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**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  
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## **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.

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## **INTRODUCTION.**

This introduction begins with a brief historical review of sex work. This is followed with previous research on sex work and the rationale and aims of this present study. Since discourse analysis is such a relatively new research approach in psychology a discussion of the background of discourse analysis, according to Potter and Wetherell (1987), and Parker (1992) is presented. This section concludes with a discussion of the discourse analytic and feminist interviewing style employed in this study.

## A Brief Historical Review of Sex Work.

This brief historical review shows how sex work has no inherent meaning but has been socially and historically constructed (Bell, 1994). The history of sex work is tied to the history and social construction of sexuality, masculinity and femininity, gender relations, family and work, and capitalistic exchange relations which have increasingly commodified everything including love (Scambler & Scambler, 1997). This review of the history of sex work focuses on the dynamic quality of sex work looking at how sex work has been similarly and variously constructed over history. The focus is on particular constructions of sex work at five significant points in history which include:

- Prehistory: The “Sacred Prostitute”.
- Ancient Greece and Rome.
- The Dark Ages: The Rise of Christianity and the Martyrdom of Sexuality.
- The 19<sup>th</sup> Century: The Whore Stigma (“Madonna’s”/”Magdalene’s”) and “The Great Social Evil”.
- The Contemporary “Stigmatized” Sex Worker.
- The Current Social and Legal Context in New Zealand.

A popular cliche used to describe prostitution is that it is one of the oldest professions. However this requires some caution since such claims take it for granted that prostitution refers to a "*single transhistorical, transcultural activity*" (Scambler & Scambler, 1997, p. x). It is debatable whether there is continuity between the earliest forms of the “sacred prostitute” of the Middle East and the “secular sex worker” of contemporary Western society. For example, the prehistoric sacred prostitute enjoyed quite a high status in society in comparison to the more highly stigmatised secular sex workers of today (Scambler & Scambler, 1997). According to Murray and Eisenbichler (1996), the term “prostitute” does not necessarily translate into the same meanings across cultures and throughout history either. For example, in medieval England, canon law defined “prostitution” in terms of promiscuity rather than financial exchange. The assumption held was that a woman was either a virgin, a wife/widow, or otherwise a prostitute. Prostitution was not

seen as an alternative to other sorts of work but only to marriage. The consequence was that any single woman who was not chaste, who enjoyed her sexuality, or earned her own living, and even a married woman who earned their own living was seen as a threat to masculine control and was labelled a prostitute. The figure of the prostitute allowed for the sexualisation of this threat. She was a woman who had bought her sexuality out of the private and into the public realm. She was a woman independent and not under male control. Labelling women as prostitutes functioned as a major means of social control.

### **Prehistory: The “Sacred Prostitute”.**

The first recorded account of prostitution was the “sacred prostitute” of a prehistoric matriarchal based society (about 25000 BC) which is rarely mentioned in the majority of history books. In this society the basic unit of social life was matrifocal centred round mothers and their children. Women were worshipped as the Great Goddess being seen as the creator, preserver and destroyer of all life. Sexuality, fertility and spirituality were strongly intertwined. Sex being defined as sacred. The prostitute was seen as embodying these qualities. Prostitutes enjoyed quite high prestige and power described as being powerful, knowledgeable, sexual and spiritual healers of men. They were recognised for their holy and civilising influence on men. This involved a combination of mother-love, tenderness, comfort, mystical enlightenment and sex. This is in stark contrast to the highly stigmatised sex worker of contemporary Western society (Roberts, 1993).

Around 3000 BC, tribes of warlike male dominated nomads with a new awareness of man’s procreation role began to invade the matriarchal territories. These were the origins of the first known civilisations of Egypt and Mesopotomia, which were hybrids of the matriarchal and patriarchal forms. As the balance continued to shift to men new forms of marriage were introduced controlling women’s sexuality and property rights (ensuring inheritance from men to men). Male gods were introduced to compete with the goddesses and male rulers established to ensure the systematic subversion of women’s status by new and increasingly restrictive legislation. As society became increasingly patriarchal it also became increasingly hierachial

resulting in a widening of the low- and high-born classes. Prostitutes were divided into high ranking temple whores and prostitutes who worked outside the temples. The latter category being history's first streetwalkers (Roberts, 1993).

In ancient Sumer (2000 BC) the first laws were introduced segregating wives and mothers from whores and thus separating the private and secluded maternal and reproductive function from the sexual. Patriarchy's greatest victory is said to be attributed to the Hebrew leaders successful institutionalisation of the doctrine that insisted that "*women unfettered and controlled (by men) sexuality was personified by the whore and was evil*" (Roberts, 1993, p.11). This whore stigma (good/bad girl dichotomy) continues to affect all women today so that any woman who steps out of line is labelled a whore. In contrast, men were not subject to the same sexual morality and continued to enjoy considerable sexual freedoms. The sexual double standard was born (Roberts, 1993).

### Ancient Greece and Rome.

Ancient Greece was a patriarchial, class-based society governed by a slave owning class of men. This historic era was glorified by historian's as being a "sexual golden era for the men with gold" (Roberts, 1993, p.11). The Greek capital was a "playground of leisure and pleasure" (Roberts, 1993, p.11), especially for wealthy men who had open access without fear of shame or stigma to a phenomenal range of sexual services (Roberts, 1993). These were provided by three classes of prostitutes - the "*hetaire*" (high- class temple whores), the "*aulerides*" (the dancer and flute player prostitutes), and the "*dicteriades*" (common prostitutes - streetwalkers and brothel slaves.) Dicteriades represented the majority of prostitutes in Athens (Bell, 1994). The "*hetaire*" were renowned for their intellect, beauty and lovemaking skills. They were excellent businesswomen who worked openly in Athens independent of state brothels and temples. In comparison to the "respectable" wives and mothers to be they enjoyed major advantages. This included considerable sexual and economic autonomy such as being allowed to manage their own affairs and stroll through the streets at any time. Whereas the respectable women of Athens were kept under house arrest, placed under the guardianship of men (first father, husband and then

probably an older son) and allowed to possess nothing - neither property nor inheritance rights. Therefore they lived a stunted life of immense frustration, obedience, and silence (Roberts, 1993).

Solon, ruler of Athens (around the turn of the 6th century), seeing how secular prostitution flourished decided to profit from this himself and organised state brothels and temples all over Athens. Solon unequivocally viewed women as either wives or whores. The latter category including any women who attempted to live independently of men, poor women, foreigners, and slaves who worked outside the home. Solon's laws against women were restrictive and punitive. These were justified by the philosophers and writers of Athens who introduced a new "rationale" mode of thinking reducing the universe into opposing abstractions (such as dark/light, odd/even, mind/matter, good/bad and inevitably male/female.) Women were identified with darkness, chaos, the body, sexuality and the natural world and men with light, order and intellect. This created a moral sexual dualism in which everything good was associated with men and everything bad with women. Women were seen as evil and inferior to men (Roberts, 1993).

*"Prostitution and sexuality in ancient Rome were accepted facts of life; openly displayed, exploited, discussed and celebrated"* (Roberts, 1993, p. 54). Prostitution was so deeply entrenched in the Roman economy. However, unlike the Greeks, the Romans did not own and operate state brothels but instead managed to introduce the first system of state registration and taxation of the lower class prostitutes into Europe. Laws also dictated that lower class prostitutes wear a particular costume to distinguish them from the respectable women (Roberts, 1993).

### **The Dark Ages : The Rise of Christianity and the Martyrdom of Sexuality.**

In 337, the emperor Constantine embraced Christianity on his deathbed. Consequently this new religion became the official creed of the whole imperial structure and spread rapidly. Therefore after Rome collapsed, the Christian church alone survived intact, emerging as a powerful institution in its own right. This had dismal consequences for Western sexuality in general and women in particular. The Christians adopted an even more strict interpretation of the Hebrew mores

transforming the idealisation of chastity into a loathing of the body and a severe condemnation of sexual acts. They also adopted and enlarged on the theory of duality passed on by the ancient Greek philosophers dividing the world into opposing pairs. The women being linked with the flesh and the senses, and identified as evil while men were linked with the disembodied spirituality and identified as god like. Most significantly they created the female sinner "Eve" as a dumping ground for all of societies projected sexual guilt and hypocrisy. Once again women were divided into good and bad. For the "respectable" women this had the added bonus of being able to bask in the Virgin Mary's halo glow a little. But the only hope for the prostitute was if she repented signified by the character Mary Magdalene. However, the church's attitude to prostitution was ambiguous. On the one hand they condemned all of sexual intercourse (other than for procreation) and yet on the other hand they accepted the existence of prostitution as a necessary evil. St Augustine, in the fifth century, said "*suppress prostitution and capricious lusts will overthrow society*" (Roberts, 1993, p. 61). Thomas Aquinas compared prostitution to a sewer in a palace. If a sewer was removed the palace would be filled with pollution; similarly, if prostitution was eliminated the world would be filled with sodomy. Therefore prostitution represented the lesser of the two evils (Bullough & Bullough, 1977). It also continued to justify a sexual double standard enabling men to have considerable sexual freedoms but subjecting women to a harsh sexual morality that placed the burden of sexual responsibility and blame entirely on women (Roberts, 1993).

### **The 19th Century: The Whore Stigma ("Madonna's" and "Magdalene's") and "The Great Social Evil".**

Since the Middle Ages, the mythology of women as Eve-like, both corruptible and corrupting proved powerful and enduring. By the beginning of the Victorian era, two stereotypes of women prevailed - the "respectable" wife and mother and the 'fallen' women. These represented a combination of Christian morality and bourgeois (middle class) ideals of the good (asexual) wife and virginal daughter. Denied access to economic and political power women gained status and social respectability which was tied to her role in the family and home (Zedner, 1991). The whore represented the evil temptress corrupting young girls and tempting men, a source of pollution and

disease and a threat to the stability of the family. The prostitute also represented the antithesis of bourgeois values - laziness and love of pleasure was the opposite of the Protestant work ethic - leading her to refuse all labour and seek prostitution instead. The assumption was made that sex work was not ‘real’ work (Roberts, 1993). However, the church continued to ambiguously treat prostitution as a necessary evil, functioning to siphon off surplus male sexual energy, and protecting the sanctity of the respectable women. Therefore, in direct contradiction, prostitution was seen as protecting rather than threatening the stability of the family by deterring men from committing adultery. In addition, prostitution was seen as protecting women from rape and sexual harassment (Sumner, 1980).

In the 19th and early 20th century, academic studies on prostitution began mainly centred around medical, legal and psychiatric fields (see Literature Review section). However, “scientific discourses” were strongly underpinned by Christian morals and bourgeois ideals of the “good” and “bad” woman and therefore provided nothing more than a “scientific logic to the moral response” (Foucault, 1976; Bell, 1994; Perkins, 1991). Scientific discourse effectively marked out and defined the prostitute body as a marginal social and sexual identity through the production of dominant negative stereotypes of the prostitute as morally and physically diseased, sexually deviant (i.e., lesbian and perverse), criminal, physically abnormal body and the suffering victim (Bell, 1994). However, little was said about the actual nature of prostitution and more about the cultural attitudes on prostitution, sexuality and women in general. Overall, it functioned to reinforce the dominant cultural representation of the prostitute as “other”, the “profane” women in contrast to the “respectable” women (Bell, 1994). The consequence of all this “scientific literature” served to provide justification for increased medical and legal regulation of women’s sexuality. This was demonstrated in Great Britain by the Contagious Diseases Act (1870) and the Street Offences Act (1959) (see Literature Review section about these acts). These laws on prostitution can also be viewed in general terms as representing male control over women especially working class women (Sumner, 1980).

## **The Contemporary 'Stigmatised' Sex Worker.**

The construction of the sex worker and women's sexuality in the 20th century is influenced by two key events which are the introduction of contraceptives in the 1950s and the Human Liberation movements in the 1960s and 70s.

With the growing dissemination of contraceptive knowledge in the 1950s the link between sex and reproduction began to weaken. This led to the romanticisation of sex (i.e., the construction of the "sex as love" discourse) and the eroticisation of the family (i.e., the construction of the sexual wife and mother figure.) Sex increasingly required the legitimisation and justification of romantic love. It was no longer seen as simply a duty or bodily function but a way of expressing love. Thus emerged a new sexual morality not the repressive (asexual) Victorian type but reshaped as the sexual mother and wife figure. However, sexuality was narrowly restricted in terms of maintaining family stability rather than for pleasure. As a result, the sex worker "*became a new folk devil in spite of an apparent liberation of female sexuality in discourses on sex.*" (Smart, 1981, p. 48). Sex is bifurcated into a "good" and "bad" variety. Good sex includes that which takes place within marriage or between unmarried consenting adults who engage in sexual activity for love. Bad sex includes sex for pleasure, promiscuity, and sex for money. However, a sexual double standard still exists in which men are accorded a higher degree of sexual freedom than women are. (Eichler, 1980).

In the 1960s and 1970s women's groups began actively demanding political, then economic, and then sexual equality including the right to control one's own bodies. This inspired various sexual minorities such as lesbians and gays, and prostitutes to demand recognition and equality. In particular, the Prostitutes Rights movement of 1975 was established.

Since the human liberation movement of the 1960s the sex worker has emerged as a new political subject and as a plural subject differentially constructed as a site of work, a site of abuse, power, sex, addiction and even pleasure. There are three major feminist perspectives on sex work which include prostitutes rights groups, radical feminist groups, and prostitutes anonymous.

COYOTE (Call Of Your Old Tired Ethics) and HIRE (Hooking Is Real Employment) are two examples of prostitute rights groups. Prostitute rights groups construct sex work not just as being ‘real’ work but as valuable work. Sex workers are constructed as being self-empowered business women offering valuable services equivalent to that of healers, teachers, therapists, “sexperts”, safe sex educators, and sexual surrogates. The sex worker is generally seen as being a powerful, knowledgeable and sexual being. This is an attempt to construct a sex worker identity that can be traced to the ancient “sacred prostitute”. Prostitute rights groups are actively working for changes in the judicial-political order such as the decriminalisation of prostitution. Prostitute rights groups are also actively involved in identity politics. This includes the production of new positive meanings of prostitution and the destabilising of negative representations of prostitutes. The general goal of prostitute rights groups is to gain recognition as a sexual minority like the gays and lesbians, to receive equal rights as citizens, and for general empowerment (Bell, 1994).

