relationship to broader social and institutional context. But being stigmatised and subject to both institutional and cultural violence did mean that participants were forced to develop a 'specialised' internal cognitive 'mechanism' that allowed them to navigate the world with all its complexity and contradictions: but on their own terms due to whorephobia (Begum et al., 2013). Reflection and a critical outlook allowed participants to resist stigma, and this was a strategy used to nurture an autonomous everyday life outside of a system that they feared and which acted to purposefully disadvantage them. This practice has been shown to benefit other people in caring professions, such as psychologists, where self-care and reflection has been shown to promote

growth and resilience as practitioners (Carmichael et al., 2020). I argue that due to the nature of sex work and stigma, sex workers are forced to build a strong and robust reflective practice that enables sex workers to challenge stigma, counter burnout and make informed decisions about their work lives and safety (Carmichael et al., 2020; Dattilio, 2015; Vanwesenbeeck, 2005). This is especially important because sex work is stigmatised and criminalised, meaning that sex workers must develop strategies to protect themselves. Furthermore, this highlights the professionalism involved in sex work.

In order to deflect and navigate stigma participants often positioned sex work as empowering (Begum et al., 2013), but they also demonstrated how inequality contributed to violence. Participants were able to hold multiple contradictory experiences at once, such as talking about empowerment but also understanding how disparity dictated their everyday lives in particular contexts (Begum et al., 2013). During the interviews the participants would often 'focus on the positives' but also divulged stories of powerlessness and inequality. This highlights that these stories of empowerment were not only contextualised in their relationship to power and stigma, but that they were used as a pragmatic way to resist anti-sex work rhetoric. This can also be viewed as a micro-form of resistance, where sex workers use language to manipulate sex work stigma and reinforce how they feel about their work (Kong, 2006). Being an insider, I could see that participants were trying to tell a story that contradicted how society constructed sex work, and this opportunity to talk about the everyday as an insider with peers highlighted differing experiences of work and working conditions that depicted a more nuanced understanding of sex work, which this research set out to achieve (Kurosawa, 2020; Mac & Smith, 2018; Sanders & Campbell, 2007).

The participants spoke in depth about their mental health and how it was connected to sex work stigma (Treloar et al., 2021). In addition, they spoke about how sex work itself, despite stigma, helped address their mental health needs and self-care practices because the nature of sex work and their workplaces were often supportive, flexible and lucrative. Fin spoke about experiencing depression,

but also that sex work helped teach her resilience because she was surrounded by supportive women. She felt that balancing work life with her mental health needs became much easier after starting sex work.

Fin: Many people in our industry have mental illness of some description, but I think that teaches a lot of people more resilience more than anything. Because it's an environment where there's other women around, and they're all supportive of each other and compassionate. Depression can take a toll on your life, and you can find it hard to do certain jobs. I was always in kind of unhealthy environments, and I think to the outside world this would seem like a super unhealthy environment but I'd say 80 %, or 70%, of my tribe around me know what I do, the family doesn't obviously, but the people around me see I'm doing so well. I think that's been having money, it's been finding hours that suit me, and being able to work from midnight, onwards, so I do like four of those a week, and I have my job in a restaurant and work four nights a week there. It's afforded me to be able to get on with life and not be stressed. There's so much shit that could have brought me down.

Evita also spoke about experiencing serious mental health issues that prevented her from engaging in more 'traditional' forms for work. She needed flexibility to be able to care for herself when she was struggling with her mental health and this meant that she needed work hours that suited her.

Evita: I don't think I actually can hold down a job. Some days like I can't get out of bed. The flexibility with sex work is major for me. I just couldn't imagine like having a job where you're given a roster. That just blows my mind and after so many years of working, like what if I don't feel like going to work Thursday at 9am? Which like with bookings you do have a set time but you can cancel. I think sex work is incredible for me with my mental health stuff.

Drew reflected on why she continued to work despite all the stigma she experienced. For her, the real everyday in the working lives of participants was not about enjoying the work per se, but more so about pragmatism, independence and resilience. For Drew, money was the 'bottom line'.

Drew: People can say I did it for all these different reasons, but at the end of the day most people do it because you get paid, just like any other job. People don't do sex work for free and the money's pretty compelling. It might be a job you like or that suits you, but at the end of the day it's a job. Like, we are pretty motivated by the bottom line. So, if I were to really distil it down, yeah it would be the money.

Jessica felt that cultural and structural stigma, in her case specifically the family, organised religion and university institutions had failed her. She felt they did not acknowledge her drive, intelligence and passion. But the club where she worked did, and through cultivating sex work pride she resisted and worked through her internalised sex work stigma and was able to accept and value being a 'career' sex worker. At work Jessica felt powerful, whereas outside of work she had to build resilience to deflect stigma. Her account highlights how the workplace acted as a protective shield where she received support from other colleagues.

Jessica: There's nowhere else that has seen my drive, intelligence and passion and actually tried to help. Like university was terrible and no one gives a fuck, I didn't have family, and I didn't really have a support network. But the strip club was all of those things for me, so, why would you wanna then go and leave that? So, yeah, it did take a while to accept that... Within the walls of the club I feel like super woman. Because I've done it for so long, it's so internally supportive, but then outside there still is a lot of nerves for me attached to my work. You know, to the point where people when they ask me what I do, they don't even believe me because I don't look like what they think I should look like. And they're like, nah, you're joking,

what do you really do? And I'm like no, like, this is what I do. You know, and then also people saying, okay yeah, but then what are you gonna do after that? Also you know, like as if it's not a justified means to an end if I just say, well actually I'm a career stripper and I got into this thinking it would be a short amount of time, but it's ticked so many boxes for me over time that I've stayed and I surprised myself that I stayed but now I'm actually really happy and it serves my life completely.

For Hannah, sex work represented independence and she felt she was able to better resist society's expectations of her as a woman when she was working. Sex work for her meant that she felt free to be a version of herself that she deeply identified with, as a sexually liberated woman, whereas her everyday life as a wife and a mother was defined by responsibility and gendered roles pertaining to 'wife' and 'mother'. Sex work was incompatible with these, and stigma meant that she could not be a wife, mother and sex worker. To resist stigma, she aimed to integrate her sex work self into her life post-sex work to retain that sense of independence.

Hannah: And to not have that as a big part of your life. Like if it was a quick stint, like two months or trying sex work and then not liking it. But it was a huge part of my life and it was probably, actually no, hands down, it was the only job I loved. The only job. Seven years. The only job that would give me freedom and let me be who I am.

Dolly compared sex work to her previous profession, which was deeply corporate and rooted in capitalist ideology. She felt that sex work did not exploit people like her previous work did and she also felt much more secure in her job as a sex worker. To her, sex work made people happy and brought comfort and healing to the lives of her clients. It also meant she was better able to care for herself and her loved ones, whereas her previous job prevented her from doing so. She knew that

doing sex work did not carry the same prestige as her previous job; however, the role she played in people's lives as their sex work provider made it worthwhile. She never regretted leaving corporate life for sex work, and for Dolly, sharing this story represented her own private form of resistance and 'sticking it up to the man'.

Dolly: It was at that moment that I was like, I've got one job that I genuinely make people happy, and I make a difference. I bring comfort and healing and fun to people's life. Where I can make great money and no one can ever fire me. And I don't have to hand in a written explanation for the two minutes that I spent extra in the bathroom because I got my period. I can take as many days off as I need to, to look after my mum and now that I'm not working 70 hours weeks, I can actually be there to take her to her appointments. Because they get pretty sick of you being unreliable when you have to be a carer. So I had this one job where what I'm doing actually makes a difference in the world or I just have this other job that I'm doing, which I get paid a lot and it carries a lot of prestige. But it's really long hours and I make a lot of money for other people. But it doesn't make a difference to anyone in the long run, it's all just money and I'm being interrogated for daring to make things work for me, to have a work-life balance and they are questioning my commitment when I work so hard. So, I walked out on the spot. And you know, I have never regretted that. I threw away a massive career to be a ho and never, ever, ever have I gone, that was irresponsible. Never, not once... It's my biggest FU to the man and the rat race and, you know, all of it.

Despite being critical of systems that disadvantage people, including sex work, Gabriel was also deeply thankful for sex work and how it benefited his everyday life. Sex working offered him resources and opportunities to which he otherwise would not have had access. He felt that sex work helped him find and appreciate his own brand of success, one that took time to appreciate and accept because it was

not culturally celebrated; rather was shrouded in stigma, deviating from normative standards of what success traditionally looks like. This demonstrated how Gabriel resisted cultural norms and stigma to build up his own self-worth through redefining what success meant to him.

Gabriel: I'm really, really, really, really, really, really, really thankful to sex work in so many ways. I mean, it's just given me so many opportunities and for someone who kind of in some ways felt like a bit of a fuck up and also kind of like maybe someone who didn't have any skills, I was very intelligent, perceived maybe as intelligent, but, I could never really turn them into empowering things or maybe I didn't have the self-confidence like other people in my family did, who had skills that were very easily accepted and celebrated. I don't at all feel like inverted commas successful per say but to my own standards I do feel successful, and like wow, sex work is a huge part of that.

Maisie was appreciative of sex work because the flexibility allowed her to care for herself in ways that she specifically needed and otherwise would not have been able to. She felt that her everyday life was idyllic because she was able to thrive and balance her work and life with more ease. She resisted the nine-to-five capitalist life and prioritised self-care and joy.

Maisie: I suppose the flexibility of the roster is really nice, because it means that I can work evening or overnight, be able to make appointments during the day and still have days off every week that aren't filled up with housework and all those errands, which is really nice. I feel like a lot of my everyday life is kind of how most people, I feel, would probably want to be able to live. But of course it comes with the concession that this is what you do, so you can

afford to not have to work nine to five and fill up your weekends with all the stuff you don't have time to do during the week. It's given me a lot more time and resources to make myself happy I suppose.

Ruby felt that due to sex work she was able to enjoy a better quality of everyday life. Doing sex work meant that her mental health was more stable and better supported than when working in other professions. She also stated how it was the first job where she was able to comfortably care for herself and her partner. Much of her stress came from financial insecurity, and sex work helped alleviate that for her but also helped her feel more resilient and stable.

Ruby: When I compare how I've been feeling, like when I've been working 100% full time sex working as opposed to, working... I've done a whole bunch of different jobs. I've worked in a few different photography companies, I've worked in retail, I've worked in restaurants and bars and stuff like that. And in all of those jobs I felt significantly more stressed and overwhelmed than I have been doing sex work. It's been about two years since I've been doing escorting and my mental health is probably the best it's been my whole life. So that's pretty much like looking at those two different ways that I had to live, I can sort of really tell how much of a positive it's had on me. It's really comfortable. This is the first job that I've had where I've been able to comfortably pay my rent and my bills, like buy food and stuff, but then also have money left over to actually do things that I enjoy. And have a little bit extra so that I don't feel like I'm pinching every single penny. It's the most comfortable financially that I've ever been and it's made me realise how much my mental health issues were rooted in being stressed about money. Also to be able to choose and be like, I am not feeling very well today. Whether it's like a headache or it's just like I'm feeling really flat and I just don't want to work today. I don't have to! It's so, so good! It's made it so much easier for me to look after myself as well as, you know, continue to be able to look after the people I care about.

Gabriel reflected on how much he had grown over his ten-year career as a sex worker. His work and everyday life was strengthened and informed by cultivating self-worth, self-care and strong boundaries (Kong, 2006). He felt that in other professions his ability to prioritise self-care was discouraged and that sex work allowed him to better care for himself. For Gabriel, self-care was a form of resistance that capitalist society aimed to erode.

Gabriel: It's kind of a fascinating sex work journey in that I can look back on at that time and identify that some of my decisions and some of how I responded to stuff was a lack of you know, in part, maybe not entirely, a lack of self-care and a lack of self-worth. But it's fascinating because now, you know, I'm still a sex worker 10 years later and so much of my sex work is informed by strong self-care and strong boundaries. And you know, it being a job where I can do that stuff, whereas if I was working for someone and I needed a self-care day, I wouldn't be able to take it, you know?... I value myself through sex work, coz it makes me money and I can provide for myself.

Stigma was deeply embedded within the stories of everyday life narrated by the participants although in these stories it can be argued that resistance was 'doing the work' through practising and prioritising self-care, which sex work allowed them to do. Self-care and sex work were not only tied to resisting stigma, but also to resisting capitalist society and ideology tied to 'work'. Despite the difficulties that sex work stigma raised, and specifically within their relationships with clients, lovers and family as detailed in previous findings chapters, in this thesis overall, many participants felt an inner strength and resilience due to sex work despite the societal conditions within which sex work was performed.

