

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**THIS IS WORK NOT YOUR PRIVATE LIFE:
A DISCOURSE ANALYTIC STUDY
OF SEX WORK IN NEW ZEALAND.**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University**

**Jill Whibley
2001**

ABSTRACT.

The majority of previous research conducted on sex work has reflected and reinforced popular cultural constructions of sex work. This present study examines alternative constructions of sex work from the viewpoint of sex workers themselves using the discourse analytic method developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992). Nine female sex workers were interviewed on a wide variety of relevant topics. The analysis revealed that five distinct discourses were used to construct sex work. These included construction of the dissociation of the self; clients as being everyday types of men who were further constructed as being wounded, as having a higher sexual drive than women and of sometimes being friends and lovers; the 'whore stigma'; sex-as-work and sex work as valuable. In general, these discourses presented positive and powerful ways of talking about the sex work industry. Participants recognised the stereotypical and stigmatic ways that they were constructed in social discourse and actively concentrated on resisting such language about sex work. The participant's alternative constructions of sex work generally functioned to justify sex work as being valid work. The results of this study have relevance for other socially marginalised groups in society, which are confronted by prejudice, stigmatisation, and oppression.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I wish to acknowledge the helpful and friendly cooperation of the nine women who participated in this study. Their accounts of sex work provided a rich source of material for exploring the discursive constructions of sex work. I also want to thank the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective for their assistance in finding the remaining participants for my study. Special thanks to my thesis supervisor Keith Tuffin for his incredible patience during a very testing and dramatic time in my life that really took its toll on my thesis work. Finally (after many years later) I've finished. Whew! Last but not least I would like to thank family and friends for their help and support and steadfastly standing behind my goals and myself. A special dedication goes to my dear son Nathan who was born in the middle of my thesis and provided stiff competition against my thesis. Most of the time he won of course. But he also provided me with the inspiration, strength and determination to finally finish my thesis once and for all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

ABSTRACT.....	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	III
INTRODUCTION.....	1
A Brief Historical Review of Sex Work.....	2
Prehistory: The "Sacred Prostitute".	3
Ancient Greece and Rome.	4
The Dark Ages : The Rise of Christianity and the Martyrdom of Sexuality.	5
The 19th Century: The Whore Stigma ("Madonna's" and "Magdelene's") and "The Great Social Evil".	6
The Contemporary 'Stigmatized' Sex Worker.	8
The Current Social and Legal Context in New Zealand.	10
Previous Research on Sex Work.....	11
19th Century Research on Sex Work.	11
Medical Research.	12
Criminology and Law.	13
Sexology and Psychiatry.	14
A Conclusion of the 19th Century research on prostitution.	15
20th Century Research on Sex Work.	15
Sociobiological Theories.	15
Pathological and Sociopathological Theories.	16
Sociological Theories.	19
Feminist Studies.	20
Discourse Analysis Studies.	22
Rationale and aims of project.	24
The Research Approach: Discourse Analysis.....	26
The New Social Psychology: The Turn To Language.....	26
Potter and Wetherell on Discourse Analysis.	27
Construction.....	27
Consistency.....	28
Variability.....	28
Function.....	29
Interpretative repertoires.	30
Ian Parker on Discourse Analysis.	30
Interviewing of Women: A Discourse Analysis and Feminist Approach.	32
METHODOLOGY.....	34
Context of the study.....	34
The Research Questions.....	35
The Participants.....	35

Interviewing	36
Transcribing	37
Coding	37
Analysis	38
Potter and Wetherell on discourse analysis.....	38
Parker on discourse analysis.....	38
A discussion of the points at which Potter and Wetherell do not concur with Parker.....	41
Objectification.....	41
Text and reflexivity:.....	42
Commonsense.....	42
The Present Study.....	43
Ethical considerations	43

ANALYSIS RESULTS: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEX WORK.
..... **46**

A Construction of the Dissociation of the Self	47
Constructing a Different Working Name and Identity.....	47
Playing a Part.....	49
It's Just a Job.....	50
Work Rules and Boundaries.....	52
Establishing a Routine.....	53
Well Established Safe Sex Procedures.....	53
Not Kissing Rules.....	54
Letting Them Know Who's Boss: Keeping Constantly Aware and in Control of the Situation.....	54
Keeping the Content of the Conversation Impersonal and General.....	55
Secret Lives.....	55
Personal relationships at work.....	57
Age and Experience.....	59
Psychological and Emotional Strength.....	60
I Have Changed: Switching off and Shutting down.....	60
I have not changed.....	66
A Construction of the Whore Stigma	69
Constructing the Whore Stigma Discourse.....	69
Resisting the Whore Stigma Discourse.....	72
"Whores" and "Cheap Sluts" Stereotype.....	72
The nymphomaniac stereotype.....	74
The STD Carrier Stereotype.....	76
The Drug Addict Stereotype.....	77
Victims of sexual abuse stereotype.....	78
The Problem with Labelling: "Sex Workers", "Prostitutes", and "Whores.".....	79
The Decriminalization of Sex Work.....	83
A Construction of Clients as Everyday Men	85
A Construction of Clients as Wounded.....	86
A Construction of Men as having a Higher Sexual Drive than Women.....	90
A Construction of Clients as being Friends and Lovers.....	91
A Construction of Sex-as-Work	95
It's a Job Much Like Any Other Job.....	95
It's a Different Type of Job from Regular 'Straight' Jobs.....	97

The Financial Justification: A Way of Making Ends Meet and Getting Ahead in Life.....	98
Sexual Services Constructed as 'Work Sex' Different from Social or Domestic Sex.....	104
Sex Work isn't just Sex: Sex Work also involves other Valuable Services.	109
A Construction of Sex Work as Valuable.	111
DISCUSSION.....	120
REFERENCES.	123
APPENDICES.....	129
Appendix A: Research Questions.....	129
Appendix B: Advertised Letter.....	131
Appendix C: Information Sheet.	133
Appendix D: Consent Form.....	135
Appendix E: Transcription Notation.	137
Appendix F: A Summary of Results.....	139