Radical feminist groups such as WHISPER (Women Hurt In Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt) construct prostitution (and marriage) as being an institution of male domination and power, the public (and private) manifestation of male sex right, and generally the social, political, and economic inequality of women. The prostitute worker is constructed as a disempowered victim of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and violence against women. The commoditisation of women’s bodies for sexual exchange is seen as being a violation of human dignity. These groups demand the abolition of prostitution since they do not believe that the prostitute can be empowered or are totally free to choose in a patriarchal, racist and capitalistic society (Bell, 1994).

Prostitutes Anonymous consists of a 12-step program (c.f., Alcoholics Anonymous) to help members who have found their lives unmanageable to leave the life. Prostitutes are pathologically constructed as being “sick” individuals suffering from sexual addiction. This has emerged from psychiatric discourse on prostitution (Bell, 1994).

## **The Current Social and Legal Context in New Zealand.**

In New Zealand, sex work still remains illegal (a crime of morality) and a highly stigmatised occupation. Under the 1961 Crimes Act, a woman can be labelled a “common prostitute” and prosecuted for soliciting. In contrast, clients (men) escape legal prosecution because the soliciting law does not apply to them (NZ Crimes Act 1961). Sex workers have been described as being the victims of legal scapegoating, enduring constant surveillance and police harassment (Sumner, 1980). Some sections of the public such as prostitutes rights groups claim that “the rights of prostitutes are the rights of women” (ECP & PLAN, 1978). They demand the decriminalisation of sex work on the basis that the current soliciting law in New Zealand (like the early British Contagious Diseases Acts (1870) and Street Offences Act (1959)) reflects and reinforces a sexual double standard in which society accord men greater sexual freedoms than women. It is said that the soliciting law discriminates against all women in general because it reflects women’s subordinate position in society and male control over women especially working class women (Sumner, 1980). Currently in New Zealand, there has been some discussion in government concerning the decriminalisation of sex work. However, there have not been any apparent changes in the soliciting law as yet.

## **Previous Research on Sex Work.**

Although sex work has a very long history there has been relatively little academic study conducted on sex work itself (Bullough & Bullough, 1977). Bullough, Elcano, Deacon & Bullough (1977) published a 'Bibliography of Prostitution', which included a list of 5500 works published between 1593-1977 dealing with varying aspects of sex work. It was found that the disciplines most represented in this list are medicine (20.58%) and law (15.17%), while psychiatry which probably had the most influential impact on public consciousness, contributed one of the smallest number of works on sex work (1.4%). It was suggested that the dominance of law and medicine in sex work research was a reflection of the community's concern for controlling sex workers. Overall, the humanities have contributed more than the social sciences, particularly history (9.83%) and then English (5.37%). In the social sciences, the leading contributor was sociology (8.61%) compared with anthropology (2.77%) and psychology (1.6%). This illustrates a paucity of research on sex work especially in the field of psychology. This current research project can therefore contribute to the field of psychology by filling in these gaping holes in our understanding of sex work.

## **19th Century Research on Sex Work.**

Academic research on sex work can be said to have only commenced in the 19th century. However, these early studies seemed to provide a "scientific logic to the moral response" rather than providing useful insights into the nature of sex work (Perkins, 1991). According to Foucault (1976), the 19th century public discourse on sexuality had three centres: medical, legal, and psychiatric, all informed by an underpinning Christian moralism and bourgeois values of the "good" and "bad" women. A great deal of the 19th century literature lingered on this theme of the sex worker as unnatural or unfeminine, as lacking a maternal instinct, and as different from other women. Apart from her sexual activities, the sex worker was also said to menstruate differently from other "respectable" women, to be infertile, to miscarry more frequently and (if she did bear children) to be a bad mother. Sex workers were also said to be "unfeminine" in behaviour such as speaking in rough, masculine

voices, dressing in unfeminine ways (e.g., dirty, slovenly and garish), to engage in masculine habits such as drinking, frequenting public houses, smoking, swearing, and mixing freely with men in public places (Sumner, 1980).

### **Medical Research.**

One of the earliest studies conducted on sex work was by a physician named Parent-Duchalét in the 1830s, who investigated 5200 Parisian street sex workers. His research is full of ambiguities sliding between different constructions of the sex worker. In an early anthropological study he provides statistical descriptions of the physical types of sex workers (i.e., the hair/eye/eyebrow chart) as being somatically “different” to the ordinary woman. He then adopts a public hygiene discourse to describe sex workers as being somatically “similar” to the average woman in the sense of being a source of pollution. However, sex workers are constructed as being more prone to diseases. The personality and behavioural repertoire of sex workers and “virtuous” women are also contrasted with the sex worker described as being brusque, aggressive, irrational, restless and tending towards lesbianism. In his 1831 demographic study, he then adopts an economic explanation of sex work as being a transitory occupation and sex workers as being “working class” women driven into sex work because of high unemployment and insufficient wages. However, he also mentions ”laziness” as being a factor, which he defines as being a desire for fine clothing without working. Therefore, making the assumption that sex work was not “real” work (Bell, 1994).

William Acton’s (1870) study called “Prostitution considered in its moral, social and sanitary aspects” was published in 1870 in support of the British Contagious Diseases Acts, 1860s and 1870s. In his exact words, he says, “*Prostitution is at once produced by and a cause producing morality.*” (Acton, 1870, p. 42). Sex workers are described as being “immoral”, “impure”, “degraded”, “fallen”, “corrupt creatures”, a “social pest”, a “spreader of disease” and “a woman with half the woman gone” - the other half being her purity. The sex worker is seen as being a perversion of respectable femininity. She is made impure by her contact with money and in turn corrupts and infects the rest of society. She is in contrast to the pure

asexual “respectable” women who has sex for love or procreation reasons only ((Acton, 1870; Bell, 1994).

## **Criminology and Law.**

Early research on sex work was “moralising” rather than scientific and provided justification for greater legal control over sex workers. English legislation on sex work in the 19th century derived from vagrancy legislation. The Vagrancy acts of 1774 and 1824 persecuted mainly lower class sex workers and those with a high public presence (i.e., streetwalkers). These sex workers were seen as being “idle” persons who could not give a good account of themselves and their way of life. Society was more tolerant of the high-class sex worker who kept her affairs discreet and private. This reflected bourgeois (i.e., middle-class) fear and distaste of the working class (Sumner, 1980: Walkowitz, 1980). The British Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s and 1870s, constructed sex workers as being a site of disease and pollution (Bell, 1994). Under these Acts, a woman could be labelled a “common prostitute”, subject to regular medical inspection, and literally kept like a prisoner in a “lock hospital” (Walkowitz, 1980).

The earliest criminology studies on sex work were the pioneering works of Lombroso and Ferrero. Lombroso and Ferrero’s study called “The Female Offender” (1895) involved taking detailed measurements of the skulls, brains and bones of women criminals and sex workers, studying their physical appearance from masses of photographs and studying their careers from a variety of life histories. Sex workers were described as being biological and evolutionary throwbacks. According to Lombroso and Ferrero, sex work was a natural state of regression, and that the sex worker most closely conformed to the criminal type being equal to the male criminal. Lombroso and Ferrero described sex workers as being “unnatural”, “morally deficient”, and “genetically more male than female” evidenced by a lack of normal women qualities such as reserve, docility, sexual apathy and maternal feelings.

Smart (1977) and Heidensohn (1985) wrote a feminist critique of early criminology and suggest that little is said about female criminality and more is said about the researcher’s ideas about women. Heidensohn (1985) criticise Lombroso and Ferrero’s study for being more “fanciful” than scientific. It was said to reflect

19th century attitudes of the “respectable” and “other” women, and as being an attempt to justify the status quo. In particular, it serves to justify the existing subordinate positions of women and the double standards of that period in history. Central to Lombroso and Ferrero’s study was the concept of the “true nature” or “natural role” of women which is based on a biological determinist position (Smart, 1977). Women were categorised into dichotomies of good/bad and natural/abnormal and this was equated with conformity and crime (Heidensohn, 1985).

### **Sexology and Psychiatry.**

Sexology and psychoanalysis were highly influential in constructing “normal” sexualities and pathologising other types such as sex work.

Havelock Ellis wrote seven volumes of studies in the psychology of sex between 1897-1928. He asserted a woman's right to sexual pleasure which contradicted the asexual Victorian ideology but he also argued that female submission and male dominance was biologically determined and inherent in “normal” heterosexual relations. He was probably one of the first sex researchers to look for psychological factors related to sex work. Sex workers were constructed as having a strong sexual impulse but also as having a congenital tendency to be sexually frigid and frequently homosexual (Bell, 1994). Jeffreys (1987) described “sexual frigidity” as being a code for non-heterosexual activity such as masturbation and lesbianism. Ellis also described the sex worker as being somatically “different” from normal heterosexual women and somatically closer to the criminal. But then later, he constructed the sex worker as being “similar” to other women. That is, the wife at home may be in need of rescue as much as the sex worker in the street since it is not the sexuality part that is objectionable but the exchange of money (Bell, 1994).

In Sigmund Freud's (1905) essay on “Infantile Sexuality” he wrote little on sex work but provides a unique construction of sex work that moves away from congenital moral degeneracy models. Freud viewed sex workers as being psychologically ill (i.e., suffering a neurosis) or as immature (i.e., of arrested development/lacking moral dams against sexual excess) (Bell, 1994).

## **A Conclusion of the 19th Century research on prostitution.**

Taken together, these texts of the 19th century provide dominant stereotypical images, which have largely constructed public knowledge of the sex worker. These images of the sex worker include: (a) the sex worker as the diseased physical and moral body; (b) the sex worker as a suffering victim; (c) the sex worker as a working class body; (c) the sex worker as a sexual deviant - the lesbian and the perverse woman; (e) the sex worker as an urban blight signifying a diseased city; (f) the sex worker as the mother body; (g) the sex worker as the criminal; (h) the sex worker as the physically abnormal body; and (i) the sex worker as the desublimated childlike sexual woman. Although, these images appear contradictory, they have a similar function to magnify an overarching cultural representation of the sex worker as the “other” or the “profane” woman in contrast to the opposing female dichotomy of the “respectable” woman (Bell, 1994).

Although early research has been surpassed and is no longer acceptable today, their ideas have continued to have a strong influence on 20th century research, to which I now turn.

## **20th Century Research on Sex Work.**

The majority of research in the 20th century has generally treated sex work as being a phenomenon and focussed upon looking for causative factors rather than focussing on sex workers themselves and the nature of sex work. Scambler & Scambler (1997) provide a categorisation of the main ways that the sex industry has been theorised about. These include sociobiological, psycho- or socio-pathological, sociological, feminist, and discourse analytical theories. These theories have been incorporated into the following review and discussion of 20th century research on the sex work industry.

### **Sociobiological Theories.**

These theories (sometimes characterised as Social Darwinist) start from a basic proposition that social differences in say sex roles can be explained in terms of

biological differences. For example, women were described as being naturally asexual and men as having a naturally higher sexual drive. Sex work was seen as being a social necessity to control the overpowering male sex drive and protect the pureness of the “respectable” women. The sociobiological theories were strongly employed in the 19th century by researchers such as Lombroso & Ferrero and Acton, and continues to be influential in early 20th century research by criminologists such as Thomas (1969), and Pollak (1961).

Thomas (1969) conducted a study on delinquent girls. He constructs sex workers as merely looking for love and tenderness but the means by which she seeks satisfaction are socially disapproved. Smart (1977) criticises Thomas’s study as being founded on a simple biological deterministic position that presupposes that the biological instincts in men and women are not equal. In particular, Thomas states that women have a more intense need to give and feel love than men. This “natural” discourse gives the perception of reality about relationships between men and women that are merely a reflection of Thomas’s own cultural beliefs.

Pollak (1961) conducted a study on “The Criminality of Women”. He describes women as being “automata” impelled by their physiology, their hormonal cycles and low self-evaluation to commit crimes such as sex work. Smart (1977) and Heidensohn (1985) describe Pollak as being similar to Lombroso and Ferrero, in regards, that they view women as being more wicked and devious than men describing them as being dually “madonna’s”/“magdalene’s”, and witches/good wives. Again, these were merely reflections of Pollak’s own cultural beliefs.

### **Pathological and Sociopathological Theories.**

These theories attribute the causation of females going into sex work as being due to some underlying pathology either in the (abnormal) psyches of these women or in the (abnormal) social environment in which they were raised or interact (Scambler & Scambler, 1997). Such theories were popularised in the 19th century by Freud and Ellis and continue to be considerably influential with later 20th century psychoanalysts, psychologists (especially social psychologists) and sociologists.

Although there is much variation and contradiction in their explanations a major theme of psychoanalytic research is that sex workers were mentally ill and should be

treated in order to cause them to leave the life. However, in practice, few were given psychotherapy, although, many had been sporadically jailed (Bullough & Bullough, 1977).

There are prolific examples of psychoanalytic research on sex work in the 20th century, cited in Perkins (1991) and Bullough & Bullough (1977), which include the following: Lampl de Groot, 1928, argued that the sexual assertiveness of sex workers was due to failure to resolve their Oedipal (that is, Electra') complex. Deutsch, 1929, identified sex worker hostility toward men as being caused by identification with a hostile mother and rejection of father's authority that extended to rejection of institutions built by men such as law and morality. Abraham, 1942, found that sex workers were sexually frigid because of rejection by father. She unconsciously avenged herself on every man by being promiscuous and demonstrating that the sex act is not important to her and thus humiliating him. Agoston, 1945, claims that sex workers and clients are involved in an immature fantasy and were unable to develop the adult responsibilities of long term relationships. Sex workers achieve a subterfuge of maturity by submerging her real infantile personality beneath a pseudo-personality that was rented out in her transactions. Caprio & Brenner, 1961, states that sex work was a defence mechanism against homosexual desires. Szasz, 1957, describes sex work as being a mechanism by which women indiscriminately participate in sexual intercourse in order to deny existence of sexual parts of their bodies by letting males possess their sex organs. Greenwald, 1958, identified rejection by both parents as a common element in the histories of sex workers. However, he adds that the maternal one was the most crucial rejection. Glover, 1960, described sex work as being evidence of an unresolved Oedipal conflict in which she hates the mother and was disappointed by father. Consequently was hostile, frigid and had homosexual tendencies. Sex work was a way of denying attachment to father when still was. Choisy, 1960, 1961 argues that the union between client and sex work was one of debasement in which both expressed aggression and hostility in a sadomasochistic relationship. The women were seeking revenge against fathers and men against mothers. Exchange of money is symbol of mutual contempt for each other. Lichtenstein, 1961, says that sex work is symbolic of 'castrating' clients to 'possess' phallus and win back love of mother lost in Oedipal phase. Hollander, 1961, argued that sex work symbolically castrated the client in an act of revenge for the way men

mistreat women. Overall, psychoanalysis constructions of sex work continued to reinforce the stigma of the sex worker as being a ‘sinful’ and ‘sick’ woman.