Intersectionality and sex work

The participants were well versed in their experiences of sex work stigma and showed how power operated (Vaughn, 2019). They were clearly able to articulate the discrimination they experienced in their everyday lives and with deeper nuance than is often presented in the literature (Chapkis, 2010). In addition, their stories reflected the complexity of how sex work intersects with their other identities that also marginalise them (Crenshaw, 1991). Although all the participants experienced stigma, it was the intragroup differences for sex workers that also shaped their experiences of violence and discrimination within sex work (Crenshaw, 1991; Mahdavi, 2010; Nemoto et al., 2011; Vaughn, 2019). For many participants, sex work was also connected to other forms of discrimination where sex work stigma and power could not be separated from their experiences of racism, fatphobia, sexuality and class, as these also defined their experiences of sex work (Vaughn, 2019). Acknowledging the intragroup differences within this cohort of sex workers was important because these differences defined their identity politics (Brooks, 1999; 2010a; 2010b; 2021; Crenshaw, 1991). These differences have also been shown to be a source of strength, community and intellectual development (Brooks, 1999; 2010a; 2010b; Crenshaw, 1991; Kay Hoang, 2011; Stryker, 2015).

The participants experienced intersectionality according to categories of race, class, queerness and size, and reflected on how it played out in their everyday sex work lives and working interactions (Crenshaw, 1991). This heightened their experiences of sex work stigma and made their intersectional identities more pronounced through sex work, as these intersections were often tied to their 'value' and 'worth'. When speaking about racism, several participants specifically spoke about how they experienced racism within the sex industry and how this impacted their working lives, earning potential and interactions with clients. Racism meant violence was also tied to sex work stigma and that their everyday lives looked different from those of Caucasian sex workers (Vaughn, 2019). When

participants spoke about their bodies, they shared how fatphobia within the industry impacted their lives as sex workers and that they experienced additional barriers that other thinner, younger Caucasian sex workers did not experience. They also demonstrated how they resisted discrimination and empowered themselves through sex work to appreciate their 'queer' bodies despite fatphobia. Several queer participants spoke about biphobia in particular and how society failed to recognise them, comparing this to the sex work stigma they also experienced. This, and other issues pertaining to queer and LGBTIQ+ participants, differentiated their experiences from heterosexual participants. Class, privilege and power were evident throughout the interviews, and this informed how individuals worked but also the kinds of clients and markets they could access, including how they navigated these issues.

Exploring intersectionality and sex work showed how everyday stories help dispel reductive ideas of who sex workers are. When these intersections were explored it was clear, how for some sex workers, power dynamics played out more clearly in their everyday work lives (Vaughn, 2019). Participants were aware of this and that they at times embodied a 'cliché', but they were also aware of the many contradictions that were at play. For example, despite feeling powerless at times they also felt powerful at other times (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). This section highlights that not only are the everyday lives of sex workers more complex than cultural depictions and narratives suggest, but also that cultural narratives, discrimination, racism, fatphobia and homophobia impact sex workers in addition to sex work stigma, and that sex workers possess and use agency. In addition, it highlights that sex workers are not homogenous and that marginalised experiences must not be erased from depictions of sex work. Instead, they ought to be highlighted and brought to the forefront. Lastly, sex work might be better viewed as a microcosm of society and can reflect how society treats marginalised groups, such as women and people of colour.

Racism

All participants of colour highlighted the overt forms of discrimination and racism they experienced and connected it to not only how they were treated at work but also more broadly within Australian society. In addition, they told nuanced stories of how racism shaped their everyday lives as sex workers, where trying to earn money through sex work was often difficult or they faced additional barriers that Caucasian sex workers did not face. For example, Andie frequently felt 'othered' as a South-east Asian person living in Australia and explained how they were already at great risk of experiencing racism and discrimination outside of their sex work identity, both as a person of colour and as a queer, non-binary person. They did not feel ready to be 'out' as a sex worker as well and risk their career prospects because they were already facing other barriers. They had to manage and hide their identity as a sex worker to prevent other forms of discrimination, 'othering' and violence within their everyday lives. For them, resisting 'needing' to be 'out' was a form of resistance and meant they were better able to protect themselves in everyday life. Internally, they accepted and celebrated their sex work and advocated for sex workers when it was safe to do so.

Andie: The fear of being 'outed' wasn't just to do with people that I knew and how they would react and how that would affect me personally. Part of that was also because I didn't want to play into that stereotype of being a South-east Asian sex worker. Also, how people viewed other people, like other South-east Asian women or non-binary people, or femmes. And it was just like, I don't want to be seen in that way. So, for me it wasn't just about my family and friends finding out, it was about how people would view me generally... The reality is that being 'out' does have costs and I'm not ready to risk that yet. Just because I'm still young and I'm still trying to establish my career and I know that it could be detrimental. As someone who's already at high risk of being discriminated against, I don't want them to have another reason to do it.

Gloria was a black sex worker and her feelings of safety and anonymity were compromised when clients asked her where she was from. This frightened her because she was from a small migrant community therefore protecting her identity was crucial. She could not risk being outed and in addition was also wary of clients locating her outside of work, as this had happened to her before. She often felt 'exoticised' by clients and this meant that they asked invasive questions about her ethnicity.

Gloria: Once people get to know me they stop treating me like an exotic thing but when they first come in with they're like oh my God you're so beautiful. I could have literally just dragged myself out of bed, you know, no makeup nothing. And they're like oh my God your skin is so soft and like you speak such good English, and where are you from? And that's what I hate. Like don't! I just want my privacy, don't ask me where I'm from!

Tami identified as Asian-Australian and spoke in detail about the racism she experienced both inside and outside the sex industry. Though she acknowledged her relative privilege as she grew up in Australia and English was her first language, it still did not negate experiences of racism. This frequently came up for workers of colour, where clients would 'other' them and assume they could not speak English. She marketed herself as Asian-Australian to avoid complications regarding her ethnicity, but she continued to experience racism regardless.

Tami: I'm used to it anyway because I'm obviously, outside of the industry, still Asian (laughs). But in a sense, I am more privileged than some other Asian workers because I did grow up in Australia. I was raised here. I have the advantage of being able to speak English as a first language so I do get some of those privileges, because there are clients who are attracted to Asian women but they don't like not being able to talk. They want to have a proper conversation too and they can have that with me.

Tami also felt angry that clients did not properly read her advert, though this was a common complaint from sex workers more broadly, for Tami it also intersected with experiences of racism. Clients would reduce her to racist tropes about 'Asian sex workers', highlighting how racism impacted her everyday work life. She often had to 'tolerate' racist clients in order to secure a booking.

Tami: Going back to like the racism thing and the being an Asian thing, I am in the significant minority... because 95% of the Asian workers in Adelaide do work in a parlour situation where they can do cheap bookings. Depending on where my stress levels are that day, or my burnout, I try to be tolerant. Because I do think it's annoying that clients didn't bother to read my ad, but how are they to know that I'm different from the other Asians in Adelaide? (laughing). Which they would know if they did read the ad.

Margaret also spoke about these issues and how despite advertising that she was Asian-Australian she was still nonetheless asked if she spoke English or if she was 'white'. She felt like her ethnicity, being Asian but being born in Australia, was confusing to clients. Despite clearly conveying that she was Asian-Australian and fluently spoke English she nonetheless had to navigate racist enquiries. This highlights how being 'Australian' is associated with 'whiteness', which overtly erases and subverts Australia's colonial history and exposes people of colour to more violence.

Margaret: I say Asian-Australian. I get a lot of messages though of people asking do you speak English? Are you white? They are obviously looking for something in particular and then because I say I love having a good conversation and I'm intellectual they kind of think, is she Asian to the point that she can't speak English? But she's advertising like this? But I do say on there, exotic Australian-Asian mixed.

Margaret worked as a full-service sex worker both privately and in a brothel setting. She also experienced instances when clients found her 'too Asian or not Asian enough'. She described a time when a client walked out because he did not expect English to be her first language. Margaret said it took her a while to understand how Asian sex workers were fetishised in the sex industry and what this meant for her as an Asian-Australian sex worker.

Margaret: Brothel-wise, I found they'd ring up and say oh do you have an Asian on? And they'd be like yeah we do, and then I'd go in and some would say oh she's too Asian or she's not Asian enough. I remember this one time I intro'd this guy, like oh hey I'm blah blah, and he was like, you speak English? YES! Like I was like what? He was like no, no thanks. I'm like, okay... Went to the receptionist and was like I think he doesn't want me to speak English. I'm really confused. When the receptionist said like said to him, oh you don't like the look of her? And he's like no, I wanted someone that wouldn't talk. And then I was speaking to the receptionist and she said guys do wanna see Asians that will just you know suck 'em off, kick 'em out, that's what they like. But I couldn't imagine a session like that. I'm like, I wanna know about you, I wanna tell you about me, I don't wanna just lay on my back and kick you out. So I thought it was quite funny, I just didn't understand where he was coming from. And then yeah, she's like guys have fetishes, like that's a fetish.

Andie felt that internalised shame and stigma interacted with racism and was evident when clients othered marginalised sex workers. Though they felt that clients also may have chosen certain workers, for example migrant workers, because clientele might better avoid seeing their sex work provider in the 'real world.'

Andie: It's not necessarily a fetish thing always, but people are sometimes trying to distance themselves from the stigma of being a client. They feel more anonymous when they see sex

workers who they think don't speak English because they feel like there is less chance of the worker having some connection to their social circle. They are trying to protect themselves because of the shame and stigma associated with seeing a sex worker but also there is the implicit othering in that thinking that they think that the worker is of such a different social standing or experience that there is no way they will connect in the 'real world' outside of sex work.

Participants of colour did not only experience racism at work but elsewhere within their everyday lives (Brooks, 1999; 2010a; 2010b; 2021; hooks, 2015; Kempadoo, 2001b; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998). This was highlighted by all participants of colour, was shown to be a barrier to experiencing equality at work and created more marginalisation (Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998). Sex workers of colour were treated differently from Caucasian sex workers, where harmful and racist tropes influenced by cultural depictions of sex workers of colour were highlighted and perpetrated by clients and Caucasian sex workers (Brooks, 2010a; 2010b; Vaughn, 2019). Specifically, participants showed how their boundaries, privacy and selfhood were disrespected and violated by clients (Brooks, 1999; 2010a; 2010b). However participants also outlined advantages, and that advertising they were a sex worker of colour was a selling point, which helped ensure regular business.

Fatphobia and the body

Fatphobia within sex work has seldom been explored within academia, although several sex workers have spoken about their bodies, fatness and sex work (Hester & Walters, 2016; McNamara et al., 2015; Stryker, 2015). Being a bigger-bodied or fat sex worker meant that they experienced more instances of sexualised and violent attention at work in comparison to smaller-bodied sex workers, meaning that their work lives involved navigating other forms of discrimination in addition to stigma

(McNamara et al., 2015; Stryker, 2015). Some participants spoke about the disconnect between the public ridicule of their bodies and how privately clients specifically sought them out, a finding also made by Stryker (2015). Overall, whilst many participants spoke about their bodies and how sex work improved their confidence, bigger-bodied participants spoke about additional barriers to finding security within their bodies due to fatphobia. These experiences were both exacerbated—and at the same time alleviated—by sex work, highlighting how complex ‘feelings about sex work’ were for participants. Fatphobia also meant that sex workers needed to market themselves in specific ways to attract the ‘right clientele’ but also to avoid fatphobic clients and harassment (Stryker, 2015). Bigger-bodied or fat sex workers had to learn to reassure themselves in what was often an antagonistic environment for bigger or fat bodies (Hester & Walters, 2016). When participants fell outside of normative body standards, both in terms of size and race, they spoke about different kinds of everyday harassment and discrimination, especially at work. However, stories of resilience highlighted how sex workers mitigated violence and overcame fatphobia and stigma through autonomy.

Janine pointed out how culturally reinforced fatphobia was within the everyday by highlighting how unreliable and inaccurate clothing sizes were and that they contributed to skewing attitudes towards ‘acceptable’ body size. She noted how often in clothing stores a size 12 was considered a large size and that clothing sizes are used as measures by which people assess their value and worth (Bishop et al., 2018).