Psychologists especially since the 1940s have shown an interest in sex work primarily through the branch of social psychology. The majority of these studies have constructed a negative picture of sex workers as being pathological victims of mental illness, addiction, sexual abuse, and tragic social backgrounds. For example, Gibbens, 1957, conducted a study of prostitutes in Holloway prison and constructed a depressing picture of prostitutes as suffering from mental illness, addiction, and physical disorders (i.e., 25% attempted suicide, 25% alcoholics, 25% drug addicts, 15% acute mental stress, and 25% physical disorders). However, it is debatable whether these results are representative of sex workers since most sex workers have not been imprisoned (Perkins, 1991).

Many researchers have emphasised a bleak picture of a dysfunctional family background. For example, Silbert’s, 1982, study found a background of single parents or separated parents, alcohol abuse, physical or sexual abuse, incest, early pregnancy or abortion, rape, promiscuous and early sex. She stated that most were not economically motivated but probably motivated by independence from oppressive family lives. However, it is debatable whether these results represent sex workers since this sample came from streetwalkers, drug rehabilitation women, and had a heavy emphasis on juveniles who only represent a minority of sex workers (Perkins, 1991). Weisberg (1985) found that like older female prostitutes, many adolescent female prostitutes have negative attitudes towards men. Most came from dysfunctional homes marked by family separation, divorce, conflict and lack of parental affection, and substantial sexual abuse in family. Many reported a background of being in trouble in a number of social settings in school, home and the community and drifted into sex work because of their marginality and association with others also marginal and stigmatised. Other research has provided similar results (Davis, N., 1971; Jagon & Smith, 1970; James, 1979).

In 1988, a large-scale national survey was conducted in the United States on human sexuality, which surpassed all previous studies of sexuality such as the Kinsey report and Masters and Johnson’s study. This was called ‘The Janus Report’. In the Janus report sex work was constructed as being an ‘addiction’ or a repetitive compulsive behaviour evidenced by little or no self control to get out of the life even

when wanted to. Sex work was categorised as a form of “sexual deviancy”. It was also found that 86% of sex workers were sexually molested in childhood (a view endorsed by many mental health professionals) which was suggested makes it difficult to develop “normal” appropriate adult interaction. In this study, it was estimated that five million American women have engaged in various aspects of sex for pay. Janus describes sex work as being degrading work. She speculates that the numbers will diminish significantly as Americans suffer less guilt and abuse and find more dignity with their sexuality, and of course with the positive aid of ongoing sex research like her own (Janus & Janus, 1993).

Some psychological research challenges this pathological model by offering a more variable, healthy, and positive picture of sex work. For example, Pomeroy, 1965, presented a more variable and healthy picture of sex workers as voluntarily choosing to do sex work because it was good money, easy work, opportunity to meet interesting people, and offering freedom and sexual pleasure. Sex workers ranged widely from charming and cultured to malicious and dishonest, and from affluent to being trapped in poverty and drug addiction (Perkins, 1991). A criminological study by Perkins (1991) found that most sex workers had a more or less average stable family and social background and that only a small minority had negative backgrounds.

### **Sociological Theories.**

Many sociological theories also contribute to this stigmatisation of sex work by defining and labelling sex work as a “social problem”, and sex workers as being “sexual deviants”, “social outcasts”, “social wreckage” and “socially dislocated and disorganised”. However, causative factors are attributed to the social environment rather than to the individual. For example, sex workers are described as being victims of social and economic disadvantage evidenced by their over representation in the lower socioeconomic classes, often from inner city areas and racial minorities (Clinard & Meier, 1995). Sex workers are also described as being victims of negative early social experiences (e.g., divorce) that have left them socially dislocated and disorganised, and thus led them to seek a sense of belonging and social embeddedness in a new and deviant subculture like sex work. (Wilkinson, 1955)

Some researchers point to social structural factors, like capitalism, patriarchy, classism and racism. For example, Davis (1963) considers sex work as being an inevitable part of our society. He describes sex work as functioning to supply a scarce resource (i.e., sexual attractiveness) and therefore preserving the “respectable” women and their marriages. Other researchers like Hoirgaard and Finstad (1992) see the sex industry as being an oppressive and evil institution of male domination, violence and corrupted sexuality in which sex has been reduced to a mere commodity and women reduced to sex objects for men’s sexual gratification. Sex workers are paternalistically seen as victims in need of rescuing from these evil institutions that are the product of a patriarchal and capitalistic society. Similarly, Davidson (1998) conducted an ethnographic study of sex workers across a variety of cultures and showed it to be a complex relationship where economics, gender, age, race, class, power and choice intersect. She describes sex work as being an oppressive institution that represents economic and political inequalities.

Some sociological research has offered a more alternative, positive portrayal of sex work. For example, Davis, 1937, describes sex workers as not being “deviant”. He argues that sex work (i.e., exchanging money for sex) is intrinsically no different to wives trading sexual access to their bodies in marriage for financial security. He uncannily suggests that women might be able to improve their working conditions and financial situation by leaving their “straight” jobs and entering into prostitution instead (Perkins, 1991).

### **Feminist Studies.**

The human liberation movement of the 1960s and early 1970s provided the impetus for sexual minority groups such as the lesbian and gay movement and the prostitutes rights movement of 1975 to assert their rights as equal citizens in society and redefine their own identity. Consequently, many sex workers rights advocates have begun to view themselves as a sexual minority who engage in a form of sexuality as work and redefine the sex worker as a positive sexual identity (Bell, 1994). This has inspired much literature on sex work that focuses on sex workers themselves, their experiences of sex work, and the circumstances affecting their working conditions. This differs from traditional social research that has treated sex work as a

phenomenon, searching for causative factors, and ways to treat sex workers or eradicate the industry.

One significant study is McLeod (1982) who describes sex workers as being quite "ordinary" women (e.g., often mothers) with a businesslike attitude to work. Sex work was seen as being a rational economic act to resist relative poverty in the context of social and economic disadvantage in a capitalistic and patriarchial society. The primary attractions of sex work being the flexible work hours, the ability to work from home and move in and out of work, and the comparatively higher incomes than is provided by legitimate work. It is discussed how legal scapegoating of sex workers has had obverse affects on their working conditions and their personal lives.

Many anecdotal studies have been produced by sex workers themselves (Silver, 1993; French, 1988; Delacoste & Alexander, 1987; Perkins & Bennett, 1985; Jaget, 1980). For instance, French (1988), president of prostitutes rights organisations such as Florida's COYOTE and HIRE, argues that the work of sex workers resembles other kinds of work that women do. For example, a woman has as much right to sell her sexual services, just as she has the right to sell her brains to a law firm where she works as a lawyer, or sell her body to say Fords model agency where she works as a model.

In the USA, voluminous literature has been published which allows sex workers to describe their experiences of sex work and explore their feelings in fiction and factual styles (Harlot, 1994; Monet, 1994; Thomas, 1994; Delacoste & Alexander, 1987; French, 1988; Pheterson, 1989).

There has been very little literature on sex work conducted in New Zealand. One exception is Jordan (1991) that highlights the experiences of female sex workers based on the raw unanalysed interpretations from sex workers themselves.

Collectively, these articles have provided a good starting point to gain an initial understanding of the experiences of being a sex worker. In particular, they have helped identify content areas of interest which have acted as a guide to formulating the research questions used in this study and to provide essential background knowledge of sex work necessary for conducting discourse analysis research.

## Discourse Analysis Studies.

Since the 1970s, discourse analysis has become increasingly popular as a research tool (especially with feminist researchers) to study sex work. This is primarily because discourse analysis offers a radical alternative to more traditional research approaches. Fundamentally, it opposes the idea of a “static, unitary truth” and replaces this with the notion of multiple and changing versions of reality. A key proponent of this field is Foucault (1976) who stated that sexuality has no essential nature or meaning but it historically and socially constructed. However, it wasn't until the Victorian period that sexuality was systematically marked and identified. Scientific knowledge produced sexual and social identities (e.g., the sex worker) through regulation, surveillance and the labelling of human activity.

Brophy & Smart (1985) employed a discourse analysis approach to study British laws governing sex work. Twenty-five randomly selected magistrates (14 men/11 women) sitting regularly in the Sheffield Magistrates Court in the winter of 1981 were interviewed. The aim of the study was .to find out what discourses were used to explain sex work and justify their policies on sex work. It was found that three main discourses were used. These included; (a) the “liberal permissive discourse” (i.e., what consenting adults did in private is not concern of the law until it becomes publicly visible -like the streetwalkers- which was the underlying justification of the Street Offences Act 1959); (b) the “puritan and authoritarian discourse” (i.e., relied on Christian morality, value of family, social upbringing, social evil and puritan ethic, sex work seen as not ‘real’ work and easy money, exaggerated concern over disease); and (c) the “welfarist discourse”. (This represented the smallest number of magistrates and mostly women, saw something amiss with sex workers such as dysfunctional family background.) In summary, it was found that ideologies about women’s sexuality, women’s bodies, and women’s place in the family as wives and mothers are central to debates in law. Law policy was based on the specific “sexual objectification” of sex workers and direct control over women’s bodies. Sex workers were seen as having lesser rights than other women.

McLaughlin (1991) also employed discourse analysis to study discourses of sex work and sexuality in the media. The intention was to address the problem of representations of sex workers as “others” in the media. It was found that feminism

has not effectively challenged women's images especially sex workers images from sensationalised deviant or disordered actor to the working women. She attributes this to problems within the area of identity politics.

Discourse analysis has been taken advantage of by many researchers for political ends because discourse analysis can be suitably employed to challenge dominant discourses and promote subordinate discourses as a form of "empowerment", "giving people a voice model of research" (Burman & Parker, 1993). Bell (1994) and Roberts (1993) are feminist and politically oriented studies, which show how the sex worker body (i.e., who engages in sexual interaction in exchange for money) has no inherent meaning but has been socially and historically constructed. They focus on the discursive domains of the 'sacred prostitute' to the contemporary secular and highly stigmatised sex worker.

A study that is similar to this present study and which this is an attempt to add to is that of Guarana's (1995) discourse analytic study of Adelaide sex workers. Five main discourses to construct sex work were employed which included the construction of the whore mentality, construction of the client as wounded, construction of the dissociation of the self, construction of sex-as-work, and the construction of sex work as valuable. The function and consequence of these discourses used to construct the self and their work in the context of much stigmatisation and oppression were discussed.

## **Rationale and aims of project.**

The primary goal of this project was to examine the functional ways in which sex workers talk about their work and themselves, and the consequences that these have. Historically, sex workers have been constructed in both positive and negative ways. The academic literature has largely reflected and reinforced the negative cultural stereotypes of sex workers as being different from other women such as morally and physically abnormal, diseased, and pathological. However, much of this literature has treated sex work as a phenomenon, seeking causative factors, possible treatment for sex workers, and ways of eradicating the sex industry. Very little has been said about the actual nature of sex work. The voices of sex workers themselves have been totally repressed. However, recently there has been a flux of literature written by sex workers themselves challenging and destabilising these negative stereotypes of sex work. The aim of this study is to continue this trend of recent research and add to it from a New Zealand perspective. This study has been carried out with the intention of listening to the language of sex workers in order to analyse their discourse in meaningful ways for the benefit of interested groups in the community. The primary goals of this discourse analytic study of the language of sex workers in New Zealand are as follows:

- (1) To obtain qualitative accounts of the sex work industry from the perspective of sex workers themselves in their own words.
- (2) Using discourse analysis, to explore the variability and consistency within and across accounts given by sex workers.
- (3) To examine the functions served by these accounts and their potential consequence in the context where soliciting remains a criminal offence and a highly stigmatised occupation in New Zealand. An attempt will be made to relate these discourses to a wider historical context where appropriate.

This project has much to contribute to the psychological field. To promote the understanding of a marginalised social group in society from the language of sex workers themselves rather than assessing public 'attitudes' towards marginalised groups in society as traditional social psychological research has done. Also to

promote the understanding of how oppression, prejudice, and stigmatisation can affect talk about self and others.

## **The Research Approach: Discourse Analysis.**

The purpose of this section is to familiarise the reader with discourse analysis as espoused by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992) which are the methods of analysis employed in this present study.

### **The New Social Psychology: The Turn To Language.**

*"It became clear to many psychologists that a key problem with traditional approaches was that they studied a silent world. Psychology needed to turn to accounts to speech, to language."* (Ian Parker, 1992: p. 65)

Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe discourse analysis as being a relatively new and radical approach although it didn't spring out of nowhere. A brief overview of discourse analysis is provided as having origins in philosophy, sociology and literary theory and as being variously applied to describe a large body of diverse work. The terminology "discourse analysis" was adopted by Potter and Wetherell to allow for the "cross fertilisation" from other fields of discourse. However, Potter and Wetherell differentiate their discursive approach from others in the field and describe it as being most similar to Parkers (1992) approach with emphasis being placed on studying language as a social practice rather than focussing on its linguistic features. This is described as being of particular importance to social psychology since language is the most basic and pervasive form of interaction between people embodying much of a person's daily activities such as talking to each other, reading each others writings, watching television, and writing shopping lists to cite a few of Wetherell and Potter's examples. The major point emphasised here is that our talk and writing do not merely reside in the conceptual realm but are mediums for action. Therefore studying social texts are an essential medium for gaining a better understanding of social life and social interaction.

The problem with traditional social psychology approaches is that they presuppose a "descriptive realist model" of language and therefore they have tended to ignore or cover over the constructive and active use of language in everyday life. Traditional social psychology approaches have treated language as reflecting or mirroring

objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world or as being a relatively “true” indicator of a person's underlying mental entities. Rather, as discourse analysis shows, language “actively construct a version of those things. They do not just describe things; They do things. And being active they have social and political implications.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: p. 6). Language is much more variable than the descriptive realist model presupposes since individuals construct different versions to achieve a variety of functions such as blaming or excusing. As stated by Potter and Wetherell (1987), “*there is, as yet, no fool proof way to deal with this variation and to sift accounts which are 'literal' or 'accurate' from those which are rhetorical or merely misguided*” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: p. 35). Discourse analysis escapes these problems by approaching participants discourse or social texts in its own right and not as a secondary route to things beyond the text such as beliefs, attitudes or events. That is, “*discourse is treated as a potent, action-orientated medium, not a transparent information channel*” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: p. 160).

The two central questions of interest in discourse analysis include:

- (1) How is participant's language constructed?
- (2) What are the functions and consequences of different types of constructions?