Janine: When you go into a clothes store and XXL is a size 12 and you’re like that twists people’s mindset in society. That contributes to body dysmorphia. That’s actually quite small and women are being told they are extra-extra-large. Or even like large and it’s like no, you’re not.

Jaz stated how before commencing sex work she had believed that men only found thin bodies attractive. Sex work heightened her confidence and self-worth, but she still struggled nonetheless due to normative ideas and standards of beauty more broadly culturally.

Jaz: I actually find my self-esteem, like it's still not great but I actually think it's increased a bit from being in the sex industry. Before coming into this industry I honestly thought that every single man wanted a size six, with breast implants, you know, five foot ten. I didn't realise actually there are a lot of guys out there that don't want someone super skinny. They actually like girls that are a size 12, 14, 16. So that's actually helped my self-esteem.

Janine spoke about the disconnect between how bigger-bodied or fat people are treated culturally and the private desires of individual clients. Fatphobia meant that shame was closely associated with desire for bigger bodies. Although she knew that bigger women were popular and that there was a market, attracting clientele was difficult.

Janine: Bigger women are so popular, and I think a lot of that is because you're not, bigger is generally not like attractive in society, so it's like this taboo thing and if a mate was with a bigger girl or having sex with a bigger girl, it's like he will be made fun of by his friends and stuff if he tells them he's attracted to these people then you know that's not what we're supposed to like sort of thing. So then going to a worker who's bigger, he can then kind of indulge in that attraction to bigger women.

Jaz shared multiple accounts of online harassment and fatphobia, and after a series of fatphobic attacks she decided to advertise as a 'Big Beautiful Woman' (BBW) worker. She did this hoping it might divert some of the violence she was experiencing and might attract more respectful clientele (Stryker, 2015). She knew that as a size 16 she was not considered a 'real BBW' worker but still felt that she had no choice and that her advertising did not signal enough that she was plus size. She highlighted how advertising was used as a strategy to mitigate violence, fatphobia and client expectations.

Jaz: Someone I've never seen before, never spoken to before, just randomly telling me that I'm way too old and fat and unattractive to charge the rates that I charge. And that he's just doing me a favour by telling me and I wrote back. I was like, so see someone else. You're a sad loser that feels the need to message a sex worker you've never even met telling them this, and then he just got super angry and he was just abuse, after abuse. It's horrible. It's really horrible. And like what the hell are they thinking? Who gets enjoyment out of that? It's really like, even though the logical part of me knew that he was the one with the issue it still ruined my whole day. Like I felt like shit, like I was almost crying because of the stuff that he's said. And that's actually when I labelled myself as BBW because he was like saying this stuff. That triggered it, to label myself as that. And I just yeah, it was horrible. And because I'm not, I'm a size 14 to 16, which really isn't that big. But in this industry they seem to think that it's too big you know. And um, so it's like, this hasn't happened on me heaps, but I have had guys arrive for bookings before and then just look at me and be like oh you're not what I expected and leave. And it is crushing. It is like, you just wanna cry. You feel so horrible. So I figured it's better to label myself as BBW and then at least they know that I'm not like a skinny little stick. But yeah BBWs are quite big. They would be like, what the hell you're talking about?

As has been previously highlighted, Tami was also harassed and targeted by trolls online due to her race and size. However, she laughed it off and was able to do so because she contextualised the

harassment and located the issues within society, not herself. This was a strategy she used to mitigate violence and she chose not to internalise stigma, racism and fatphobia.

Tami: I get troll texts from randoms saying you fat cow, or whatever and I just laugh. It legit doesn't hurt my feelings if like some rando tells me I'm ugly coz I'm like, don't care. (laughs)

Being plus size in day-to-day life was something that Janine struggled with, although she navigated this by reassuring herself of her worth. She stated how she would routinely remind herself that people were attracted to bigger women and that 'everyone's attractive to someone'. Consistent with findings by Tovar (2016; 2018), this 'self-talk' and reflection was another way that sex workers resisted fatphobia and reinforced fat-positivity within their everyday lives.

Janine: Being bigger, that's hard in day-to-day life. So, when I'm not getting appointments I'm like that's because I'm blah, blah, blah. But I have to remind myself that I am a specific niche that people are looking for and people do come to me. They're not going to come pay money to someone that they aren't attracted to... You're the person that I want to pay to do this thing. So it can be hard, but I just need to sort of sit myself down and talk myself through it and understand that everyone's attracted to someone. Everyone's attractive to someone.

When Fiona worked in a massage parlour it took them a while to attract clients due to fatphobia. Additionally, management did not understand how to effectively advertise them as a BBW. They were disheartened at first but decided to manage their own advertising and learnt how to advertise themselves more successfully. This was a protective strategy and self-management tool used to resist fatphobia through agency and control over how they were advertised.

Fiona: I can remember one of my firsts and it took a while to get my first client because I'm not your stereotypical, classically pretty, rub-and-tug girl... I got a thick skin pretty quickly. Where I worked I was lucky enough that they had retainer, so it was 20 dollars if you'd go in and not get any work. At the end of your shift you'd get the 20 dollar retainer. It's hard and it does play on you emotionally, especially at the beginning when you see the other workers just go through and they're getting five, six, seven clients a shift or even like two or three, you know. There're girls that have their regulars, that will come in and then you're sitting there going what's wrong with me?

So I preferred managing my own ads. I just felt I was better at describing myself and selling myself than the descriptions that management would put in. I learnt to advertise myself better. And then going into recaptioning myself I was learning how to describe the other girls as well and that's how I learnt what works and what doesn't. I did get to a point where I started getting clients and I realised that while I'm not everybody's cup of tea, I'm somebody's. You know, you learn that there's somebody out there for everybody. Um, and those that came in and saw me loved me. Like they weren't interested in anything else that was available because I was so unique and different and I filled a niche. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough in the niche to keep me going but it did help build that confidence. I am sexy and people do wanna be with me. People are attracted to me. It may not be every Tom, Dick and Harry out there, or John (laughs), but there's somebody.

Participants spoke in depth about their bodies and how sex work built up their confidence, although for bigger workers the additional barriers due to fatphobia and discrimination meant they had to closely manage client expectations and mitigate the effects of abuse. They did this through agency, and were able to reinforce their value through contextualising their experiences as fatphobic.

Being queer

Sex work has often been framed as reinforcing heteronormative gender roles (Ahmed, 2011) and whilst it can, sex work nonetheless is positioned outside of heteronormative culture and therefore can be viewed through a queer lens and as queer work (Laing et al., 2015; Stardust, 2015). Many sex workers do identify as queer, and in this study over half of the participants identified as such. This is notable as this research project did not set out to explore queer sex work. Queer sex workers have often been left out of discussions regarding sex work, and this can be viewed as a kind of queer erasure where non-normative identities are routinely overlooked and often for the purposes of reinforcing gendered binaries and dualisms (Laing et al., 2015).

Queer participants in this study shared stories about their non-hetero and homonormative everyday sex working lives, therefore this research is also ultimately about the lives of queer people, not only sex workers embodying a heterosexual experience. Queer sex workers highlighted stories specific to their queer experience and told stories of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia that were embedded within their everyday lives and sex-working lives. They were defiant and resisted heteronormativity by highlighting their 'queerness' to me. Internalised whorephobia was experienced differently and intersected with internalised queerphobia (Laing et al., 2015), therefore adding nuance to how whorephobia is experienced by queer sex workers.

Ani worked in a brothel and struggled with her identity as a lesbian sex worker. She did not feel supported within the queer community, was actively discriminated against and struggled to marry her identity as a lesbian with her identity as a sex worker. When she discovered the rich legacy of lesbian sex workers she was comforted and did not feel so alone in her experience. It is because of the historic invisibility of lesbian sex workers that she had struggled at work with her identity, henceforth why queer stories are needed.

Ani: I'd read a few really good books and some of them were fiction even, but, I discovered that there was this whole legacy of lesbians involved in sex work. And that was so affirming for me, as a lesbian doing sex work, knowing that it didn't mean that I was straight, because there's all these other girls that have come before me that have done it. You know, there's this whole history of my community doing sex work.

As a queer, cisgender male sex worker, Gabriel felt that whorephobia made dating more difficult for him. He felt that because normative and monogamous relationships were more widely accepted within society, and that while same-sex marriage had been legalised, queer and non-normative lifestyles were still treated as marginalised and undesirable. He felt safer identifying as queer and felt that aligning with the queer community over the 'gay' community meant his experiences as a sex worker were more visible and celebrated.

Gabriel: Coz there's lots of faggots out there who would abhor the thought of being a sex worker or dating a sex worker and it's a fucking tricky one. Did being queer make it easier? No. Coz you know, homos are accepted, they're allowed to get married now, sex workers are not. Maybe it made me a bit more resilient, because I'd been through that a bit more already. I think certainly within queer culture there is more um, and certainly queer culture for men, like there's more prevalence and more awareness of sex work and not just for queer men, but I think more so for queer women, queer people and trans people, you know?

When Ani 'outed' herself to a friend's partner she was met with disgust and felt both undermined and misunderstood as a lesbian and sex worker. She felt that because she chose to have sex with men for money that the lesbian community would question her identity. She highlighted the complexity of

sexuality and that one's sexual activities, especially within a sex work context but also more broadly, did not always align with one's sexual identity.

Ani: I got some whorephobic responses from some of my lesbian friends, and that made me feel really shit... I came 'out' to a friend's partner and her instant reaction was like, oh my God, ewwwwww. Like that's so gross, and I was at a birthday party so it wasn't like a space where I could be like, well actually fuck you. I just was so shocked actually at the time that I just kind of went, okay, I guess it is. And I feel so shit now that I said, yeah I guess it is sometimes gross, coz it wasn't. I mean of course every job is sometimes gross, but like, I've had more gross experiences in other work that I've done than I did in the brothel. But I guess maybe it would have been the same for her if I had come 'out' and said I'm bisexual, because maybe that would have been gross for her as well. So it was maybe the concept of sleeping with men. But I just kind of came away from that feeling so undermined, and so misunderstood by the lesbian community as a whole, just from this one person. Your sexuality is not the same as, does not equal your sexual practices, like I can identify as a lesbian and still sleep with men, particularly in a work context, and still hold my lesbian identity, you know they're two different things...

Furthermore, Ani critiqued the radical feminist lesbian rhetoric to which sex workers are subjected as serving to reinforce the patriarchy, that is, that sex workers are victims with no autonomy. She was angry and resisted this narrative, especially that she was not able to make informed decisions about her everyday life.

Ani: Um, so I think that's yeah, I guess that's something I really struggled with was like, you know, we have been here this whole fucking time and the idea that we still experience such whorephobia from the queer community is just like, you know, and the idea that we're playing

into the patriarchy or that like, we're victims of the patriarchy, we don't know what's good for us or whatever. Is just such bullshit.

Tina spoke about experiences of biphobia within her everyday life. She was comfortable with her identities as both a sex worker and bisexual but compared the judgment she felt about sex work to her bisexuality and felt that it simply was not worth 'outing' herself to people when she knew she would be misunderstood and exposed to unnecessary prejudice.

Tina: Yeah it was quite good. I actually felt, felt happy coz we worked together and we worked well together, we do different things now but yeah. But I didn't tell her anything else. Because we were with other people as well and I just didn't want people telling other people. It's none of their business. Not that I mind, coz I didn't mind her knowing, and other people knowing, but it's just how they would judge me about it, then tell other people and like calling me a slut, things like that. I don't want those kinds of things to get around at work. Coz I wanna be everyone's friend but you know, people are judgmental. And yeah it can be a very gossipy environment. Even with sexuality. Coz I'm a bisexual. But even I know some people at work who don't like lesbians and there are a lot of people like that. I think it's a cultural thing as well because it's a multicultural place. So, I tend to keep to myself, especially with those people. It's hard. It's just like the judgment and also explaining, having to explain to people things (about sex work and sexuality), and I just don't have the time and patience. You shouldn't have to. But I hear about lesbians cutting ties with girls coz they know they like guys too. So I'm just like, I'm judged, like even with the sexuality thing.

Jill wanted to do street-based sex work as she was struggling financially. She was not scared about working on the street per se but was more fearful of being visible as a trans person on the street who was doing sex work, as she had frequently experienced harassment in public spaces.

Jill: It was great to have that friend who was willing to support me and support my decision to do some street. But I'm petrified. Absolutely petrified of getting abused and not so much being a sex worker, that doesn't scare me so much. It's being trans and being a sex worker and getting abused by transphobic people. Just the general public. Calling out 'tranny' and throwing eggs, which I've had people do. Yeah so that's what scares me the most.

Hannah spoke about working as a bisexual person and the 'gay for pay' culture within sex work. She understood that performance was part of sex work, but she felt uncomfortable when she had to erase her bisexuality within the work context.

Hannah: It's funny when sometimes you do doubles because girls who go gay for pay, but then when you actually go do the booking and you know be sexual with them and physical with them they're like can you just pretend to go down on me (laughing)? What does that even mean? So, okay, I'll pretend. Not that I care, but at the same time I was like, well you're making me feel a little awkward because I'm not going to beg you to eat your pussy.

Janine identified as gay and asexual and chose not to do any full-service sex work. This story highlights the diversity of queer and sex worker experiences, where sex workers can work in ways that feel safe for them. Janine felt empowered to work and still maintain her boundaries as a gay and asexual person.

Janine: I identify as gay, as well as being asexual, and I just couldn't handle it (full service). Currently, I do domination, findom and foot fetish/foot worship stuff. And I've been doing that for I'd say about a year. But it's not particularly popular. There are times when I wish I could do it and bring in some more money but it wouldn't be worth the strain on my mental

health. So, I don't offer any full service because due to trauma in my life I'm often repulsed by the idea of me having sex. I can feel quite uncomfortable with the thought of it so I don't do anything sexual... So you can imagine when someone's paying money like that and they're looking for a particular service they generally will want a sexual thing, so I try to call myself a classic Domme where I am completely in control.

Queer sex work experiences were important to highlight and honour, as queer people made up a significant proportion of the participants. Highlighting these lived experiences not only gave voice to queer sex workers but also highlighted the diversity of people involved in sex work and how people manage their identities outside of sex work. For several of the queer participants sex work stigma meant that they were further marginalised; however, this occurred not only within sex work but also within the queer community. LGBTIQ+ people had to navigate other intersections that heterosexual sex workers did not, demonstrating the complexity of queer sex workers' experiences and their capacity to understand their nuanced nature.

Class

Sex work attracts a diverse range of people for various reasons but at the same time, as the stories of the participants have shown—similar to the findings of other studies—many were ultimately drawn into sex work for financial reasons and security (Ditmore et al., 2010b; Maher et al., 2012). Studies have shown that sex work can offer more money, and in less time, and that it is more accessible to a broader range of people, especially people of colour, non-university educated, working-class and trans and gender-diverse people (Ditmore et al., 2010b). Sex work is also one of the only industries where women, trans and gender-diverse people and migrant populations can earn more when compared with other industries—and more than cisgender men (Ditmore et al., 2010b; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998). FOSTA-SESTA has led to increased surveillance of sex work, especially online, and as a result

sex workers are earning less and work has become more precarious (Jackson & Heineman, 2018; Mia, 2020; Musto et al., 2021; Stern, 2019). The appeal of online sex work has also increased due to global instability, meaning that sex work has become more saturated and also that it is being performed in an everchanging environment. These interviews were conducted shortly after FOSTA-SESTA laws passed, and it is within this context that participants discussed their everyday lives, demonstrating how class intersects with the law and impacts their working lives.

Several participants shared how sex work helped alleviate financial insecurity and enabled them to work through anxieties that were connected to poverty and class. Before sex work, Lucie had worked in casual jobs and mainly within the hospitality industry. She was used to earning low wages and working hard for little return. When she started sex work she was struck by the amount of money she could earn and in such a short amount of time.

Lucie: And then obviously the money as well. Like the first time I had a client and he handed me the money and I'm like this is what I wanna do now. I knew it as soon as I got the money! I've never earned this much money for doing this amount of work, whereas I'd be busting my ass in another job just to earn 20 dollars an hour.

Theresa explored how experiencing poverty and not having any familial support meant that saying no to money and work had become difficult for her as an adult. Her finances were a source of anxiety and she had to practise learning to say no to work in order to create boundaries for herself and prevent burnout. Several participants identified anxiety connected to poverty, including Theresa (in her past).

Theresa: My ex-husband screwed me over, drove me into the ground financially. They cut my gas off. I have a little mini foxie, and I had an opportunity to go into a flat but I had to get rid of him and I went no, I'll whore for kibble. I never had family support, even before they found

out I was a hooker, so I just thought, I'm on my own, I gotta figure my finances out. Did three shifts at a brothel and the rest is history. Because I came from such financial despair and it took me a solid year after my partner left me to get myself financially sorted, I just vowed I'll never be broke again. So, I tend to push through, and I tend to go hard. You know like fuck it, I'm gunna take that next booking and I always burn out and I hate life, I hate men. And I'm learning to say no to work. And that's really hard coz in my head it's money that I'm missing. It's really psychologically difficult for me to say no to work. And learning to do that has been life changing. When I have a massive burnout I usually take all my ads down. I have like a tanty.

For working-class participants, having to play the part of a 'glamorous high-end' escort meant not being able to reveal their working-class backgrounds because they feared they would be 'othered', stigmatised and their service devalued. This exposes how power operates against working-class sex workers where, like in other industries, working-class or poor workers are discriminated against and punished for their class. For working-class sex workers, power was more precarious.

Enid: I obviously I don't tell them about my problematic past because I am charging a premium. I'm this high-end escort. And I don't want to be, oh I'm high end, by the way I was also a foster kid and homeless and shit, you know? That's just off putting. And you don't want the judgment of them being like, oh you're a bit lower class then aren't you? That's the vibe you'll get, so that side of it's very private from the clients, but also more for a business perspective.

As part of her service Margaret offered several different rates to appeal to a more diverse range of clientele. However, clients who were after an 'exclusive' and 'premium' service would remark on her lower rates and that it was off-putting for them. She felt that working-class clients were more

respectful and that upper-class clientele felt that it was an indication of the quality of her service. She experienced power differently depending on the client and their class background.

Margaret: Even now I'll see, you know, higher-up businessmen and they'll get my deluxe which is \$400 for half an hour, and they'll say like, oh why do you offer this lower rate, like it kind of turned me off a little bit? And I'm like, oh that's for people that don't have your lifestyle. I wanna meet people of all different walks of life. So I find I've got this more affordable option, which is still expensive, people still have to save to see me for \$250 for half an hour. Like that's some people's half-weekly income. Then I've got others that just have all this money that they can just throw at anything, which I find at \$250 the guys are booking that one rather are just horny guys that just wanna get off, or they've saved and are like thankful.

Nina commented on the intersection of her own class and privilege, specifically focusing on how growing up in a rural area impacted her outlook regarding privilege. She was conventionally attractive and had the financial means to curate her 'look' through exercise, diet and surgery, which also meant being able to charge a premium rate, thereby attracting a 'high-class' clientele. She acknowledged that it took her some time to reflect on and acknowledge her own privilege. Once she came to a place where she better understood her own privilege, she felt more understanding towards other sex workers. This privilege also extended to her experiences at work where she enjoyed 'more respect' from clients who had been flagged as problematic by other workers. This also highlighted how some sex workers are able to interrogate their own privilege to better understand the whorearchy.

Nina: Like I said, a lot of the gentlemen I see, they're the ones that have a very high-stress life and are looking for an escape from reality. And then you get the other ones that believe that no sex worker is worth over x amount. Then it's actually really funny, because there's a really well-known person on one of the forums, and he can be very rude. And a lot of girls don't like

him. I didn't like him and then I met him in person. And we got along really, really well. Next thing I know he's paying for one of my more expensive services on a regular basis. Which was a real big eye opener because he will sit there and go, oh this girl, this is her flaw, and I had talks to him about that. But I can't change what he does on forums and all I can do is focus on the time we spend together. They will say one thing on a forum, but then they'll turn around and he'll still book me once a month for an expensive service. But that's where I'm lucky and I'm admitting I'm privileged. I am a privileged worker. To be able to look the way I do and even have the opportunity to improve on my looks and to have the clientele that I see, I am privileged. And it's something that took me a little bit to get my head around. I didn't really recognise it. I had a 'it is what it is' kind of mentality for quite a while, which comes from coming from small towns and things. But then over time, I started to show a lot more empathy to other workers of different nationalities, different sizes, different genders and things like that.

After FOSTA-SESTA laws passed sex workers also had to contend with the cheapest and most accessible advertising platforms shutting down and being replaced with more expensive options. Sex workers who had regular clientele fared better after this, although many sex workers struggled. Several participants stated how they struggled to afford the alternative platforms. Gloria stated how after this she considered going back to brothel work, though she knew that she could not risk working in South Australia due to the criminal status of sex work. FOSTA-SESTA highlighted the precarity of sex work and also that this was often perpetrated by the state and made the lives of working-class sex workers more unstable.

Gloria: Cracker was convenient, it was cheap and you pretty much put your ad up whenever you wanted. It was so much cheaper and then the whole, like when Cracker went down and no one really knew where to go to advertise and stuff. I actually contemplated maybe going

back to the brothel but then not in Adelaide, I'd never brothel work here. The good thing is, the regulars, like I still had them coming in, so they still have my number, and they're like are you working? Yeah, so now we've got another to advertise on and I've talked to the girls who set it up, they're really nice. Like they usually solve everything really quickly. But, it is a bit more expensive, and I'm still trying to get my head around the advertising and all that.

Tami showed me the calendar on her work phone to highlight how much her work had dropped since FOSTA-SESTA. She stated that her bookings dropped 50 percent and then continued to decline thereafter. She described how more privileged sex workers were not impacted in the same way as she was, as they were able to rely on other platforms that were not impacted by the laws and that they impacted sex workers who were already struggling financially.

Tami: Between March and April, April is when Backpage closed, and my bookings dropped by more than 50 percent and have slowly decreased since then. So, yeah, I'm like lots of workers, that sort of level that I work where it's made a big difference and I know there are some private workers who haven't been impacted coz they never really relied on Cracker. But yeah I was one of the ones that did and there are people that have been a lot worse off than me too. I've been averaging a booking a fortnight maybe, maybe two one week but then I won't get any for the next three or four weeks, which is not good obviously. But I also do know that there are people who have been doing even worse than me. And I'm lucky in that I do have a day job as well, it's not enough to live on, which is why I do have a second job but I do have another source of income and there are people who don't.

Participants were drawn into sex work because of the relief it offered them from financial insecurity although it did not mean that they could always escape their working-class backgrounds. They had to be mindful of how they advertised their services and that the amount they charged 'signaled their

class' or correlated with the 'value of their service'. There was often a disconnect between the 'fantasy' that sex workers provided and the experiences of the 'everyday sex worker'. For example, this was evident in how criminalisation and FOSTA-SESTA inevitably targeted working-class sex workers, leaving them further disadvantaged rather than protecting workers. Power shifted depending on class, where privileged sex workers experienced more power, and for working-class sex workers it was precarious.

Stigma and politics

Throughout the interviews the participants aimed to dispel stigma and often highlighted the impacts of criminalisation and policing, which were wide reaching in their everyday lives. Legislative discrimination meant that when participants spoke about their relationships to sex work, discussing the 'politics of sex work' was inseparable from, and formed part of, their sex worker identities. Participants were highly critical of the way sex work was legislated. Despite multiple efforts to decriminalise sex work, sex workers remained criminalised. It was in this context that participants spoke about the 'politics' they navigated in their everyday lives. 'Politics' was constructed as incorporating media depictions, politicians' rhetoric, debates on trafficking and ideas of choice. Participants gave examples of these different forms of 'politics' that annoyed them, influenced them, and/or which they actively tried to resist. The 'politics' builds and sustains the stigma that sex workers must manoeuvre in their work and personal lives. Sex workers were angry at media depictions of sex work because they were often not representative and instead further stigmatised sex workers (Wattis, 2020). Tami commented on how the media often presented binary depictions of sex work that sensationalised the issues concerning sex workers and failed to educate the public, further stigmatising sex work.

Tami: We have an image in our head of what sex workers will look like. That's one of the reasons why it sort of aggravates me that in the media when it does focus on sex work, both in a fictional narrative and in the news generally, the perspectives which get the most air play are like the most privileged and the most oppressed demographics. So, it's only the *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* with Billie Piper or it's *The Jammed*. And there's no medium, which is where I feel the majority lie. Somewhere between those two. As a thirty-something private, ethnic worker in Australia, I have never seen a narrative which reflects my experience.

Enid also commented on how films often depicted outdated images of sex work, further perpetrating stigma. This made her angry and upset.