### **Potter and Wetherell on Discourse Analysis.**

Potter and Wetherell (1987) define “discourse” (following Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) in a very broad and flexible sense “*to cover all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal and written texts of all kinds*” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: p.7) and “discourse analysis” as meaning analysis of any of these forms of discourse.

### **Construction.**

A major contention of discourse analysis is “*that people are using their language to construct versions of the social world*” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: p. 33). Accounts are constructed from using a selection of the individuals pre-existing

linguistic resources which vary as they are used to perform different functions. Although note, choices may not be made at a conscious level. In addition, at any time, powerful social constraints maybe operating on a person's discourse and they may not be aware of the consequences of his or her discourse. Not only is language constructed but it is also constructive. In a profound sense, language constructs "reality". Language in subtle and complex ways orders our perceptions (i.e., our world is accessed and made "sense" of through language use) and makes things happens (i.e., language is actively used to "do" things such as persuading or blaming). One individual's account will be different to that of another individual experiencing the same event. Neither account can be seen as being more accurate or true but as just versions of an event assembled according to the functional orientation of the individual. Therefore, it can be said that language is used to construct social interaction and diverse social worlds.

### **Consistency.**

Although consistency is of some interest to the discourse analyst, analyses which identify only consistent responses are sometimes uninformative because they reveal little about the full range of accounting resources that people use when constructing the meaning of their social world and do not so clearly reveal the function of participants constructions. Consistency may merely indicate that participants are drawing on a limited number of compatible discourses or interpretative repertoires. Of more interest to the discourse analyst is variability in accounts.

### **Variability.**

In traditional empirical research, consistency within and between accounts is highly valued as evidence of a consistent reality beyond. However, traditional empirical techniques and analysis are criticised by Potter and Wetherell (1987) for tending to overstate the consistency in accounts and suppressing the inherent functionally determined variability of talk and therefore of obscuring some of the more interesting and important features of social life. Traditional empirical techniques include restricting the range of responses available to subjects, using

grossly inclusive coding categories and selectively coding subjects accounts to fit in with the researchers preferred theoretical “story” rather than critically evaluate it.

A central prediction of the discourse analysis approach is that a high degree of variability in accounts will result within and between individual accounts as they construct versions of their world to achieve different functions. To exemplify, a person or a social group or an event may be described in many different ways as the functional orientation shifts from say blaming to excusing. Since variability will vary systematically with the functional orientation of the speaker therefore identifying variability within and between discourses will provide important analytical clues of the function being performed by the speaker and the possible consequences of their language construction.

## **Function.**

Language doesn't just “describe” things; they “do” things. For example, blame, excuse, request, and persuade. Talk can be orientated to many different functions that can be categorised as global, specific, direct or rhetorical. At one end, language can be quite specific such as requesting help with housework and can be quite direct (e.g., can you please mop the floor?). At the other end, language functions can have more implicit and global consequences (e.g., an individual may wish to present their self in a more favourable way, and so instead of saying “I'm a wonderful person”, they slip in how they won an academic prize or worked for a charity). However, as Potter and Wetherell (1987) state, people may not deliberately formulate a function to achieve a specific effect or understand the implications of their discourse, they may just be doing what comes “naturally”. The analysis of function involves generating hypothesis about the functions and consequences of language and looking for the linguistic evidence. Since accounts vary according to the purpose of talk, variation provides a valuable analytic clue of the function of a discourse.

## **Interpretative repertoires.**

Potter and Wetherell (1987) present a case for the existence of "interpretative repertoires" which is defined as "...recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena. A repertoire... is constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organized around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes)." (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: p. 149). This is illustrated by citing the example of research conducted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) which revealed that scientists used two main interpretative repertoires to achieve particular functions. These included using an empiricist repertoire to warrant their beliefs with the support of empirical and experimental evidence and a contingent repertoire to characterize personal or social factors that influenced beliefs. Discourse analysis doesn't deploy the cognitive reductionism of social representation's theory that links linguistic behaviour with mental entities and processes, and repertoires are intrinsically linked to certain social groups or categories. Rather, repertoires are seen as being available to people of quite different groups or categories. Different repertoires are drawn on by people, as they go through life, to suit ever changing situations. In discourse analysis, interpretative repertoires are not just identified, the functions and consequences of these different repertoires used by participants in different contexts are also examined to help make sense of diverse areas of social life.

## **Ian Parker on Discourse Analysis.**

Parker (1992) embarks on a working definition of "discourse" as being a "system of statements which construct an object" (Parker, 1992: p. 5). Parker employs discourse analysis in a wider context than Wetherell and Potter. Parker describes discourses as being multiple and shifting arising under certain social conditions and located in a specific culture and time in history. Parker agrees with the frequent criticism of discourse analysis that it is often subject to reification and abstraction from the realms of everyday life and often is reduced to nothing more than an

academic pursuit. In response he proposes grounding discourse analysis in reality by employing it as a form of action research. This is outlined in three major steps:

Firstly, adopting the technique of reflexivity to challenge “unitary truth” claims that psychology makes.

Secondly, employing a critical discourse analysis approach to develop an understanding of social structures. For example: (a) look at how discourses reproduce and transform our world, (b) look at how a specific discourse has historically emerged and how it has changed, (c) identify which institutions are reinforced and attacked by a discourse, (d) identify the power relations they mirror and reproduce along lines such as gender, race, class, culture, age and disability, and (e) identify the ideological struggles between dominant and subordinate discourses

Thirdly, employing discourse analysis as a form of political intervention by identifying and challenging the contradictions and tensions within a discourse and in relation to others, in order to alter and permit space for manoeuvre and resistance against processes of power and ideology. Burman & Parker (1993) suggest that discourse analysis can be suitably employed to champion the cause of a particular discourse by elaborating the contrasting consequences of each discursive framework. It can promote an existing (perhaps subordinate) discourse analysis as “empowerment”, “giving people a voice model of research”.

## **Interviewing of Women: A Discourse Analysis and Feminist Approach.**

In this study, the participants were interviewed by employing an open-ended, semi-structured format. Traditional structured interviewing styles with their single direct questions and preset response categories tend to suppress the very variabilities and contextual detail that discourse analysis celebrates such as contradictions, ambiguities, contrasting views, uncertainties of responses, emotional content and nonverbal communication like pauses and silences. These are regarded as interesting and important features of social life that should be an integral part of the data to be included in the analysis. These features are best revealed by adopting an open ended, semi-structured format of interviewing as recommended by Potter and Wetherell (1987), and Parker (1992).

Interviewing was also conducted as a two way process. The mythological practise of sanitising research (Oakley, 1981) through the pretence of neutrality may actually be counterproductive: participation demands alignment (Dexter, 1956; Paul, 1954). It is suggested by Sellitz et al (1965) that interviewer bias is nothing more than interviewer differences which is inherent in the fact that interviewers are human beings and not machines and therefore do not work identically. Rapoport & Rapoport (1976) assert that the type of relationship developed between interviewer and interviewee is an important factor in achieving the quality and quantity of information required. Laslett & Rapoport (1975) assert that the best results are achieved when interviewing is conducted as a joint enterprise. Richardson and colleagues (1965) similarly assert that gaining and maintaining satisfactory participation is intimately linked to the quantity and quality of information achieved. Oakley(1981) asserts that the goal of finding out about people is best achieved when the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierachial, friendly, informal conversational style and the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship by answering questions about self and research. This approach will help gain and maintain satisfactory participation from the interviewee.

Furthermore, Oakley (1981) suggests that the traditional criteria for interviewing appeal to dominant values of a traditional male culture such as objectivity,

detachment, hierarchy, and science, and subsequently comprises poor interviewing as including subjectivity, emotions and involvement. The traditional approach tends to treat the interview as a one way process in which the interviewer elicits and receives but doesn't provide any opinions or any information so as not to bias data, and the interviewee is allocated a subordinate position as object of study and sources of data. It is asserted that traditional interviewing style (as a one way process) is inadequate for understanding the reality, needs and desires of the people researched and in particular oppresses and suppresses the viewpoint of women.

# METHODOLOGY.

This section provides an outline of the research process followed in this present study which includes a description of the context of the study, the research questions, the participants, interviewing, transcribing and coding procedures, and ethical considerations. References are made to Potter and Wetherell (1987), and Parker (1992) whose discourse analysis methodological techniques I have both drawn on and incorporated into my analysis. A critique and justification of these approaches are provided. References are also made to Phoenix (1990) concerning the context of the study, and Oakley (1981) and Brannen (1988) whose approach I have adopted in my interviewing of the participants.

## Context of the study.

*"Researchers are not objective observers of social contexts and interactions but are members of society who have specific social locations and who bring particular orientations to bear on their research. The issues researchers choose to study and the frames of reference they use to structure their enquiries are often products of their individual interests and dominant social constructions of important issues."* (Phoenix, 1990: p. 91).

I have not gone into my personal background here as that would be a thesis project of its own. I have just briefly discussed how I became interested in this topic. The topic of sex work I came upon accidentally while reading an article in a New Zealand magazine concerning three sex workers that had been murdered in Auckland. It was one of several possible topics I was considering at the time but the topic of sex work attracted me on several different levels (emotionally/intellectually/intuitively) as being a topic worth investigating. Intuitively, I felt that there was more to this topic than met the eye and that there were voices waiting to be heard. So I began intense reading on the subject since my understanding of the sex work industry was limited to media representations. My orientation to the topic I would describe as being a feminist social researcher which has derived from an academic background and interest in such areas as sociology, history, philosophy, women's studies, cultural

anthropology, politics, economics and of course psychology. In particular, my loyalties in psychology are primarily in the area of social psychology and discourse analysis. My career interests include youth counselling especially counselling of abuse victims. Moving back to the topic of sex work, my primary interests were in hearing from sex workers themselves how they construct themselves and their work in the current social and legal climate in New Zealand and the function and consequences that these constructions have. More generally, I am interested in the social construction of women's sexuality in New Zealand and the function and consequence that this has for all women.

## **The Research Questions.**

The research questions were kept fairly broad in content in order to address the issues of the construction (function and consequence) of sex work discourse by sex workers themselves. These were primarily constructed based on my reading of the literature and what I thought maybe important questions related to the topic (see Appendix A).

## **The Participants.**

Participants were located by contacting well known sex work agencies (i.e., escort agencies and masseuse parlours) advertised in the Palmerston North and Wellington newspapers. In the initial contact I spoke directly with the employers of each business explaining my research to them and gaining permission to leave adverts (see Appendix B) requesting volunteers for my research. Interested individuals were able to contact me by the phone number provided on the advert. Some participants were informed of my study by the adverts placed and others by word of mouth procedures. The remainder of the participants were located with the much appreciated assistance of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC). The participants interviewed in this study included nine women which is a sufficient number since this study is concerned with language use rather than producing statistical averages of the people behind the language. A sample of nine participants would produce a large number of

linguistic patterns to study. To pass ethical criteria, participants had to be at least eighteen years of age. In this study, the ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 38. Their length of employment within the sex industry ranged from 4 months to 14 years. Five participants were employed by massage parlours, two participants were employed by escort agencies, one participant was self-employed working from her home, and one other participant worked as a streetwalker.

## **Interviewing.**

Interviews were used as the purpose of this study was to study the discourses of sex workers themselves. Prior to each of the nine interviews conducted, participant's had the interview procedure explained to them verbally and in writing on an information sheet (see Appendix C) and their rights explained to them before signing the consent form (see Appendix D), in order to gain their permission to use their interviews for the purposes of research. The interviews were conducted by the author on a one-to-one basis in a convenient, private, and quiet location of the participant's choice. My approach was to be flexible and non-intrusive as possible working around the participant's daily activities rather than the reverse. As a result, interviewing was often conducted within work hours under the time constraints of working between customers or on their work break. One participant was interviewed at the NZPC in Wellington, one in her own car at a quiet and location, the remainder in a quiet and private space in their workplace area. The interviews were recorded by a tape recorder on a 90-minute audiocassette tape. The time duration of each interview ranged in length from 23 minutes to 1 hour and 26 minutes with a mean time length of 53.1 minutes. An open ended semi-structured format of interviewing was adopted as recommended by Potter and Wetherell (1987).

The research questions were deliberately designed to be sufficiently open ended to allow participants to elaborate on their views in a relatively naturalistic conversational exchange and act as a general guideline to constrain and guide the interview to content areas of interest. However the questions were not necessarily presented in the same order or in the exact wording for each participant, and the prompts and follow up questions varied for each participant. The questions were employed in a

flexible, inventive and intuitive way to allow themes to emerge gradually in their own terms, to pursue certain areas in more detail with prompts and follow up questions, and to switch from one topic to another and back again if required in order to gain a more fuller account of certain areas of interest. The interviews were also conducted as a two way process as recommended by Oakley (1981). This involved encouraging active participation from participants as well as personally investing myself in the research. This was achieved by assuring the participants of complete confidentiality and anonymity, adopting a non-hierarchial, informal and friendly conversational style with participants and also making myself available to answer questions about myself and the research throughout and at the end of the interview.

## **Transcribing.**

The interviews were transcribed using a simplified version of a notation developed by Gail Jefferson in Atkinson and Heritage (1984) (see Appendix E). This was applied to both the interviewers and interviewees speech since all language is active and constructive and therefore an object of analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This notation included basic contextual details that I thought maybe helpful in understanding the function and consequence of various discourses.

## **Coding.**

Coding is a preliminary process to the analysis stage with the pragmatic purpose of sorting the data into manageable chunks in preparation for more intensive study. The coding categories were developed in the first few readings of the transcript. These were designed to be inclusive as possible to include all those possible instances no matter how borderline that maybe crucially related to the research question of interest that being the construction of sex work. These passages of coded transcript were then copied and placed into separate files for later analysis.

## **Analysis.**

The method of analysis of the present study represents a combination of the discourse analytic procedures proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1990).

### **Potter and Wetherell on discourse analysis.**

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), in comparison to traditional social psychology approaches (such as conducting an experiment or analysing survey data) which provide a methodical step by step procedure the analysis of discourse is more analogous to “riding a bicycle”. That is, the skills are developed in the laborious process of reading and rereading the transcript in order to make sense of it. This doesn't involve reading for “gist” or a “general idea” or to produce a “simple unitary summary” which Potter and Wetherell state is the wrong spirit for discourse analysis. Instead discourse analysis is concerned with all the detail of passages no matter how fragmentary or contradictory. Discourse analysis involves two main closely linked processes:

- (i) Searching for significant patterns in the data. This includes both variability (or differences in either the content or form of accounts) and consistency (or the identification of features shared by accounts.)
- (ii) Forming hypotheses about the function and consequence of people's accounts and searching for the linguistic evidence.