Enid: I think movies and stuff, just old stigmas and everything. That doesn't help. Like, I've watched a lot of things about call girls or like a movie with you know, prostitution, even the feel-good ones, the way they portray things it's like, fuck you and your stigma.

Quinn tried to educate her parents and aimed to appeal to their sensibilities through reason. This was a way participants resisted stigma through trying to educate the people in their lives about sex work.

Quinn: Every now and again somehow it will come up on tv and they start talking about decriminalisation and I go, yeah it should be. Dad will make some type of remark, Mum will sort of try and change the subject. I'm like, just because I did it, and you didn't approve of it, doesn't mean that they shouldn't be safe. Like, some of those people are single mums that can't get any other job. People have kids and can't work because they have soccer after school, or have to go in and do library stuff with them. Like it gives people the freedom to go to work for two days and make enough money for the whole week. Now not so much but yeah.

Other participants spoke about the power politicians have when they talk about sex work. They expressed annoyance or exasperation that politicians have the power to talk about sex work when they want and how they want, therefore shaping and reinforcing stigma they very much hoped to resist. Dolly commented on how sex work as an issue gets caught up in politics for politicians' gain. She was fearful because those in power, who are meant to protect sex workers, such as the police, posed the most risk to the everyday lives of sex workers.

Dolly: Like, there are the people that think we matter so much we need to be removed and then there are people that think we don't matter at all and are completely irrelevant and that we are the butt of the joke. That scares me a lot. The law though. Scares the shit out of me. Because those that should serve as protectors actually are the most dangerous ones of all.

Carmen felt the key reasons for criminalising sex work and arguments against decriminalisation were misguided and, like other participants, argued that sex work was unfairly conflated with trafficking and as a tactic used by politicians to create fear regarding decriminalisation of sex work. She stated how other industries were not demonised like sex work, nor were they 'heavily surveilled' like sex work, especially when they too were known for exploiting 'at risk' workers.

Carmen: Unfortunately, in South Australia sex work is still illegal. As far as I'm aware, sex work is a victimless crime if you're the sex worker. The key motivation behind criminalising sex work is to save people from trafficking, but you don't see that in the garment industry, you don't see that in hard manual labour. I know that people will try and legislate against sex trafficking and that sort of stuff, but voluntary sex work shouldn't be legislated against. I mean its voluntary for a reason. Like I'm not saying that human traffickers should be let off because, I don't know why they would be. But police work and resources shouldn't go towards that. But why would you bother setting the police against your ma and pa sex worker? It's just not a

valuable use of police resources. Also, the problem with criminalising sex work is it creates stigma. So even if people are trafficked and are facing like sexual coercion, where do they go? Do they go to a church group who tells them that they're disgusting and wrong because they've been trafficked? Do they go to the police who are more likely to arrest them because it's illegal to do so?

Dolly added that people did not understand sex work and often failed to recognise the difference between consensual sex work and violence. She also highlighted that a raft of laws already exists criminalising slavery, kidnapping and human trafficking; whereas consensual sex work remains criminalised and misunderstood. She wanted to be clear and send out the message that she was proud of her sex work, that her work was consensual and that sex work ought to be decriminalised.

Dolly: There is a difference that people refuse to acknowledge. Slavery, kidnapping, imprisonment, human trafficking, bullying, abuse. Those things are bad, they're non-consensual. And there's a whole separate set of laws of all of that. Sex work, consensual, popular, beneficial, healthy, good! I'm not ashamed of what I do. I'm very proud of what I do and I don't wanna hide. I don't wanna be a criminal.

Several participants felt that they had a duty to advocate for sex workers because of their lived experience. Andie felt that when people were not connected to sex work they were more at risk of perpetrating stigma, therefore they felt that peer education was important. They also tied the decriminalisation of sex work to broader issues of social inequality and questioned the role of police as moral guardians and felt that this was not adequately challenged. This again highlights how

participants understood power and were able to see how social and cultural structures discriminated against marginalised groups, and in unequal ways.

Andie: Just because I do have that lived experience I feel like I have a responsibility to advocate in that regard. It's something that people are still not comfortable talking about because of the stigma, so even just having those conversations is really important. And like for people who are not sex workers and who don't really have anything to do with sex workers because they're not clients or don't know anyone who's a sex worker, it's easy to think that it doesn't matter to them. Like it doesn't affect them directly, but this is not just about sex workers, it's about more than that. Decriminalisation is also about women and autonomy and it's about the role that police have in our society and even just challenging morality and the dominant views on sex work being immoral. Like I think that's pretty tied in with the autonomy of sex workers and, you know, people's ability to choose what they want to do with their job if it's not harming anyone else.

Ani also tried to challenge people and push back on the idea that sex work was only ever a last resort for people. She felt that it was a pragmatic choice for her and under a certain set of circumstances she would do it again.

Ani: Even now when I tell people that I've done sex work, it's the idea of like, oh well you had to do what you had to do. And I really wanna challenge that. That no, I chose to do sex work and I would choose it again in a certain set of circumstances, not because I was desperate for money, or because I had to, but because it is actually better than a whole lot of other jobs that

I've done. Like it wasn't the worst choice. You know, it's not like I only had that choice so I had to do it.

Lastly, several participants shared Jessica's sentiment, where sex work was no longer a job that they needed to carve their way out of; rather, it had become an important part of their everyday lives and tied to their identity. For Jessica, sex work had become her life's work and she wanted to become a voice for sex workers: 'I've just gotten to that point of like okay, well, if this has really become my life's work now. How can I help be a voice for it?'

The participants in this study highlighted how often sex work was sensationalised and purposefully misrepresented as a display of power across social categories, culture, systems and structures, and politics. They understood how this was connected to stigma and tried to resist this through education and understanding complex sex work issues and politics. Additionally, participants attributed the harms they experienced to social and systemic structures that purposefully aimed to marginalise them. Throughout the interviews participants were able to clearly articulate how stigma and criminalisation harmed them within their everyday lives and aimed to counter the public narratives about sex work. Participants desperately wanted to be given a voice so that they could advocate on behalf of their community.

Conclusion

Participants showed professionalism and resilience through a self-reflective process. Through 'coming in', they were able to be proud of who they were as sex workers and better resist stigma. Highly stigmatised workers made considered decisions about their work and were able to show how it

crossed over with their other identities and aspects of their lives and how they navigated stigma and discrimination. Understanding sex, relationships and power in this way was shown to be a form of 'expertise' and meant that tensions between these played out in unique but strangely familiar ways. It was clear that participants understood stigma and how power operated because they discussed the complexity, but also the intersections between these within their everyday lives. They also showed how, when sex work stigma was discussed, that forms of everyday resistance surfaced because they were explicitly tied to sex work. Participants had a nuanced understanding of power, and more so than non-stigmatised workers, because they deeply understood how power played out on an intimate and localised level, in their working practices and through their relationships. In addition, when value judgments were made about them as sex workers, and because of other aspects of their lives such as sexuality, gender or race, they were better able to manage and resist stigma because they understood the complexity of social and structural inequality.

Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The choice of 'Come as You Are' as the title for this thesis highlights from the outset that honouring sex worker voices and lived experience is essential to a sex work feminist approach. In this thesis, I sought to identify, understand and document the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers specifically from the perspective of sex workers themselves. I have explored the everyday experiences of South Australian sex workers and the cultural and structural factors of stigma that shape, construct and reinforce these contemporary everyday experiences, as well as what these mean for this community and how they manifest.

As an insider researcher, my own lived experience of sex work, my sex work activism and peer work with SIN—my local peer sex work organisation—means that I was better able to access South Australian sex workers and facilitate research with them so as to present the complexities of everyday life for them, especially when compared with outsider researchers. In addition, I was able to centre sex worker voices and balance these with sex work community politics. This balance was carefully managed within an academic setting where traditionally, lived experience has been undervalued and meaningful collaboration with community has been discouraged (Fayard, 2020; Stardust, 2020). This research adds to the growing body of peer sex work feminist research and addresses a significant gap in the literature. The cultural and structural factors that shape sex workers' lives, and specifically from an everyday perspective, have seldom been explored.

South Australian sex workers were interviewed in 2018 for the purpose of this thesis, and this was a time that was particularly challenging for the sex work community. This timing demonstrates how

precarious everyday life can be for sex workers, especially those who are more marginalised. Due to criminalisation, sex workers were working, and continue to work, in an environment that reinforces state-based discrimination. This means that they have to manage stigma day by day in addition to work pressures. This is demonstrated throughout the findings chapters. Although attempts to decriminalise sex work were—and continue to be—made, this failure, in addition to amendments passed in previous Bills such as those regarding police powers, undermines the principles and benefits of decriminalisation (Diamond, 2019a; 2019c; 2021). Sex workers continue to stress the dangers of policing and advocate for the full decriminalisation of sex work in South Australia (Diamond, 2019b).

The purpose of this enquiry was to understand South Australian sex workers and how cultural and structural stigma impinge on their day-to-day lives. When little is known about the contexts and difficulties that sex workers work within and face, stigma is more likely to prevail and hinder law reform efforts and human rights for sex workers. This research shows how legislative powers that criminalise and marginalise sex workers further harm them by reinforcing cultural and structural stigma in their day-to-day lives, particularly within their relationships. The findings of this thesis demonstrate the nuances and complexities of how sex workers navigate cultural and structural stigma—in all its forms—and therefore challenge dominant and discriminatory constructions of sex workers that have been reinforced throughout history.

The study was informed by the following research questions:

- What are ‘the everyday’ experiences of South Australian sex workers?
- What factors shape and construct the contemporary, everyday experiences and meanings for sex workers in South Australia?

The key findings

Research, legislation, policy and media depictions of sex work often focus on sensationalising and highlighting what is perceived to be the 'inherent risk' involved in sex work rather than positioning sex work as work and depicting it as a normal, everyday work activity involving a spectrum of experiences ranging from good to bad, but mostly somewhere in between. In addition to this, the environment within which sex workers operate is often ignored as a contributing factor when discussing the harms associated with sex work; therefore, any issues sex workers experience become simplified and decontextualised. Everyday life is influenced and dictated by both visible and invisible social and institutional structures, such as the law, and sex work does not operate in isolation from these. Rather, cultural and structural stigma compound the difficulties of daily life for sex workers; hence understandings of everyday life and sex work have the power to begin to break down stigma in its various forms.

The findings of this research are new findings in the specific socio-legal context of sex work in South Australia. The timing of the interviews elicited rich new material that highlights the issues sex workers face as a result of the global impact of the enactment of the US FOSTA-SESTA laws as well. There are also new findings about how sex workers view clients and the relationships between sex workers and clients. Most of the research in this area has previously consisted of findings based on the content analysis of escort directory website forums (Bucknall, 2017) rather than on the views of sex workers themselves.

It was found that the environment within which sex work occurs either facilitates safety or hinders it, and that cultural and structural stigma are major driving forces of discrimination and inequality for

South Australian sex workers. This study highlights through exploration of the everyday experiences of sex workers that it is not sex work that is harmful; rather, it is the social, cultural and structural environment that produces stigma, which causes and reinforces harm.

Overall, the findings highlight that sex workers manage stigma and criminalisation in their everyday lives and this has an enormous impact on their relationships with their clients, partners, lovers and families. In contrast, friendships, especially sex worker friendships, were described as being the safest relationships for sex workers. Stigma and criminalisation also affect how individuals feel about themselves, both as people and as sex workers.

The findings highlight how the everyday lives of sex workers are characterised by constant negotiations and mediating between actions of resistance and autonomy to navigate cultural and structural institutions that impinge on their day-to-day lives. Sex workers spend much of their time managing and resisting stigma, and although at times they felt they had little power to influence change structurally, many nonetheless wanted to create change and be a voice for the community. They felt that those with power (policy makers, politicians, outsider researchers) did little to create meaningful change for sex workers, although by managing stigma within their day-to-day lives and relationships sex workers became better able to protect themselves from it, and as a result were able to enjoy some autonomy through fostering safety, pride and community.

Sex workers are still believed to pose a risk to society and the law reflects this (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013a; Nagy & Powell, 2016). But this study shows that cultural and structural stigma, manifesting through criminalisation and policing, pose a much greater risk to sex workers in their daily lives. In addition to challenging and resisting stigma and criminalisation, sex workers also manage other intersections that further marginalise them, and in distinct ways (Crenshaw, 1991). The major intersections that participants spoke about were compulsory heteronormativity and monogamy,

gender and gendered constructs, classism, racism, homophobia, queerphobia and fatphobia. These, in combination with stigma, impact sex workers regarding how much power they have or feel that they have within their relationships as well as dictate their relationship to sex work, how they balance stigma in their lives and how much they are prepared to compromise their work. Trans participants and participants of colour in particular felt that these intersections further marginalised and disadvantaged them in comparison to cis and Caucasian sex workers. To contend with sex work stigma and criminality, participants reflected deeply and demonstrated that understanding marginalisation and intersectionality also forms part of their resistance, which helps better protect them from internalised whorephobia and discrimination. The findings make it clear that sex workers engage in everyday acts of resistance that are also central to their everyday lives. Participants were protective of their work and concerned about how sex workers were depicted more broadly within society. Participants often wanted to advocate on behalf of the sex work community to help create change for the better, citing for example, advocating for law reform and decriminalisation.

To answer the research questions of what constitutes 'the everyday' experiences of South Australian sex workers, and what factors shape and construct the contemporary everyday experiences and meanings for sex workers in South Australia, this thesis demonstrates that cultural and structural stigma does! Sex workers navigate these stigmas in the everyday. Through storytelling it was found that expressions of the everyday are constructed and contested through client relationships, romantic relationships, relationships with family and friends, and the self.

Sex workers and client relationships

Participants demonstrated the complexity of their everyday work lives and relationships through the nuanced aspects of their client relationships. 'Clients' were described as everyday men, where

participants compared their clients to 'regular' men in everyday society, highlighting that their work relationships with clientele were comparable to their experiences with everyday men outside of the work context. However, participants also defended their clientele because they were mindful of stigmatising sex work themselves, and in addition they were proud of their work. They were also critical of 'men' and 'compulsory masculinity', heterosexuality, gender norms and the normalisation of gendered violence within the community. The impact of criminalisation, policing, gender, power, capitalism and racism were explored, defined and contested in participants' everyday interactions with clientele. Some participants highlighted that these relationships were built on developing trust and creating and reinforcing boundaries while also acknowledging that sex work stigma and the cultural and structural normalisation of violence and surveillance meant that their safety practices at work were undermined. This was not only acknowledged, but contextualised and managed as part of participants' day-to-day work lives.

Participants spoke at length about how they stayed safe at work, managed stigma as best as they could and balanced these with earning an income. Participants employed defensive work strategies and developed an understanding of 'real risk' and 'perceived risk' using intuition and their 'sexpertise'. The police posed a risk to safety, and participants had to manage work and the screening of clientele away from police detection. Participants were not reductionist when discussing their work lives and client relationships; rather, they demonstrated nuanced accounts of their everyday lives. Participants enjoyed their work as well as the flexibility and freedom it offered them and simply saw managing clientele and stigma as part of the job.

Sex workers and romantic relationships

Participants' romantic relationships were also heavily dictated by cultural and structural stigma, where compulsory gender norms and heteronormative social conditioning meant struggles for power within their relationships. The everyday life of a sex worker navigating romantic relationships meant closely managing if, when and how they 'came out' to their lovers or partners to ensure their own safety, although when in relationships most participants also considered their partners' safety and wellbeing. Participants shared how sex work stigma manifested within their relationships, and this was evident when they experienced microaggressions, jealousy and insecurity from their partners. Several participants shared stories about compromising work for their partners to better manage stigma, although stigma was often present even after they quit sex work.

Several participants resisted stigma by learning to spot 'reg flags' and either ended relationships when they felt stigmatised or avoided romantic relationships altogether while doing sex work. This also meant that they were better able to protect themselves and ensure that their earning ability was not compromised. Developing trust within relationships took time for participants, and even when they were 'out' to their partners—which the majority were—they continued to manage sex work stigma within their day-to-day lives but also on behalf of their partners (Hochschild, 2012). For example, most participants kept aspects of their work hidden to protect their partners from stigma. However, keeping much of their work life hidden also created barriers to seeking support from their partners when a work-related issue arose. In addition, it was found that relationship structures also created barriers to them seeking support due to heteronormativity and could either perpetrate stigma and, or alternatively, were places of resistance for couples. Those who were in traditional heteronormative relationships, for example participants in monogamous relationships, spoke more about how sex work stigma impacted their relationships, and several of them quit sex work for a partner. However, those who were in polyamorous or non-normative relationships, including open relationships, spoke about experiencing more acceptance from their partners and found it easier to talk openly about sex work and navigate sex work stigma. Regardless, most participants kept parts of their work lives hidden.

Participants resisted stigma within their relationships in several ways and created boundaries around their sex work to better protect themselves and their work. This was a path of ‘least resistance’ but also meant more emotion work. They also actively engaged in self-care practices to minimise the harm of stigma and to combat internalised whorephobia. Heteronormative ideals do not neatly fit into a sex worker’s life; therefore, participants had to manage stigma in their lives by resisting heteronormativity and fostering sex work pride. However, resisting stigma for many meant being critical of normative society in order to fit sex work into their lives. In contrast, when participants spoke about their families they were more likely to uphold gendered norms and expectations as a protective mechanism, as they did not want to risk being ostracised by them. Participants were less likely to ‘come out’ to their parents, although several did.

Family and friendship

The relationships participants had with their families were in direct opposition to the ones they had with their partners and friends—but especially sex working friends—who were shown to be some of the most supportive relationships in a sex worker’s everyday life. Friends were often supportive in ways that family members could not be, and unlike family, participants could choose with whom they shared their lives, often using attitudes about sex work to filter out people with differing values. The sex work community was integral to security and important safety information was often shared, for example, when police were raiding brothels. Emotional support was a key feature of sex worker friendships, where several participants chose to live with other sex workers to further cushion themselves from stigma.

Overall, when participants spoke about their families they could not trust that they would be supportive of them as sex workers or their work. When participants did ‘out’ themselves—which

several did—it was in the hope of receiving acceptance, although this was often conditional or did not occur. Traditional ideas of gender roles and heteronormativity shaped participants' engagement with family and prevented family members from understanding sex work outside of heteronormative gendered roles. Participants were less able to resist or break down ideas of 'family' and family roles and had more autonomy within their romantic relationships. When speaking about family, participants were nonetheless heavily influenced by their family and cultural upbringing. They often tied these into narratives about why they become sex workers, and for some it was either in spite of their family or because of their family. Gender was reinforced within the family, and it was evident that speaking about sex work and sex was taboo.

Relationship to the self and sex work

Participants shared stories that demonstrated how they managed and resisted cultural and structural stigma. The impacts of stigma meant that they were forced to develop a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of it, and through a self-reflective process they were then better able to resist internalised whorephobia. Participants often worked towards understanding themselves deeply so as to develop a strong sense of self and resist harmful narratives about sex work. Part of this was also understanding other intersections that impacted their lives in conjunction with sex work stigma. Reflection and a critical outlook enabled participants to resist stigma, and this was a strategy used to nurture an autonomous everyday life outside of both cultural and structural forms, which they feared and understood as acting to purposefully and actively disadvantage them. When participants spoke about discrimination pertaining to racism, fatphobia, queerphobia and classism, this was how they better contextualised their everyday lives as sex workers within the broader cultural and structural constructs. Sex work stigma alone, without acknowledging the role of other intersections that impacted their sex work experience, was not enough to address the problems arising from the

complexity of their everyday lives. Throughout the interviews participants, whilst highlighting the stigma they experienced, also aimed to dispel sex work stigma. They showed that they navigated 'politics' in their daily lives and spoke about media depictions of sex work, political debates regarding sex work and trafficking and ideas of choice. Throughout the interviews participants indicated that they understood how power operated across social categories, culture, systems and structures, which was evidenced by how they spoke about their everyday lives, conveying the nuance and complexity of them. These findings about sex workers' intense internal scrutiny are in direct contrast to mythical 'false consciousness' themes that dominate much of the research performed by non-peers.

Sex work feminism

This thesis further develops sex work feminism and promotes it as an approach and distinct methodology for sex work research. It does so by building on seminal pieces written by other sex workers, in particular Elena Jeffreys (2010b), Jules Kim (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013) and Janelle Fawkes (2005). This thesis showcases how sex work feminism could be developed as a methodology to centre sex worker voices in a transparent way that privileges, and is accountable to, sex workers. The adoption of storytelling underpins not only the findings and conclusions of this research but is a useful method (amongst others). Other measures to ensure full accountability to sex workers and sex worker-led organisations include ensuring that these stories are representative, and that both sex workers and sex worker-led organisations are consulted as much as possible. A key part of this research thesis involved conducting a risk analysis prior to submitting the PhD to ensure that the findings would not negatively impact the sex work community. This was conducted with SIN, Scarlet Alliance and individual sex workers. A consultation process was undertaken and gave the community the opportunity to feed into, identify and highlight any risks or concerns including with the presentation of findings.

To centre the voices of sex workers, I aimed to limit my own voice throughout the chapters and to instead make sure that the findings were constructed within the stories of sex workers. This was done to ensure that the reader could clearly see what sex workers said to support my interpretations.

Furthermore, the use of non-academic language and insider language is also important as this helps destabilise classism and ableism within academic institutions. This assists in decolonising academia through prioritising and utilising community knowledges and culture (Antoine, 2017; Smith, 2012); hence I deliberately used insider language and structured the thesis to enable the research to be more accessible to those who have been part of this research. (Smith, 2012). I hope I have achieved this vision in my thesis.

The layout of this thesis reinforces the arguments of sex worker academics/researchers that sex work feminism is worthy of stand-alone status. I started by exploring sex work research and its limitations, arguing for the importance of insider sex work feminist research. Through social constructionism and phenomenology I was able to present the findings, which mirrored the narratives participants told when they were asked about their everyday lives. With sex worker voices making up this thesis, especially throughout the four findings chapters, sex work feminism and methodology was in action. Although there are limitations to my methodology, as with all methodologies, it is ethical to the standards imposed by sex worker activists/researchers, which tend to be higher than those of university ethics committees so as to ensure that the protection of sex workers as a deeply marginalised community are met. These standards work to ensure that sex workers are represented fairly and accurately and that being 'outed' or producing erroneous conclusions that can harm the sex worker community are avoided. Consultation and trust take time to build, and as has been argued throughout this thesis, I was able to present the nuanced and complex lives of sex workers because I

am a trusted member of this community. In future research projects I hope to build on sex work feminism as a methodology and to create clear guidelines, as currently, these are scant.

Conclusion

As an insider, and by positioning sex workers as the experts on sex work, my research has uncovered nuanced understandings of sex workers and their everyday lives. I was able to uncover the connections between everyday life and cultural and structural stigma. This was demonstrated through how participants spoke about their relationships with clients, romantic relationships, friends and family, as well as how they spoke about themselves and sex work. These findings are complex and nuanced. Daily life was not only dictated by stigma but also other intersections, and participants were clear in their conviction that criminalisation was harmful and that they wanted law reform. However, despite these burdens, participants demonstrated resilience and autonomy within their everyday lives and showed this by how they navigated their relationships. This thesis highlights the expertise involved in sex work and that it is comparable to other professions where self-reflective practices are a part of managing work life and home life.

It is important to acknowledge the role that society plays in harming sex workers and how stigmatising narratives about sex work are used to justify criminalisation and reinforce the harms that they experience. By exploring the interplay between cultural and structural stigma, expressed through criminalisation, this thesis illustrates how marginalisation and discrimination operate against sex workers and other intersecting marginalised communities on an everyday basis. This demonstrates how deeply stigma permeates the everyday lives of sex workers. Law reform is integral to addressing this discrimination and stigma. Sex work can be viewed as a microcosm of what occurs more broadly

within society, that discrimination is part of daily life. Its impacts however, are disproportionately experienced by sex workers, especially those working in criminalised settings.