### **Parker on discourse analysis.**

Parker (1992, 1990) provides seven criteria for identifying discourses and three auxiliary criteria concerned with institutions, power relations and ideologies related to discourse. While Parker acknowledges Potter and Wetherell's (1987) contribution to discourse analysis, he criticizes their definitions and methodology as being like “riding a bicycle” as being too vague and as posing difficulties for the novice, inexperienced

researcher to identify specific discourses. Therefore Parker proposes his seven criteria as being a useful adjunct in order to fill a gap in the practice of discourse analysis. These seven criteria should equip and enable the analyser to engage in discourse analysis, which include the following:

- (i) A discourse is realized in texts: The application of discourse analysis is broadened by Parker. Texts are defined as being "*delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretative gloss.*" (Parker, 1992: p.6) This may include anything from a speech, writing, nonverbal behaviour, stained glass, and a bus ticket, which are just a few examples provided by Parker. Discourses are identified in texts by transforming the text into words (written/spoken) making them accessible for discourse analysis.
- (ii) A discourse is about objects: Parker asserts that 'analysis' requires some degree of objectification and that within discourse there are at least two layers of objectification. The first layer is that discourse constructs objects and therefore gives them a 'reality'. The second layer is that discourses in turn maybe reflected upon and treated as objects. As Parker says "*A discourse is about objects and discourse analysis is about discourses as objects.*" (Parker 1992: p.9).
- (iii) A discourse contains subjects: Although readers of discourse have an independent 'reality' beyond the discourse, discourse positions the reader as a subject and gives the subject another reality. That is, allows particular types of self (or subjectivity's) to step in. Three questions maybe asked: What "role" does the subject assume to hear this message? What rights does the subject have to use that discourse? What position does the object take in relation to a discourse itself?
- (iv) A discourse is a coherent system of meaning: Parker asserts the notion that statements in a discourse can be grouped together and given a certain coherence to the extent of referring to the same topic but what constitutes a topic is limited by culturally available understandings (or different "commonsenses") of a topic. The point is made that it is necessary that researchers bring their prior

knowledge of discourses to their analysis. To identify a discourse is the ability to adopt a position and step outside of the discourse and to label it in a particular way as a function of accessing the dominant cultural meanings and the marginal (critical) position, which the researcher takes within or alongside another discourse.

- (v) A discourse refers to other discourses: During the analysis of discourse, contradictions within a specific discourse become apparent leading to questions about what other discourses are being used in the text.
- (vi) A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking: This is concerned with the condition of reflecting back upon one's own rhetoric. It allows the analyst to think about their choice of language used. It allows the analyst to take their own discourse as an object of analysis. It assists the analyst to evaluate their own terms used to describe the discourse, which involves moral and political choices. It invites the readers to evaluate the analyst's use of terms. Two questions to be asked include: How does the writer's rhetoric address different audiences? What is the function of the writer's rhetoric?
- (vii) A discourse is historically located: According to Parker, the "structure and force" of particular discourses can only be comprehended in terms of other examples of this discourse and explaining how and where the discourses emerged in history and how they have changed.

These seven criteria outlined are described as being necessary and sufficient for identifying particular discourses but Parker alerts analysts to three more additional aspects of discourse that should be considered in research projects which would make the analysis politically useful. To summarise briefly:

- (i) Discursive practices reproduce institutions: Radical analysts should identify which institutions are reinforced/attacked or subverted by a particular discourse.

- (ii) Discourse reproduce power relations: (Although discourses don't necessarily entail power). Analysts should identify which category of people gain/lose from employment of a discourse and who would want to promote or dissolve a discourse.
- (iii) Discourses have ideological effects: (Although Parker warns against making the assumption that all discourses are ideological). An analyst needs to take steps to show "*how a discourse connects with other discourses which sanction oppression*" and to show "*how the discourses allow dominant groups to tell their narratives about the past and justify the present and prevent those who use subjugated discourses from making history*." (Parker, 1992: p.20)

### **A discussion of the points at which Potter and Wetherell do not concur with Parker.**

Since this study draws on both the methodology of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992), a discussion of key differences between Potter and Wetherell and Parker's approach is deemed necessary. The following is a discussion by Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) of three major points at which they do not concur with Parker.

#### **Objectification.**

Firstly, Potter et al (1990) criticize Parker's approach for tending to reify discourses. That is, treat discourses as objects so that the focus of analysis becomes that of abstract discourse operating on abstract discourse and thus neglecting the specific ways that discourse is effective in that specific occasion.

In reply, Parker (1990) agrees that "objectification" may lead to reification and idealised data but asserts that this risk is worth taking. Objectification of discourse, he asserts, is crucial in order to conceptualise differences between discourses or different "commonsenses" that are contested in society. I tend to agree with Parker on this matter that objectification is necessary to some extent in order that discourses can be coherently described and distinguished from another.

### **Text and reflexivity:**

Secondly, Potter et al (1990) criticize Parker's first criteria of identifying discourses by translating texts into written form as doing most of the interpretative work very early on and risks producing "idealised data" characteristic of traditional social psychology. Furthermore, Potter et al. (1990) point out that Parker's use of reflexivity to identify discourses may tend to replace analytic practice with the researchers commonsense.

I agree with Parker that discourses maybe identified in texts but I also share the concern's of Potter et al. (1990), that if the researcher is the medium through which texts are transformed into written discourses, that most of the interpretative work is done at the preliminary stage risking producing "idealised data" and the analysts commonsense. In my study I have avoided this first problem by using interview texts which only required direct translation from audio to written form. In regards to the issue of reflexivity, I agree with Potter et al (1990) that "reflexivity" may replace analytic practice with the analysts commonsense. However, I view it as being unavoidable that the analyst will bring his own preconceptions and assumptions to analysis but this is a problem in all forms of analysis not just discourse analysis. Even traditional social psychology with its so called "objective" practice of experimentation and surveys with their pre-set categories, restricted response range and gross categorisation techniques tend to reduce the variability of responses and displace them out of their social context. This often results in the researchers commonsense notions being equated with scientific fact. The advantage of "reflexivity" is that it aids the accountability of discourse analysis by rendering interpretations, resources and processes public and available for evaluation.

### **Commonsense.**

Potter et al (1990) point out that Parker apparently equates commonsense ideas with their own discourse. The question supplanted by Potter et al is what function does a commonsense construction serve?

I agree with Potter et al that Parker's notion of commonsense constructions as having related discourses can be beneficially challenged by examining the functions that are served by these.

### **The Present Study.**

One of the primary differences in the methodologies advocated by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992) is that Potter and Wetherell tend to emphasize the local context of their data examining the specific ways their talk was made effective on that specific occasion. In contrast, Parker emphasizes the wider consequences of discourses such as how they reinforce and challenge institutions and ideologies and their historical location. In my study I have tried to address both aspects of discursive concern where appropriate. Commonsenses in the analysis are referred to as "discourse" rather than "interpretative repertoire" since this is a term that is shared by both Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992). The results of my analysis have been presented with extracts of participant's talk in such a way that the reader may evaluate the quality and validity of my analytical conclusions as proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987).

### **Ethical considerations.**

The first ethical consideration is informed consent. Before signing the consent form, the participants had the interview procedure and their rights explained to them verbally and in writing on an information sheet.

A second ethical consideration is confidentiality. Confidentiality was paramount to everyone concerned in this research project but especially to the participants since sex work is still illegal in New Zealand and is a highly stigmatised occupation. This may raise possible fears and anxieties for the participant such as possibly incriminating themselves, the negative reactions of family and friends finding out what they do, and of course revealing personal details about themselves. Confidentiality was therefore rigorously safeguarded by the adoption of several measures that included conducting the interview in a private location where there was little possibility of being overheard or intruded upon, using pseudonyms in the writing up of the research, and altering or masking any identifying details. Access to the transcripts were restricted to just the

researcher and thesis supervisor. At the end of the study, the tape recordings were returned to the participants or destroyed depending on their choice of preference.

A third ethical consideration is the reduction of possible participant distress. It was anticipated that due to the highly personal nature of the interview questions that some participants could experience some personal distress. However, the personal nature of the questions could not be eliminated since the participant's replies to these including the context and manner of delivery are an essential part of the data in discourse analysis. Therefore the goal was not to eliminate all possible sources of stress but to avoid and reduce any unnecessary sources of stress. Initial precautions were taken to forewarn participants that the interviews were only intended for the purposes of research and not for treatment or counselling. However, if any participants were experiencing obvious distress or felt the need to talk about any issues raised during the interview then an appropriate referral to a counsellor would be provided as a follow-up. Of critical importance again was to ensure the participants of complete confidentiality and anonymity. In the process of the interview, participants were treated with complete respect and sensitivity. Any judgmental responses were strictly avoided. 'A silent yet empathetic approach' was adopted as recommended by Brannen (1988). This included avoiding becoming too involved by offering to be their rescuer or insensitively brushing aside things too quickly. In actuality the participants did not show any obvious personal distress, and in most cases the participants described the interview experience as being cathartic and quite enjoyable.

A fourth ethical consideration concerns the vulnerability of participant's to exploitation, and inaccuracy and distortion in the interpretation of data especially in this instance where participants represent a minority group. As recommended by Oakley (1981) measures were taken to convey to the participants that I didn't intend to exploit them or the information revealed in the interviews. Participants were assured that these interviews were to be used for the purposes of research only and that my role of researcher was to gain knowledge about their experiences of sex work and to provide them with the opportunity to express their own views. Participants were also assured of total confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also informed of their rights, which included the right to not answer any questions, have the tape turned off at any time or withdraw at any time. At a later stage, written transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participants for the opportunity of

editing (altering or deleting) any details or clarifying any points made. During the interview process, I adopted the approach as recommended by Oakley (1981) of treating the interview as a two way process. This included: (a) adopting a non-hierachial, informal, and friendly conversational style with the participants, (b) encouraging active participation from participants rather than treating them as passive objects of study and sources of data, and (c) investing my personal identity in the interview such as providing personal feedback, answering questions about myself and the research during the interview, and at any other point in the study. In my analysis, both the researcher and the participants speech were transcribed, and extracts of the participants speech were combined with the interpretations in the writing up. This laid the analysis open for readers to see and critique. At the completion of the study, participants were sent a summary of their findings (see Appendix F). A copy of the completed thesis was sent to the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective so that participants involved in the research and any other interested individuals involved within the sex industry have the opportunity to read the thesis and contact me with their opinions.

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

There were five main discursive themes analysed in this study. These include the following:

- (1) A construction of the dissociation of the self.
- (2) A construction of the "whore stereotype".
- (3) A construction of clients as everyday men/as wounded/men as having a higher sexual drive than women/friends and lovers.
- (4) A construction of sex-as-work.
- (5) A construction of sex work as valuable.

## **A Construction of the Dissociation of the Self.**

All of the participants drew on the “dissociation of the self” discursive theme to a considerable degree. Dissociation of the self is a phrase, which aptly describes how their self or identity as a sex worker was fragmented from the rest of their self or identity. The participants operated their lives under two different names - a “work” name and a “real” name. Furthermore, not only did participants construct a different work name but also constructed a different “work” identity or circumstances and a complete separate “work” personality encompassing different work behaviours and attitudes separate from their “private” selves and identity.

### **Constructing a Different Working Name and Identity.**

Many of the participants in this study spoke of constructing a work name different to their real name and a work identity with a different set of circumstances to their private identity. The importance of constructing an alternative identity was emphasised quite strongly by Rosanne for instance. In response to the interview question, “if you had a friend considering becoming a sex worker what advice would you give them?” Rosanne strongly advised that one should pick a “*working name*” and to “*make up your own little life*”. These alternative identities were partially developed through their rapport with their clients. This gave them the freedom of being absolutely anyone that they desired although the construction of personal details were often guided by work interests which were to attract clients and make money. For instance, the statement made by Rosanne, “*I haven’t a partner*” and “*I’m studying*” had the deliberate function directed towards achieving these work goals which was to construct a “work self” that was more attractive and more interesting to a client. This would encourage repeat clientele and guarantee a regular income.

Constructing an alternative identity also had the explicit function of preserving distance between the private self and work self on several levels - physically, socially, psychologically and emotionally. For instance, Sharon asserts this separation between the private self and the work self with the statement, “*when I come here my name is [Sharon] who is a different person to who she is at home*”. A pragmatic function of

constructing an alternative identity was to produce physical and social distance between their private self and their work self, which was achieved by not divulging their real name or details of their private life such as where they live. In this way their private identity could be kept hidden to a certain extent thus avoiding any possible risks of comebacks in their private life that could pose a possible potential threat to their physical safety and security of their private life. Constructing an alternative identity also had the function of creating emotional and psychological distance between their private self and work self. This is clearly expressed by Rosanne when she asserts the importance of avoiding getting too close to clients and avoiding taking work and their clients too seriously. This operated as a way to cope psychologically and emotionally with doing sex work.

*"You pick a working name and you become her (1.47) Um:: and that's who you are with, when your with your clients. You can be anyone... Make up your own little life... Don't let them get too close to you (.) Don't get too close to them ... Just don't take it seriously (.) or don't take the clients seriously." (Rosanne 4/2)*

*"When I come here my name is (Sharon) so (Sharon) is a different person to who she is at home." (Sharon 50/4)*

*"I always tell them that I haven't got a partner because that's the first thing they ask... because sometimes it matters (.) to them... I never tell them where I live... Um I used to make up things (1.39) and um (1.87) you know say yeah I'm studying and what not." (Rosanne 4/5)*

Lydia offered a variable discourse on this “dissociation of the self” theme. In this instance, the boundaries between the private self and the work self were not maintained. Instead Lydia spoke of divulging a considerable amount of personal details of her private life to her client in response to the client sharing details of their life. Lydia speaks of developing “*close associations*” with her clients. This inconsistency was explained by Lydia as being due to the intimate nature of the client-sex worker relationship or more specifically was because sometimes the girls genuinely liked their client.

*"The things that probably stand out the most about working are probably the amount of nice men I've actually met in that industry and the close associations(1.41) that you have with these men... I feel I know them second best to their wives... because of that intimate relationship your always talking with them and they tend to find out all about your life and you tend to find out all about theirs." (Lydia 24/11)*

## Playing a Part.

The extent of this dissociation between the private self and the work self is most clearly illustrated by the many examples in which participants constructed not only a separate work name and identity but also constructed a completely different work personality. Phrases such as “*it's a game*”, “*the art of it*”, “*you're an actress*”, “*like a role-play*”, “*play up*”, “*put it on*” and “*playing the game*” were profusely and actively employed by the participants to construct their ‘work’ self as being analogous to ‘acting’ and not a true reflection of their private self.

Rosanne spoke of picking a working name and an identity then “*you become her*” which suggests that becoming the work self is not a passive process but involves an active adoption of a work personality to the extent that their private self becomes completely submerged while at work and is substituted by their work self. Similarly, other participants used descriptions such as “*I completely cut off*” and “*switch off*” to indicate a clear psychological and emotional separation (or dissociation) between their private self and their work self. But note that this dissociation of the self into a work self and a private self doesn't represent a “split personality” or “multiple personalities” but rather participants don their alternative work identity much like an “actress” does adopting the appropriate personality of their constructed sex work character.

*“This is work... I cut off. (.) I completely cut off. I'm an actress in the room when I'm doing a job.” (Joe 76/40)*

*“You switch off... So [Sharon] is a different person to who she is at home.” (Sharon 50/4)*

Therefore the participants were playing two different roles: sex worker and private self. The sex worker role being described as merely “role playing” or “acting” and therefore not a true reflection of their private self and sex work being described as a “game” or an “act” and not a true reflection of “reality”.

*“You look at it like it's a game (1.73) as or that you're an actress.” (Rosanne 4/1)*

*"You switch off... You don't take any morals into that room whatsoever. Like when I come in here it's pretty much like I mean like a roleplay... At the end of the day it's not reality." (Sharon 50/4)*

The construction of the sex work character involves a great deal of creativity as suggested by Rosanne "you can be anyone" but seems to be primarily driven by work interests and that is to attract clients and make money. This was referred to as "*playing the game*" or "*play up*" and "*put it on*", playing the "*seductress*" or "*entertainer*" (e.g., "*a lady in the lounge and ... a slut more or less in the bedroom*"). This functioned to make their clients think that they really did like them and/or was interested in them and to basically show them a really good time. Therefore encouraging repeat clientele and increasing their incomes.

*"Um sometimes they can fall in love with you (.) because your playing the game with them that (.) if they think that you really, really like them they'll come back and see you again but (.) we don't. It's a case of well we don't really care about you. All I care about is your money (laughs) but you still (.) the art of it is still to try and give them the best time (.) that we can. We're actresses." (Rosanne 2/21)*

*"Um you got to be a good actress like put it on to make it like your really interested." (Helen 81//16)*

*"Your just here to (.) play up to what they want (.) really." (Nicole 14/10)  
"Your there for entertainment ... your the seductress ... an all around good entertainer... *a lady in the lounge and a (2.37) a um (.) slut more or less in the bedroom*." (Rosanne 5/20)*

The primary function of constructing an alternative work name, work identity and a work personality was the requirements of the job. It also functioned to create distance between their work self and private self as a way of coping psychologically and emotionally with the personal nature of sex work itself, and as a way of incorporating such a heavily stigmatised occupation as sex work into their lives in a manner that did not interfere with their personal lives.

### **It's Just a Job.**

Participants commonly adopted the "it's just a job" discourse to reinforce this distinction between the work self and private self. This is consistent and overlaps with

the “sex as work” discursive theme. Participants spoke of their work relationship with their clients in a way that clearly differentiated them from personal emotional relationships.

*“This is just a job (.) It's not your personal life.” (Nicole 11/6)*

*“He is just a client not a boyfriend.” (Nicole 11/20)*

Participants also depersonalised the client-sex worker relationship in the sense of not seeing their clients as being “men” but instead objectified their clients as being a mere work tool and monetary commodity.

*“I don't even see them as anything... I just see them as another job.“ (Rosanne 4/31)*

*“You don't see them see them. I mean there's the odd one I can't deny there is the odd one that sort of blows you away... but (.) generally at the end of the day (.) we want to know what they've got in their wallets.” (Sharon 63/18)*

Furthermore, any personal and emotional qualities such as enjoying working were removed from their work and emphasis was placed on making money. Therefore sex work was reduced to being a mere business monetary transaction. This functioned to clearly differentiate sex work from their personal pleasure activities.

*“You don't actually enjoy doing it... I'm counting up the dollars.“ (Lydia 27/2)*

The donald duck analogy describes this monetary commodification of clients and sex work very well. *“I just go doink and it's like this couple of dollar signs.“*

*“You put him on dollar terms. (laughs) You've got to sometimes if your tired or (.) you've had a bad day and his regulars booked and you think oh my god. I don't really want to see this guy. (laughs) You do. You put it on. You just (.) like your eyes I just go 'doink' and it's like this couple of dollar signs. (Laughs) Yes. Um. Um. The donald duck is it. Yes um. Whose got the three little nephews that become I feel like him and it's sort of like (laughing) 'click' and I go into the room and I just focus on the money (1.01) and you know deal with him for the hour and (2.19) and then thank god at the end of that thing”. (Lydia 27/13)*

The function of this “it's just a job” discourse was to create and maintain distance between their work self and private self. Participants employed dissociation phrases such as “*shut off*”, “*putting my mind elsewhere*”, “*I just focus on the money*” and

"*you put him on dollar terms*". This dissociation discourse functioned to create and maintain an emotional or psychological barrier between their private self and work self. This functions as a survival strategy or as a way of protecting their personal selves emotionally and psychologically from their work. This was especially the case when they didn't feel up to work or didn't find work enjoyable because of feeling tired, having a bad day, or a difficult client. Constructing clients/sex work as being just a job for money helped the participants to survive the day to day hassles of being a sex worker. This is what Nicole connotes by the phrase "*doing it safe*" which is to maintain a "difference" or not allow "*crossing over*" between your work and personal life, and therefore preventing your work from "*affecting you...personally.*"

*"Most of the time I think you don't actually enjoy doing it because I tend to shut off and (.) I'll be rude here and say yes I do think about the money. I'm counting up the dollars (laughs) or my minds elsewhere as I'm doing it."* (Lydia 27/2)

*"As long as your doing it safe (.) you know your doing your job (.) and it's not affecting you (.) like you know personally. (.) It's not crossing over. You know. (.) This is just a job. (.) It's not your personal life (.) you know. You have to have those two differences."* (Nicole 11/6)

### **Work Rules and Boundaries.**

Certain rules and boundaries are established in the workplace which explicitly function as a form of physical protection for the sex workers against various sexually transmitted diseases, violent, and difficult customers but also implicitly function as a form of dissociation by creating a distance between their work self and private self. Therefore rules and boundaries operated as a way of protecting themselves psychologically and emotionally. This dissociation is described in several key ways which include establishing a formal routine, standardised safe sex procedures, no kissing rules, letting them know whose boss: keeping constantly aware and in control of the situation, and keeping the content of the conversation fairly impersonal and general.

## **Establishing a Routine.**

Doing sex work was constructed as being just a “job” or “like a little factory line.” Participant’s spoke of establishing a “*systematic routine*” or developing a set practice like always giving the client a “*massage*” or “*oral sex*” when doing sex work. Every client was basically treated in the same manner. This functioned to tip the balance of power and control away from the client towards the sex worker by constructing the sex worker as the more powerful and active agent and the clients as the passive recipient of sexual services in the client-sex worker relationship. As Lydia says “*I'd rather be doing things to them (.) than have them (.) do things to me*”. This reduces any aspects of unpredictability, emotionality, and acts of intimacy, which is more typical of personal relationships therefore constructing a working relationship that is based purely on business levels. This functions to create distance between the private self and the work self by highlighting the dissimilarity between “normal” personal relationships and work relationships.

*"I have a routine literally... I systematically do the job and every john is the same...It's, its like okay I've got to put the condom on. Gonna do the job. Should take da de da. Um. (.) put him in the shower and it's, it's like a little factory line." (Sharon 60/21)*

*"I always try to give my clients a massage and that's because if you're massaging them for fifteen minutes that's fifteen minutes they're not touching you. (1.09) Before I got into work I never liked giving men (1.09) oral sex where now I've perfected it (1.06) because my theory is if your giving them oral they're not touching you and I'd rather be doing things to them (.) than have them (.) do things to me that I ( .) maybe don't want and have to battle with them... kills a lot of the time." (Lydia 26/42)*

## **Well Established Safe Sex Procedures.**

Safe sex procedures are well established in the sex industry, which obviously function to protect the worker and the client against various sexually transmitted diseases but also implicitly function to create a distance between the work self and private self. By employing clinical hygiene procedures such as utilising spermicides,

lubricants, condoms, washing routinely after every job and adopting checking procedures to a more rigorously conscientious and routine degree than a personal relationship constructs the sex worker-client relationship as being clinical and impersonal. Again this highlights the dissimilarity of work relationships from personal relationships.

*"We're all taught, educated on (...) um safe sex which is using spermicides, lubricants, condoms...check around their genital area for any open sores."*  
(Joe 72/29)

*"We have checks every three months. Um. I use a spermicide... condoms... sponges... Obviously you wash after every job.Um. Just very, very conscientious" (Sharon 55/3)*

### **Not Kissing Rules.**

The practice of kissing is often regarded as more intimate than having sexual intercourse probably due to the closer eye to eye contact and is often reserved only for those persons that we have personal feelings for. Some sex workers are provided with the option of not having to kiss their clients. This functions to create a distancing between the work self and private self by differentiating between what is considered "work" sex and more intimate sex that they would have with say a partner in their private life.

*"We don't have to actually kiss our clients... I mean a lot of these guys you don't mind having sex with the, with a condom but you most surely wouldn't want to kiss them (laughs)... Well it's a lot more intimate and I mean a lot of them come in and they've been drinking and a lot of them have (...) bad breath. I mean god I just couldn't imagine kissing a lot of them." (Lydia 26/16)*

### **Letting Them Know Who's Boss: Keeping Constantly Aware and in Control of the Situation.**

Elements of power, control and predictability are again the theme here. The sex worker is constructed as the active, powerful and controlling agent (i.e., who just doesn't lay there and have fun but keeps control of the situation and remains constantly aware). The client is constructed as the passive recipient of sexual services. Furthermore sex work is constructed as being just a job that is devoid of anything personal or emotional such as having fun. This functions to create distance

between the work self and private self by highlighting the dissimilarity between work sex and private sex.

*"I always keep control of the situation as in I get them to remove their clothes. Get them into the shower. Get them to lie on the bed then I take control. So I'm potentially always have the upper hand with most clientele... like I let them know whose boss in the room right from the start." (Sharon, 55/23)*

*"Just always got to be aware (1.43) and watch everything that's going on (.) and it comes from experience. Knowing every trick in the book. It's not easy. (laughs) But we're not here to lay here and have fun." (Joe, 72/45)*

### **Keeping the Content of the Conversation Impersonal and General.**

Conversation with clients is retained on the level of small talk and is merely employed as a work tool to develop rapport and interest so that the client will come back again. More intimate details about their life such as who they are and what they do are strictly avoided and this functions to create distance between the work self and private self.

*"I'm only spending that hour or so with them (1.83) so it doesn't really matter to me (.) who they are or what they do. (.) Um. (1.67) We talk about things in general." (Rosanne 4/24)*

### **Secret Lives.**

All of the participants spoke of a social stigma attached to sex work. Participants spoke considerably of the oppressive effects that this work label had on their personal lives.

*"You know once you've been labelled a prostitute your always gonna be (1.13) um (1.08 yeah. You know it's that not being able to tell anyone what you do and (.) um (2.15) yeah you know like you can feel proud that you've supported yourself...you know you kind of have to be very assertive about it (1.02) but then you know some girls choose to be open about working and some don't. (2.17) So yeah. It's that social stigma that really keeps you um (1.07) down I think." (Tracy 41/38)*

The majority of the participants in the study tenaciously attempted to contain the negative and stigmatic effects of being a sex worker from crossing over into their

private lives by extensive acts of secrecy. This included lying about what they do to family and friends, hiding things, and avoiding certain persons, places and situations. This was experienced as being “*really, really hard*”, “*stressful*” and isolating. Especially lying to their family and friends was described as being “*the biggest negative*”. This act of secrecy was talked about as being driven by feelings of fear and uncertainty of how people especially family and friends would react about them being a sex worker and of being negatively judged and stereotyped by people. Such feelings are clearly valid when working in an industry that is so heavily stigmatised.

*“I just keep it confidential what I do for a job. I just keep lying. I hate LYING... I'll deny it because they'll judge me... They'll judge me as a different person. They'll wont like me... I know because the attitude towards it is negative so that's why I keep it quiet.”* (Helen 83/49)

*“Trying to keep it hidden from people. From family. (1.36) U::m (1.15) that can be quite stressful... You've got to do some fast talking... You start to start lying (1.12) to people... trying to hide it I think is the biggest negative for me because your constantly scared of getting caught out.”* (Joe 64/23)

*“That's one thing I find really hard to deal with is the lying. Really hard to deal with you know. Especially people that I love so dearly... I haven't bothered associating with people. I haven't bothered creating friendships... while I'm doing this. We're better off just keeping solely to ourselves. I had my mother here for five weeks... that was really, really hard (1.53) because I had to bullshit on top of bullshit... because I'm scared how they'll react... I don't want to lose (.) their friendships.”* (Sharon 51/14)

*“I suppose how people look at it and I mean it's not an industry that you work in that you can actually walk around out there holding your head up high saying, yes I do this. (laughs) Your constantly (.) hiding it... everyday I walk around the streets of Wellington. I see clients everywhere and these are all suits and tie men. I mean I just see them absolutely everywhere. I can't go to the supermarket. I can't go anywhere.”* (Lydia 24/47)

A couple of participants have preferred to be more open about what they do and have been a little more confident of the reactions of their family and friends expecting or demanding acceptance regardless. For instance, Rosanne deliberately avoids the extensive acts of secrecy that the other participants demonstrate, that function to keep their work self and private self separate, by adopting the same “dissociation of the self” discourse to justify the opposite action of being “*upfront*” about what she does. She initially justifies her position by adopting a very liberal viewpoint and asserts this

in a very strong and confident manner. "*It's my choice...I'll do what I want to do*". Then supports this statement by drawing on the "dissociation of the self" discourse, which involves the assertion that what she does (i.e., work self) is separate from who she is (i.e., private self). This is delivered explicitly in her talk with the statement "*if people like me (1.44) they'll like me for who I am (.) not what I do*" and also implicitly in her talk with the statement, "*They're not coming into my life. I'm coming into theirs*", thus denying any crossover of her work life into her personal life. Therefore she avoids any possible accusations that she could be possibly hurting anyone else.