Recommendations

- 1) For researchers to incorporate a sex work feminist approach to sex work research. To consider how sex worker voices will be centred within sex work research and what the 'Nothing About Us Without Us' principle means to sex workers in practice when conducting research with (not on) sex workers. For example, what will successful consultation with sex workers and sex worker organisations look like, especially if one is not a sex worker? (Jeffreys, 2010b).
- 2) For research on sex work to value complexity and move away from narratives that simplify and flatten sex work; exploration of cultural and structural stigma must be central, as the way in which these manifest highlights how harmful practices such as criminalisation are in the lives of sex workers.
- 3) For sex work academics to fight for the full decriminalisation and the destigmatisation of sex work. However, to also acknowledge the other intersectional issues that sex workers face, and that decriminalisation is only the first step to sex workers accessing justice and rights. Decriminalisation will not achieve full rights for all sex workers, especially if migrant sex workers are criminalised or street-based sex workers are regulated (DeCat, 2019). Law reform efforts must contend with the complexities of everyday life and be underpinned by the understanding that marginalisation is often complex, multifaceted and made invisible.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The Conversation article: 'No more fear of police: South Australia is close to fully decriminalising sex work' (Diamond, 2019a)

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigour, journalistic fair

Arts + Culture Books + Ideas Business + Economy Education Environment + Energy Health Politics + Society Science + Technology

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WORKER

SIN for

MY BODY MY RULES

Y BODY MY

No more fear of police: South Australia is close to fully decriminalising sex work

Published: June 21, 2019 12:42pm AEST

Members of the Sex Industry Network protest outside the South Australian Parliament, May 31 2019. AAP

Author

Roxana Diamond
PhD Candidate, Flinders University

South Australia is a crucial step closer to becoming one of few places in the world to decriminalise sex work.

Email

Twitter 55

Facebook 19.2k

Appendix 2

The Advertiser article: 'Tinkering with Bill harms sex workers' (Diamond, 2019c)

Tinkering with Bill harms sex workers

ROXANA DIAMOND

THE Bill to decriminalise sex work in South Australia has a long history and is in its 13th iteration.

South Australian sex workers and SIN (Sex Industry Network), the only peer-based community group advocating for the rights and wellbeing of sex workers in SA, have been at the forefront of this campaign. They have worked tirelessly for a Bill that represents our diverse needs.

The stigma around sex work, on top of prohibitive legislation, further disadvantages sex workers and feeds back into the conditions that continue to marginalise our community.

We are at risk of a Bill that undermines what sex workers have long campaigned for. Current debates on the Bill show how both legislative and cultural factors continue to expose sex workers to stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

Our lives as sex workers are often unfairly depicted and harmful narratives that suit the rhetoric of those opposed to law reform go unquestioned.

Criminalised sex workers experience far greater harms than those working within a decriminalised setting.

Decriminalisation means that consenting, adult sex workers will no longer be criminalised. But this does not mean no regulation, as some believe; rather, government regulation and protection, just like any other industry.

Most importantly, the police will not be involved as regulators unless there is a breach of law, meaning sex workers can approach the police to report crimes without fear of arrest or harassment.

The full decriminalisation of sex work has the power to set a precedent in terms of how we treat sex workers and other marginalised communities.

But the principles underpinning decriminalisation, such as human rights and harm minimisation, are undermined when politicians compromise.

The police already have extensive powers to investigate suspected criminal offences.

The amendments to the current Bill are not necessary and put sex workers at further risk of continued harassment at the hands of the police.

The Bill in Parliament had

They should be able to report crimes to police without fear of arrest or harassment

The Bill in its original form fully decriminalises the sex industry but a few amendments have passed the Legislative Council, and more may come up for debate in the House of Assembly.

One amendment (24A) allows a police officer, at any time, day or night, to enter into, break open with force and search a sex work premises, if the officer has reasonable cause and without warrant.

the potential to lead the way in legislative reform, because no jurisdiction has successfully passed a Bill that fully decriminalises sex work. Rather than focusing on evidence-based research and harm minimisation, fear-based arguments prevail. Leading with fear only creates a stalemate, or detrimental outcomes, for the sex-work community.

'ROXANA DIAMOND' IS VICE-PRESIDENT OF SIN AND A PHD STUDENT

Appendix 3

InDaily article: 'SA's sex workers won't stop fighting for legal protection' (Diamond, 2019b)

INDAILY ADELAIDE independent news | SALIFE | CityMag

NEWS BUSINESS OPINION EAT | DRINK | EXPLORE ISPY PREMIUM PROPERTY *inreview* SALIFE CityMag EVENTS

ADELAIDE
Thursday, Nov 21, 2019

SA's sex workers won't stop fighting for legal protection

OPINION

South Australia's lawmakers have once again failed to heed evidence about the benefits of decriminalising sex work, allowing political game-playing and rigid ideas of morality to stymie reform, writes **Roxana Diamond**.

Roxana Diamond / SIN

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<https://indaily.co/301082>

[Print article](#)



A SIN protest outside Parliament earlier this year. Photo: AAP/Kelly Barnes

Appendix 4

Submission to the select committee on Statutes Amendment (Repeal of Sex Work Offences) Bill
(Diamond, 2021)



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE ON STATUTES AMENDMENT (REPEAL OF SEX WORK OFFENCES) BILL

Plaza Room, Parliament House, Adelaide

Friday, 5 November 2021 at 11:10am

WITNESSES

| | |
|--|-----|
| DIAMOND, ROXANA | 121 |
| HOWE, JOANNA, Associate Professor in Law, University of Adelaide | 133 |
| MILLS, BRADLEY | 147 |
| MILLS, DEAN | 147 |
| MILLS, TRISH | 147 |
| MURRAY, CRAIG, Playnice Sex and Relationship Education | 147 |
| SANDEMAN, PETER | 109 |

WITNESS:

DIAMOND, ROXANA

612 The CHAIRPERSON: Welcome to the meeting. The Legislative Council has given the authority for this committee to hold public meetings. A transcript of your evidence today will be forwarded to you for your examination for any clerical corrections. I advise that your evidence today is being broadcast via the Parliament of South Australia website. Should you wish at any time to present confidential evidence to the committee, please indicate and the committee will consider your request.

Parliamentary privilege is accorded to all evidence presented to a select committee. However, witnesses should be aware that privilege does not extend to statements made outside of this meeting. All persons, including members of the media, are reminded that the same rules apply as in the reporting of parliament.

We would like to acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional lands for the Kurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their country. We also acknowledge the Kurna people as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today.

Good afternoon. My name is Tammy Franks. I am the Chair of this particular select committee that is looking at the Statutes Amendment (Repeal of Sex Work Offences) Bill 2020. To my right, I have the Hon. Nicola Centofanti and the Hon. Heidi Girolamo. To my left, I have the Hon. Clare Scriven, the Hon. Irene Pnevmatikos and the Hon. John Darley. Indeed, we have all the members of the committee here today. If you would like to introduce yourself and then make any opening statement after that, we will move into questions and answers.

Ms DIAMOND: Thank you so much, Tammy. Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks so much to the committee for inviting me along and giving me this opportunity to present. This invite means a lot to me, especially because it's rare for PhD candidates, and sex workers for that matter, to be given this kind of opportunity and platform where I can directly influence legislative reform. I am truly honoured and would love to thank the sex work community, especially those who were interviewed, and SIN, who have supported me throughout my PhD journey. I continue to be inspired by sex workers past and present, and this work is for you.

I also think society has a lot to learn from sex workers, and your involvement with this committee is your opportunity as non sex workers to listen to current sex workers, current South Australian sex workers. But before I move on I do request that the committee respect sex workers during question time by using respectful language because there are sex workers currently in the room. The use of the term 'prostitute' by a non sex worker is considered deeply disrespectful to my community and it is harmful because it perpetrates stigma. When speaking about us, please use the term 'sex worker'. I hope that you all respect my request.

Why should this committee listen to me? Firstly, I am a current South Australian sex worker, and criminalisation deeply impacts my day-to-day life. This is why I am so heavily invested in making sure that our community is heard and that we achieve full decriminalisation. Secondly, I have worked with SIN, South Australia's peer sex work organisation, since 2015. I helped SIN

Appendix 5

SIN submission to the select committee on Statutes Amendment (Repeal of Sex Work Offences) Bill



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE ON STATUTES AMENDMENT (REPEAL OF SEX WORK OFFENCES) BILL

Old Parliament House Chamber, Old Parliament House, Adelaide

Thursday, 16 September 2021 at 2:10pm

BY AUTHORITY OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

WITNESSES

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DIAMOND, ROXANA, Board Member, Sex Industry Network.....85
GRAY, CHLOE, Social Media Officer, Sex Industry Network.....85
MORRISON, KAT, General Manager, Sex Industry Network.....85

440 The CHAIRPERSON: That will allow us to photocopy that for further on, and I have asked one of my staff to come and help with photocopying. Ms Diamond.

Ms DIAMOND: Hi, everyone, and thank you so much for having us here today. I'm Roxana Diamond, and I've been involved with SIN since 2014, I've been involved with SIN in various capacities, largely as a volunteer, but I helped SIN incorporate. I've been on the board in various capacities and roles, I've served as the president and vice-president and now I'm a general member. I am also a researcher: I'm currently doing a PhD at Flinders University exploring the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers.

The criminalisation of sex work is an outdated and punitive response to sex work and is out of line with community standards. We do not need to look far to see examples of Australian jurisdictions that have either already decriminalised sex work (New South Wales and the Northern Territory, for example) or are hoping to decriminalise sex work (Victoria and Queensland).

During previous debates on this issue, there has always been overwhelming public support in South Australia for decriminalisation. In 2019, for example, an online poll of 5,335 people conducted by ABC Adelaide found 93 per cent supported decriminalisation. The Liberal member for Adelaide, Rachel Sanderson, asked her electorate in the same year and conducted a questionnaire that attracted about a thousand responses and around 82 per cent supported decriminalisation.

The Advertiser this year conducted yet another survey, a poll, where 1.K people were in support of decriminalising sex work and only 51 people dissented. The community support sex work and the decriminalisation of sex work. Globally, research has consistently shown that the abuse towards sex workers most commonly occurs when sex work is criminalised and/or regulated by the police. Currently, in South Australia our punitive laws serve to instil fear and marginalise sex workers and blatantly disregard sex worker rights.

The laws do nothing to protect sex workers from harm and only create more challenges for sex workers, both at work and in their lives. Sex workers, our lives are complex because stigma, discrimination and violence related to sex work intersect with issues of gender, class, transphobia, migrant status and racism. All of this is intensified in a criminalised setting. Evidence has consistently shown that decriminalisation is best practice and sex workers globally advocate for this model.

Scarlet Alliance, in their publication 'Principles for Model Sex Work Legislation', state that in a criminalised setting, policing practices, fear of prosecution and stigma have acted as barriers to safe sex practices, human rights and occupational health and safety. They also state that, 'The use of condoms by police as evidence of sale or purchase of sex demonstrates how criminalisation impedes' sex worker health and safety.

Additionally, the ability for sex workers to seek out information, support and health care is severely compromised by the risk of prosecution, while healthcare officials and professionals and outreach organisations such as SIN face barriers reaching sex workers due to the invisibility of the community and sex workers purposefully remaining clandestine to avoid police detection. South Australian sex workers have highlighted and evidenced this.

Appendix 6

Interview guide

What are 'the everyday' experiences for South Australian sex workers?

The taken for granted, mundane forgotten phenomenon.

This research aims to uncover rich and detailed narratives about the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers. These narratives will start building narratives about sex workers by sex workers in an academic space. By focusing on the everyday lives of sex workers, this research will build contemporary narratives around sex workers and who they are. To gain this information, qualitative narrative interviews will be conducted with sex workers as only they can speak about their everyday experiences (Camila Junqueira, Vicente, Paulo Rogério, & Modesto Leite Rolim, 2014). These kinds of interviews place the people being interviewed at the heart of the research and can come closer to representing the context of people's lives more deeply than quantitative research (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Researchers using narrative interviewing do not set out with a fixed agenda, rather they let the interviewee control the direction, content and pace of the interview (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Narrative interviews will help tease out the everyday stories based on the participants perspective (Camila Junqueira et al., 2014). Narrative interviews reconstruct the life history of the participant, however, also aims to understand the context in which these accounts were constructed and the factors that produce change and motivate the actions of the participant (Camila Junqueira et al., 2014). A narrative approach privileges the meanings that sex workers assign to their lives.

Narrative interviews ask the how? why? and what? questions that are common in qualitative research without a specific agenda (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Participants will be encouraged to freely discuss their lives to help highlight their experiences.

The interview can be divided into four sections according to Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016)

1. Introduction to the research

The researcher will explain the research and interview process to the participant. Confirming with the participant that they understand the interview will be audio recorded and they consent to being interviewed. Also the interviewee will state that they have received their \$50.00. The researcher will encourage the participant to share their story.

2. The narrative

The participant will share their story. The interviewer will listen, using non-verbal cues, such as smiling and nodding, to encourage the interviewee. The interviewer should avoid interrupting until there are clear signs that the interviewee has finished telling their story.

3. Questioning phase

The interviewer will use the participant's language to fill in any gaps or to ask for more detail about an issue of interest. The interviewer could ask questions like 'What happened

then/before/after', or 'can you say a bit more about...?' rather than asking for opinions or attitudes or even asking why questions.