*"I'm pretty honest (1.39) with people. (1.43) I'm pretty upfront. So. Both my parents are dead. (.) Ah but I have a sister (.) and I told her (1.06) and she doesn't like it (1.35) but it's my choice... I'll do what I want to do...It's not really hurting anyone else because it's my choice. I'm not bringing the men home.(.) Um. They're not coming into my life. I'm coming into theirs. So. My friends and flatmates that I've had um have all known and they've even told their parents...They actually find it really, really (.) um (.) entertaining and they always like to know what I'm doing...So I've never really had any problem and like if people like me (1.44) they'll like me for who I am (.) not what I do."* (Rosanne 5/30)

### **Personal relationships at work.**

Many participants admitted that due to the exceptionally personal nature of their job, the wide variety of male clients, and the large number of nice men that they meet in their work that it was not always easy to accomplish this separation between their personal life and work life. It was impossible to totally avoid personal and emotional relationships at work because occasionally you met a client that you felt "attracted" to or "gelled" with. Participants spoke of developing "close associations" and "friendships" with clients that went beyond the role of sex worker (i.e., exchanging sex for money.) This included intimate behaviours such as kissing and cuddling, in-depth discussions about each other, intelligent conversation, learning from each other, developing an understanding and a caring for each other, going out to dinner like friends, and enjoying each others company. Sometimes sex wasn't even involved. These intimate behaviours are more associated with personal relationships rather than work relationships. Therefore this illustrates a partial failure to dissociate between

their real life and work life although this may have been intentional because of certain personal gains.

*"You might get a client that you end up kissing because you actually quite attracted to him (1.69) and I think this is another side of the industry that a lot of people won't admit but I mean (...) people say oh it's only the money you know. You never see nice guys in there. But I think that's impossible because statistically if you work long enough (1.26) you have to have that percentage of clients that come in that, that you gel with." (Lydia 26/25)*

*"I've got a couple of regular clients that I see (1.03) and:: they're such gentlemen. They're so:: interesting and it's really good and I mean sometimes sex isn't even involved but we'll go out for dinner when they're in town...and um it's like you know having a friend." (Sharon 64/51)*

*"You can form friendships if you get regular clients. Um. Yeah you can form some sort of understanding and you can have a caring for each other (1.13) and a friendship and in a lot of cases you know clients come in um (1.23) basically to talk...Somebody to nurture them..feed their ego's really." (Tracy 41/51)*

Sometimes sex workers have even ended up becoming involved with their clients outside of work but in terms of a personal relationship rather than as a sex worker-client relationship. These examples illustrate the constant struggle that exists between the dominant "sex as love" discourse of mainstream popular society and the subordinate "sex as work" discourse of the sex work industry.

*"I do know two girls from the establishment that have become involved with their clients (1.76) and:: they are now seeing them on a regular basis out of work. No longer work but a full on relationship." (Joe 76/41)*

However, several participants warned of how "dangerous" and "unprofessional" it was to allow personal factors to intrude into their work life. Younger and less experienced sex workers seemed more susceptible to misconstruing "sex as work" with "sex as love" especially when "you are going ALL the way". Participants strongly emphasised the need to keep "grounded" by keeping work separate from their private life (i.e., avoiding using work as a way of meeting men), and if sex workers are incapable of doing this then maybe they shouldn't be in this industry.

*'That is dangerous and if you're like that you shouldn't be in this industry'. (Joe 76/41)*

*"I don't like them finding those buttons because to me I gotta have my life outside of work...This guy pressed my button the other day and it was like oh*

*"no, no, no. I had to click myself. I'm at work here. This is a job. No and I had to stop the job because he was yeah we clicked damn it and that's not meant to happen in this field of work. You're a professional." (Sharon 48/41)*

*"It can be quite a deceiving thing for a young girl... they'd probably go into lala land... you have to be a bit more careful here... um yeah and if they have sex with me and they picked me they must love me... we're going ALL the way here... keep yourself grounded. You're not here to meet men." (Joe 77/1)*

### **Age and Experience.**

Age and experience was spoken of as key factors involved in successful dissociating of the self which functioned primarily as a way of psychologically coping with work life. Younger and less experienced workers seemed more susceptible to allowing personal factors to intrude into their work. For instance, Nicole aged 18, speaks of how difficult it was for her to psychologically and emotionally separate work life/client from her personal life/boyfriend. For example, Nicole was falling in love with clients and seeing them out of work, which resulted in her getting fired from her job. This is largely due to her young age and lack of experience which clients may have taken advantage of by "influencing" her in certain ways.

*"I've found it like hard to (1.02) you know let go :: if and realise (.) I use to see a client quite a bit (.) and realise that he is just a client not a boyfriend (.) Even though (.) you know he was my boyfriend for an hour. Not (.) for that you know that night. (.) Not for that (.) week. Not forever. (.) And that was really hard. (.) You know. And they'd influence you in some ways like (.) just this guy I'd used to see all the time like I fell in love with him... But you know I thought that (.) I was something special to him... I got fired because I'd gone to see him out of time... You just got to let them go:: ...They don't want you. All they want you is for your body and that's it... Just probably getting too attached to the clients... the thing that happened to me the most." (Nicole 11/18)*

Similarly, many other participants produced examples of their own personal experiences and of other working girls to illustrate the importance of age and experience in successful dissociating and therefore surviving in the sex industry. According to participants, younger and inexperienced sex workers don't have enough sexual and general life experience nor do they possess sufficient emotional stability and assertiveness to be able to handle clients and deal with the sex industry in general.

In particular, younger, less experienced sex workers tended to be more easily influenced by the manipulation, deceit and flattery coming from clients whereas more experienced workers have learnt to recognise that this is not reality. That is, that this is just their work life not their personal life.

*"I think it's only through experience that I've learn't it cause I don't deny when I first went into working um I got a real swollen head over it (laughs) cause there's all these guys saying, Oh your so beautiful, Oh you know your this, your that, da de da da and you get this huge head swell (laughs) you know and it's not reality." (Sharon 50/6)*

*"Her minds too young for it. She hasn't experienced. She hasn't had personal sexual experiences enough to deal with this industry. I look at the ones who are you know thirty and over (1.04) yeah (1.09) I mean you've had your flings... just more in control of your emotions". (Sharon 61/42)*

### **Psychological and Emotional Strength.**

Participants emphatically spoke of the need to be mentally strong, emotionally secure, well balanced sort of person to be able to successfully dissociate the self. As Sharon says, it's not just a case of exchanging sex for money but you also need to be psychologically and emotionally strong to prevent work from affecting you personally.

*"I think they should be secure in themselves. (2.22) Know who they are... You know pretty well balanced sort of person but this can (.) muck you about (.) and you know (1.51) all the mind games that they play it can take it's toll on you." (Rosanne 3/50)*

*"You've got to be mentally strong to handle this sort of job too. It's not a case of going in and spreading your legs and getting paid for it. You got to be able to mentally handle it as well." (Sharon 49/25)*

### **I Have Changed: Switching off and Shutting down.**

Making the transition between work and their private lives was often described of as being very difficult and the participants often used dissociation phrases like "switching off" and "shutting down" to describe the difficult psychological adjustment that this transition between the work self and the private self involved. The

“dissociation of the self” discourse is constructed as a coping strategy. It functioned as a way of placing emotional and psychological distance between their work self and private self. However, in many instances the “dissociation of the self” discourse was also employed by participants to illustrate how in the long term there was an eventual crossover between their work self and private self. Participants used phrases such as “switching off”, “shutting down”, “burning out”, “getting harder”, “becoming more disillusioned with men”, “losing something of yourself”, and feeling “emotionally drained” to describe how their private selves in the long term had changed psychologically, emotionally, and socially from doing sex work. According to participants you really couldn't do this type of work without it affecting you to some degree.

*“You can't do this sort of work without it affecting you to some certain extent.” (Tracy 41/26)*

*“Working girls try to say right hm it doesn't get emotionally to them but I think that's a load of bullshit. I think they just don't want to look and see that they've probably changed since they've started working because I most certainly have.” (Lydia 25/37)*

*“You know girls that say 'oh it doesn't affect me' we'll they're talking shit.” (Sharon 48/9)*

Many participants spoke of how long term working in the sex industry had adverse emotional and psychological costs like feeling burned out and emotionally drained to the degree that they had to either reduce the amount of days working or take a complete break from doing sex work for awhile.

*“At the moment I'm sort of having a break from it. It's, it's that whole thing about burnout. When I'm feeling that way I'm pretty much turned off sex work and everything that goes with it and feel quite anti (...) ... and HOWEVER I still maintain um you know relationship ties with people (...) but um I'm just switched off by the thought of doing sex work.” (Nina 87/27)*

*“Working in itself had become quite hard for me. I just felt tired. Worn out. I'd had enough. (1.53) Um. (1.04) I sort of I think I'd burned out... You feel like they're sucking the energy out of you.” (Lydia 27/22)*

*“I only work once a week now so (1.34) I really feel the effects of working. You know. Like I feel tired. I feel emotionally drained.” (Tracy 40/52)*

Other participants spoke of how working long term in the sex work industry produced emotional and psychological changes in their views and feelings towards all men such as getting harder towards males, losing interest in men, and becoming disillusioned with men. This illustrates a crossover of work into their private lives. For instance, Helen spoke of getting emotionally and psychologically harder and losing interest in males particularly sexually because of doing sex work. Helen has completely adopted the sex as work discourse in her work life and also in her private life. Sex feels so much like work that sex and work have become synonymous. This functions as a protective strategy for her. She advises that it's best not to see men outside of work or give it away for nothing because it's just "too much" to cope with psychologically and emotionally.

*"I've got a bit harder um (1.77) like towards males. Not interested in males much after doing this job because I see enough males through the job and I mean I'm not gonna give it away (laughs) for nothing. You know it's just what I do. It's best not to have a partner in this job (1.16) if you can because it's just too much (.) because then they want sex and it's like your doing sex on the job." (Helen 80/31)*

Lydia spoke of how she had emotionally changed since she had begun working from being "*naive*" in her pre-working days to becoming more disillusioned with men in general after working in the sex work industry. She attributes this to the unexpected realisation of the type of men that use the sex work industry. These were of a high calibre, a lot sneakier than originally thought, and occasionally abusive.

*"I've changed a lot. Any romantic notions I had about males have gone out the window. (Laughs) And that'll be true. I think you go through stages. When you first start working your on a bit of a high at something quite novel. You think. Oh I got these men paying this big money and er taking you upstairs and then (1.17) I think you go through another stage after probably (.) I don't know two or three months (1.570 I think because you do get the odd bad client and you start feeling slightly abused. That'll be the understatement... you get totally disillusioned about men." (Lydia 23/52)*

*"And I think (.) working girls try to say right hm it doesn't get emotionally to them but I think that's a load of bullshit. I think they just don't want to look and see that they've probably changed since they've started working because I most certainly have. (.) I've probably become more disillusioned with men in general because I think they're a lot sneakier than I used to think they were probably because I never realised the calibre of (.) men that we see." (Lydia 25/37)*

Many of the participants spoke of "shutting down" emotionally and physically.

*"Um the negative side to me is shutting down the doors. You know emotional and physical. You know. There's that shut down." (Sharon 48/9)*

Because of the nature of sex work, "*your like a toy come counsellor*", there were often many psychological issues that needed to be confronted. However, due to sex work being highly stigmatised the girls often couldn't talk about their work but instead kept things closed in. Therefore talk of "shutting down" was described as a way of protecting themselves emotionally and psychologically. By closing off certain doors this maintained a distance between their work selves and private selves.

*"Part of me has shut down. (1.35) Definitely a part of me has shut down and I think that when girls finish working they really need to go through the healing process. You know. It's not something cause there's a lot of psychological things that are involved. I mean your like a toy come counsellor come you know. Your quite a menagerie of different things and you know girls that say, 'oh it doesn't affect me" well they are talking shit. It does. Because you go out you step out of this parlour and you go by your friends::, family and so forth. It's something you can't talk about. It's something you got to keep closed in. So yeah. Oh yeah. There are doors that I've shut since I've been back working (2.79) and it's only a protection thing."* (Sharon 48/9)

Tracy and Sharon spoke of shutting down sexually outside of work for similar reasons as Lydia and Helen spoke of which was that sex begins to feel like work and you lose respect for men after a while. This functions as a protective strategy. Sex and work have become synonymous that they are unable to keep a distance between sex at work and sex in their private life therefore they shut down sexually and emotionally as a way of coping.

*"Um I think that he's concerned that I will get harmed (.) and I do shut down sexually (.) when I'm working. (1.22) Um (1.35) and I shut down to him. (1.89) Um:: Yeah you know and I do have issues aro::und (1.00) I don't respect men you know and that comes out with him." (Tracy 42/34)*

*"There's a shut down but there's also you know outside my sexual activities...I'm noticing things that I'm not doing with my husband anymore because of working here because I won't do them because it feels like work. You know and there is a piece of me that has:: It has shut down and it will stay. That door will stay closed." (Sharon 50/10)*

Maria made the strong assertion that eventually you lose something of yourself when doing sex work. This seems to indicate some crossover effect from the work self to the private self. She employs the “sex as work” discourse which is evident with the statement, “*people say... it's just work*”. However she doesn’t totally accept this statement herself when she asserts the difficulty of going home to a partner afterwards. A clear differentiation is made between “work” sex in which there are no choices of who you can have sex with and “personal” sex.

*"You lose something of yourself. (1.11) You do eventually. (.) Um. I don't understand how people can (1.520 go home to a partner when they're a sex worker for example you know and I know people say oh you know that (.) that it's just work... but (2.20) the thing is that most people have a choice of who they fuck."* (Maria 17/23)

These negative (psychological/emotional/social) effects seem to be largely exasperated by the social stigma attached to sex work. This prevented sex workers from communicating with family and friends about their work and therefore prevented them from accessing the necessary support from these people. One participant expressed the strong sense of frustration felt by sex workers. "*I'm just itching to just offload... get rid of it...shake it off*", "*what bummed me out or what upset me or what was a high...*", but you "*can't talk about it though.*" Therefore what functioned as a way of protecting their private lives by keeping separate their work and private life was at the cost of sacrificing valuable support from family and friends. Many participants didn't feel that it was justifiable to talk to somebody about a situation that's "*not involved*" anyway "*because they don't know.*" Therefore they preferred to employ the necessary emotional and psychological support from other working girls instead "*because they've all been through it too.*" Other working girls were described as being like a “*family*”, “*support group*” or “*therapists*”. Because of a sense of commonality and shared understanding sharing their experiences with each other acted as a form of mutual support. For instance, “*talking to the girls*” was described as being an important way of unloading and therefore was vital for their psychological and emotional health. In conclusion, with the dual function of psychologically and emotionally surviving, and also protecting their private lives, sex workers have deliberately kept their private and work lives separate, and relied on the

strong system of support within the sex industry itself. This was largely in response to an unsupportive society that holds highly stigmatised views of sex work.