Example of the question guide:

- 1) How did you come to sex work – what is your journey through this work?
- 2) How would you describe your sex work self? Who are you?
- 3) How long have you been working for?
- 4) What parts of the industry have you worked in?
- 5) Why have you moved around/stayed in that particular part of the industry.
- 6) Tell me about your typical working week? For example, the challenges, routines, enjoyments, juggling of demands etc.
- 7) How do you set yourself up for work? Why do you work this way? What do you need to work?
- 8) What are your experiences of sex work every day? What are your routines, challenges, successes and how do you keep safe?
- 9) How do you manage your work life? Physically, emotionally, materially etc.
- 10) Your body is your business, do you engage in daily activities or routines to support your body through your work?
- 11) Have you ever experienced jealousy? How do you manage self-esteem in the business?
- 12) What are your clients like? Who are they?
- 13) How do you manage burn out, have you experienced it?
- 14) How do you balance your work and personal life?
- 15) Do you have a partner? (mono or poly?)
- 16) Do you have children?
- 17) Do you keep your sex work identity hidden? How? Who knows you work?
- 18) How has sex work impacted on your life?
- 19) Did Fosta Stesta impact you? How?
- 20) Does your family know?
- 21) Does the current model of sex work governance impact on your work life and the way you work?
- 22) Has your work practice changed throughout the years?
- 23) Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

4. Conclusion

Finally, the interviewer concludes the interview and explains the next steps of the research, such as the transcribing of interview.

Appendix 7

Recruitment poster

ARE YOU A SEX WORKER?

INTERESTED IN GETTING PAID TO.....CHAT?

PhD student is seeking to explore the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers. You will be asked to participate in face to face, hour long interviews and will receive \$50.00 for your expertise. All genders welcome. The researcher is a sex worker. This project has been approved by Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University (8004).

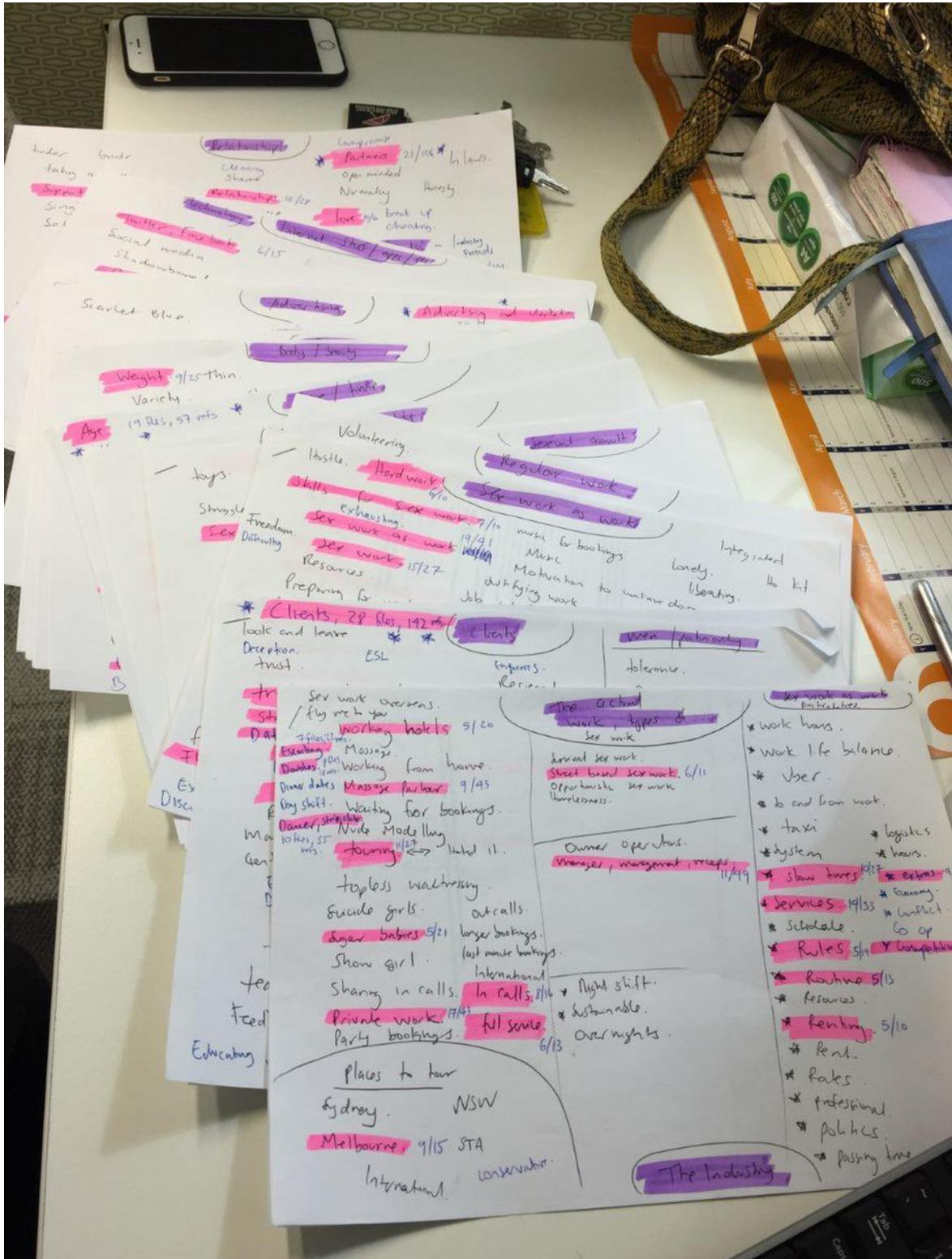
- Street based
- Massage/Parlour
 - Brothel
 - Escort
 - Private
- Sex for favours
 - Porn
 - Cam
- Exotic dancers/Stripper
- BDSM/Dominatrix

Are you over 18?
Can you chat about your everyday life without a translator?
Are you interested in sharing stories about your everyday life?

If you are interested please get in contact:
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/KlaraRosie>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/rosie.klara.7>
Email: bara0063@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 8

Mapping out research themes



Appendix 9

Participant information sheet



Participant Information Sheet

The Researcher

Roxy

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Roxy is a PhD student from Flinders University. She graduated with honours in social work from the University of South Australia in 2016 and has published in the Women's Studies International Forum with Sarah Wendt. Her article was titled "Outdated Laws, Outspoken Whores": Exploring sex work in a criminalised setting.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277539516301273>

She is a current sex worker, with 7 years' experience in the sex industry and sits on the SIN board acting as President.

Supervisors

Professor Sarah Wendt, Doctor Priscilla Dunk-West

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Tel: +61 8 82013978, +61 8 82015288

This research has gained ethics approval by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University: 8004



The Research

Description of the study

This study is part of the project titled 'Come as you are': exploring the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers. This project will investigate the everyday lives of South Australian sex workers through hour long, semi structured, qualitative interviews. This project is supported by Flinders University, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work. The research is peer based and has taken adequate steps to ensure that the research is ethical and considers the specific needs of the sex worker community. The researcher has consulted with SIN.

Purpose of the study

This project aims to find out what South Australian sex workers everyday lives look like. In Australia there is a significant gap in the literature exploring the everyday lives of sex workers. What are the everyday rituals and practices that make up the everyday lives, including working lives, of sex workers in South Australia? Furthermore, it is unclear how constructions situated around sex work, such as stigma, impact on sex workers day to day lives. This research therefore acts to investigate the contemporary, everyday dimension to sex workers' lives and to illuminate these experiences. This research has the potential to shift harmful narratives situated around the sex industry.

What will you be asked to do?

You are invited to attend a one-on-one interview with the researcher who will ask you questions about your everyday life as a sex worker. Participation is entirely voluntary. The interview will take about one hour. The interview will be audio recorded, then transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file for further analysis. The data will only be destroyed if the participant decides to waive their consent.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

The sharing of your experiences will inform a space within academia where often sex worker voices are left out of, misused or misrepresented. There are no up to date, academic records of the everyday lives of sex workers in South Australia, therefore your voice is integral to this research. This research has the potential to counter the stigma situated around the sex industry, through the narratives of South Australian sex workers.

This research has gained ethics approval by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University: 8004

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

Your identity will remain confidential and you will be assigned a pseudonym by the researcher. Any identifying information will be removed, and your comments will not be linked directly to you. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to the researcher alone. The interviews are being conducted at Flinders University (located in the Adelaide CBD), and care will be taken to ensure the interviews are conducted in a private and safe space.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study; however, some participants could experience emotional discomfort as we are discussing everyday experiences. If any emotional discomfort is experienced you have access to a number of free supports provided by the researcher. SIN offer free counselling services for sex workers, and are conducted by peers. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher. No information will be handed over to any authority, sex worker rights and confidentiality will be prioritised.

Recognition of expertise

If you would like to participate, in recognition of your contribution and expertise, you will be provided with \$50.00. This will be provided to you face-to-face on completion of the interview.

Feedback

All participants will be given the opportunity after the interview to provide feedback for the researcher.



Criteria for Participation

To participate in this research you must fit the following criteria:

- Are you a South Australian based sex worker past or present?

The Definition of a Sex Worker according to the World Health Organisation (2016):

This research has gained ethics approval by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University: 8004

Sex workers include female, male and transgender adults (18 years of age and over) who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally. Sex work is consensual sex between adults, can take many forms, and varies between and within countries and communities.

- Street based
- Massage/Parlour
- Brothel
- Escort
- Private
- Sex for favours
- Cam
- Porn
- Exotic dancers/Stripper
- BDSM/Dominatrix
- Other

- **Are you over the age of 18?**

- **Do you have proficient English literacy? I.e. can you discuss your everyday life without a translator?**

This research has gained ethics approval by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University: 8004



Information for sex workers

Scarlet Alliance:

Scarlet Alliance, the Australian Sex Workers Association, is the national peak sex worker organisation in Australia.

SIN:

SIN is concerned with everything that concerns sex workers. They promote the health, rights and wellbeing of South Australian sex workers. SIN is a peer worker organisation run by sex workers for sex workers. They provide free services for sex workers including peer counselling, advocacy and support.



Other useful services

beyondblue: Support service

beyondblue are a mental health information line and offer free support for depression and anxiety. There are many useful links and resources on this website.

Lifeline:

They are a national, 24-hour telephone counselling service, crisis support and suicide prevention.

13 11 14 (cost of a local call)

Relationships Australia: Counselling service

Many of their personal counselling services are fully funded and there is no cost to the person attending. Where a fee applies it is determined according to household income and includes concession rates. Fees can be negotiated or waived.

SHINE SA:

SHINE SA is a leading not-for-profit provider of primary care services and education for sexual and relationship wellbeing.

Yarrow Place:

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Yarrow Place Rape and Sexual Assault Service is an inclusive service welcoming people who have been sexually assaulted.

[Adelaide Sexual Health Centre, formally Clinic 275:](#) Sexual Health Testing

They provide a free, confidential service. This includes advice, testing and treatment for all sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV. They provide a free and confidential sexual health service for sex workers specifically on Wednesdays. Translators are available.

[SAMESH:](#)

SAMESH provide the community with a range of services and initiatives all designed to provide people with information, education, and programs to enhance their sexual health and well-being. These services are open to people of all cultural backgrounds and gender experiences.

[HepSA:](#)

Hepatitis SA is a non-profit, community-based organisation that provides information, education and support services to South Australians affected by hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

[MOSAIC: Blood Borne Viruses Support Services](#)

MOSAIC Blood Borne Support Services focus on the health and emotional wellbeing of people living with and affected by HIV and Viral Hepatitis.

[Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia: DASSA](#)

Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia (DASSA) is a statewide health service that offers a range of prevention, treatment and education services for people with alcohol, and other drug issues.

[Nunkuwarrin Yunti:](#)

An Aboriginal-controlled, city-based health service with clean needle program and liver clinic.

[Multicultural SA: Migrant Services](#)

This site contains information about the services available to migrants to help meet their needs.

[Working Women's Centre SA Inc:](#)

They offer free and confidential help with work issues.

This research has gained ethics approval by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University: 8004

The Women's Legal Service SA (WLSSA):

The Women's Legal Service SA (WLSSA) is a non-profit organisation and operates by funding received from the Australian Attorney-General's Department as well as private donations. They provide free legal advice and assistance to women in South Australia who experience domestic violence and family law matters.

This research has gained ethics approval by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University: 8004