*"The disadvantage is that you can't talk about it though. I mean like I can't spare out to my hubby what bummed me out or what upset me or what was a high or anything like that...and there's only so much you can spare to the girls. You know. I can't deny there's times when I've been at home and I'm just itching to just offload. To just get rid of it. You know. Shake it off but I can't and even with my friends there's very few friends that know I'm working as well." (Sharon 50/28)*

*"Talking to the girls is really important (1.43) whether we have a good client or whether we have a bad client we do tend to talk about our clients and I think that's an important way of unloading... Supporting each other. We're not gonna get any [inaudible] from the girls because we are all in the same ship. We do become like a family (1.61) you know cause how can you talk to somebody about a situation that's not involved. (.) You know because they don't know." (Sharon 51/40)*

*"But the girls are a really good support because they've all been through it too. You know. So it's good to get things off your chest while your up here and then you can just go home and relax because when you go home there's usually no one (.) you can talk to about it." (Joe 66/4)*

*"Girls are a good support group (laughing). We're all therapists (laughing) and you've got to learn to I mean that it's just a job." (Joe 65/54)*

The long term adverse costs of doing sex work is clearly exemplified by several participants who spoke of the need to "deal with the trauma's of it afterwards" and of going into counselling during and when finished to "dispose of it", "get rid of it", and "unload". This illustrates the partial failure of the dissociation of the self discourse that not only while working but even once the girls had left sex work the psychological and emotional effects of their work life still continued to intrude into their private life.

*"Oh it's not really easy cause you've gotta (1.05) afterwards you've gotta (1.03) deal with the trauma's of it." (Nicole 12/16)*

*"I'll probably um I'll probably um get into counselling when I'm finished just to dispose of it. Get rid of it. Unload. You know. Um. Yeah. Yeah. For sure. I'll have counselling for my sake as well as my husbands." (Sharon 50/16)*

*"U::M:: I didn't used to deal with it that well when I was younger. Um. I used to get quite screwy actually and um I sought um (1.65) um counselling yeah and the counselling has actually been really good. In fact, it's probably been one of the biggest things that helped to um (.) that's aided me through (1.03) working as a sex worker where the psychological effects are concerned. Yeah." (Nicole 12/16)*

### **I have not changed.**

There were some variations to this theme that "I have changed". Some participants actually claimed the opposite that they had not changed. They adopted the "dissociation of the self" discourse to emphasis that there was a difference between who they are (or private self) which they labelled as being "me", "I" and a "person", and what they do (or work self) commonly labelled as being a "whore", and that their "private" self (the "me") had not changed from doing sex work. This is explicitly emphasised by the statements: "*I'm still me. (.) I haven't changed*", "*I'm still a person and I haven't changed... I'm still the same me at the end of the day.*" These assertions seemed to be driven by the fear of not being "liked" and of being "judged" by their work self (i.e., as a "whore" or as a "different person") rather than by who they really are by a society that holds very negative attitudes and stereotypes about sex workers. As Helen says, "*I know because the attitudes towards it is negative*". For instance, one participant exemplifies this when she states that when people didn't know she was a sex worker they judged her as a "person" like everyone else rather than just as a "whore". However, once labelled a "whore" this label came to encompass everything about her so that people came to stereotypically define and judge her only according to the work self (the "whore") rather than by her private self (the personal "me"). This she strongly denies "*No:: I'm not like that (1.32) I'm still a person*". Therefore, defining a clear separation between the work self and the private self functioned as a way of protecting and preserving their self-concept (the private self / the me) and self-esteem from the stigmatic effects of being a sex worker. This is clearly the function when Rosanne demands that people like her for "who I am (.) not what I do" and when Helen states "*I'm not like that. I'm still a person*".

*"So I've never really had any problem and like if people like me (1.44) they'll like me for who I am (.) not what I do.... They may not agree with it (.) or may not want to do it themselves (.) but it's (.) I'm still me (.) I haven't changed."*  
*(Rosanne 5/44)*

*"No:: I'm not like that. (1.32) I'm still a person and I haven't changed. I've probably changed a little bit because of my attitude towards work. It's different (1.08) but I'm still the same me at the end of the day. I haven't changed." (Helen 83/37)*

*"They'll judge me as a different person. They'll wont like me. It'll. She's a whore. We didn't know that. But when they didn't know it was like they like me for who I was. They knew me... I know because the attitude towards it is negative so that's why I keep quiet." (Helen 83/54)*

In conclusion, all the participants in this study drew on the "dissociation of the self" discourse to a considerable degree. The "dissociation of the self" discourse conveyed two other conflicting but related discourses: "sex as work" and "sex as love". Participants adopted the "sex as work" discourse in conjunction with the "dissociation of the self" discourse by: (a) constructing a different work name, identity, and personality, (b) constructing and objectifying clients as mere work tools or as monetary commodities and therefore simultaneously constructing the sex worker as the more powerful and active agent, (c) describing sex work with phrases such as "it's just a job", "it's the money" or "he is just a client not a boyfriend", (d) creating work boundaries and rules, and (e) maintaining secret lives. This "dissociation of the self" discourse primarily functioned as a coping mechanism for the participants by having the function and consequence of creating an emotional and psychological distance between their private and work lives. This was in response to the very personal nature of sex work itself and it being subject to such heavy stigmatisation and prejudice.

However, variabilities appeared within this "dissociation of the self" analysis. For instance, within sex work itself the "sex as love" discourse sometimes prevailed over the "sex as work" discourse in the sense that the client-sex worker relationship sometimes became much more personal and emotional in nature. This was largely attributed to a sex workers young age and lack of experience. Often there was considerable overlap between the sex workers work life and their private life to the extent that participants felt that they had permanently changed from doing sex work. For example, experiencing sexual problems with their partners, becoming harder, less interested, and disillusioned with men. Some participants alternatively asserted that

they had not changed personally from doing sex work. The function of this was largely to protect their self-concept and self-esteem from the negative stigmatic effects of sex work. This analysis also raised two major general issues. At the personal level, concerning the long term psychological, emotional and social costs of “dissociation of the self” as a coping strategy within sex work. At the societal level, in regards to the stigmatisation of sex workers and the sex work industry, the negative effects that this has, and the possible measures that can be adopted to challenge these negative stereotypes. For example, decriminalisation of the sex work industry, more positive media portrayals, and academics undertaking further discourse analysis research in this topic area.

## **A Construction of the Whore Stigma.**

*“These stereotypes of normal and abnormal femininity are composed of a number of qualities attributed to particular women. Several of these attributes lead to a woman to be seen as less than a whole human being and to her disqualification from full social acceptance. Erving Goffman (1963) deems such an attribute a stigma. When a woman has been labelled, successfully, in this way, it has consequences not only for how others identify and respond to her - her personal and social identity - but also for her sense of her own identity, her ‘ego’ or felt identity.... The stigmatizing label may be assigned in a number of ways. It may be firmly attached, in legal form, as when a court declares a woman to be a ‘common prostitute’, or it may be the result of a long series of interactions with family members, doctors and other professionals... The prostitute will, similarly, have learned the ‘normal’ attributes of women and the public view of the ‘whore’ and then has to learn how others respond to her as a prostitute. Not only will a number of negative qualities be assigned to her but these will affect her life in various ways. Her ability to function as a mother will be questioned (whether or not she is in prison), and her relationship with her husband or lover may lead to him being accused of ‘living off immoral earnings’. She has to learn how to cope with her new social and personal identity in the eyes of shopkeepers and neighbours. Her status and rights as a citizen will be affected out of her working time. As a known prostitute, to wait for a friend in the street makes her liable to be arrested for ‘loitering’. When she appears in court, unlike other defendants, her criminal record is known to the court before the court charge is proved, as the court will be told, at the beginning of the hearing, that she is a ‘common prostitute’. The acquisition of the label ‘prostitute’ leads to her being subjected to a greater degree of control over all aspects of her life.” (Hutter & Williams, 1981: pp. 24-26).*

## **Constructing the Whore Stigma Discourse.**

The “whore stigma” was a repertoire raised often by all the participants at various points throughout their interviews. The whore stigma discourse included popular stereotypes and myths conveyed in public, media, and legal discourses on the nature of sex work. According to participants, once a woman is stigmatically labelled as a “whore” this leads to her being seen as less than a whole human being. Other people tend to identify and respond to her as a “different” person, by the “work” self (the “whore”) rather than by the “private” self (the “me”).

*“I'll deny it because they'll judge me. They'll judge me as a different person. They'll wont like me. It'll. She's a whore. We didn't know that. But when*

*"they didn't know it was like they like me for who I was. They know me."*  
*(Helen 83/54)*

After a woman is labelled as a “whore” a number of negative qualities are stereotypically assigned to her. For instance, sex workers are stereotyped as being nymphomaniacs and of dressing a certain way such as wearing boob tubes, short skirts, and fish net stockings.

*"Outside of here I think a lot of people tend to have this preconceived idea that we're nymphomaniacs." (Sharon 53/47)*

*"They think that we're someone that wears fish net stockings and short skirts and the boob tubes." (Rosanne 5/6)*

Sex workers are stereotyped as living horrible, debauched lifestyles as drug addicts, STD carriers, and criminals.

*"... stereotypes that... we live this (.) um horrible debauched type lifestyle."*  
*(Tracy 43/5)*

*"...they put it hand in hand with drugs and alcohol and disease." (Sharon 60/52)*

*"They're really against it... says it's trouble... it's a shame... it's dirty... it's scummy." (Helen 83/27)*

Sex workers are stereotyped as being victims of sexual abuse.

*"It sounds good though doesn't it abused people and sexually abused people you know drawn to this industry." (Joe 71/8)*

The whore label is described as having enduring “socially stigmatic” effects. For instance, as Tracy says *"once you've been labelled a prostitute your always gonna be"*. This “social stigma” attached to sex work is described by participants as being very negative and oppressive which has impelled many sex workers to keep secret what they do for a living as a way of protecting their private lives from these stigmatic effects.

*"Disadvantages are the social stigma I guess. You know once you've been labelled a prostitute your always gonna be... It's that social stigma that really keeps you um (1.07) down I think." (Tracy 41/32)*

*"I just keep it confidential what I do for a job... They'll judge me as a different person... I know because the attitude towards it is negative." (Helen 83/49)*

Participants attempted to challenge the whore stigma discourse by undermining its validity. This included differentiating between lay (i.e., public) knowledge and expert (i.e., sex workers) knowledge of the sex work industry. According to participants, lay knowledge (i.e., the whore stigma discourse) consists of "negativity", "generalisations", "judgements", and "stereotypes". Participants suggest that this was because the public has no direct exposure or experience with the sex work industry and therefore do not have accurate knowledge about sex work. They describe public views as being "naïve", "uneducated", and "unenlightened". These factors combined with human insecurities and fears can lead to prejudice and hatred against a particular group such as sex workers. This is described as being similar to racism. Participants adopt the rhetoric of direct experience to provide power to their version as being a more valid indicator of the truth.

*"People are very quick to generalise and to say you know those kind of things and they're naive and what you don't know about you know you, you hate. You can be negative about. But we're like any other industry (.) any other business." (Joe 78/24)*

*"They don't know what it's like because they don't work as, they're not sex workers themselves." (Helen 83/27)*

*"Um if they're unenlightened ones... like Joe citizens... they think we're sluts and that we're um (1.05) low life and:: all those negative things that society think about, think about working girls... people that have um (2.22) some sort of spiritual growth or some sort of um (1.17) own acceptance around who they are (.) are a lot more understanding then they realise that it's just (.) something that you're choosing to do in your life. (.) You'll find most um (1.57) most society type people are so caught up in their own shit that they lash out at other people to make themselves feel better...like yeah let's put that person down because they're moari for example and then I can feel better about myself...we're certainly judged. (1.30) Definitely and stereotyped. (1.03) But I think again it's all pretty much part of being human and part of (.) being uneducated (1.10) about um (1.39) yeah about people." (Tracy 43/1).*

Lay knowledge (i.e., the whore stigma discourse) is also described as being due to the publics over reliance on the media for the majority of their information such as television programs, newspapers, and magazine articles. Media accounts of the sex work industry are described as being negatively biased by focussing on the "*blood and guts type stories*", which sell. Sex workers are negatively portrayed in media accounts as being nymphomaniacs, disease carriers, drug addicts, victims of violence, and sexual abuse.

*"I think they watch too much TV. (2.03) I think um (...) no they do. I'm sure they do. Prostitutes in America. TV. Hookers getting murdered. Drugs. Alcohol. Um sleeping with every Tom, Dick and Harry. Diseases...and they see all of this on TV because they're never exposed to it...they don't know what it's like. They get all their information from TV programs, news, magazine articles and they really sell their story by showing the negative sides of it. Um (1.33) you know the blood and guts type stories (laughs)... and they just presume... it's this narcotic filled (1.28) um disease ridden industry (1.85) and it's not." (Joe 68/21)*

A key focus of participants was to challenge the whore stigma discourse by refuting these negative stereotypes and to reconstruct a more positive and realistic image of sex work by promoting alternative discourses about sex work based on real life stories by the participants themselves. As stated by Sharon, the public should see the sex work industry for what it "really is" which is not as "dirty" and "horrifying" as people expect.

*"I want society to get out there with a big scrubbing brush and scrub off all the dirt that they've thrown at it... and see it for what it really (...) really is... it's not as dirty and horrifying (laughing) as, as a lot of people with preconceived ideas have." (Sharon 60/13)*

### **Resisting the Whore Stigma Discourse.**

#### **"Whores" and "Cheap Sluts" Stereotype.**

According to participants, public and media perceptions of sex workers consist of negative stereotypes that portray sex workers as looking like "whores" and "cheap sluts". For instance, sex workers are stereotyped as wearing clothes that are tight

fitting, skimpy and revealing such as lycra bodysuits, leopard skins, boob tubes, short skirts, and fish net stockings, that act to accentuate the more sexualised parts of a women's body. In addition, sex workers are stereotyped as being conspicuously out walking on the streets a lot going "wanna date honey" and "wanting to go with any john."

*"O::h yes. They have very um (.) vivid ideas (.) of what (.) a sex worker is. They think that we're someone that wears fish net stockings and short skirts and the boob tubes and walks along the pavement going 'wanna date honey?'.(laughs)" (Rosanne 5/6).*

*"I think its, its society's put that stigma on. You know. You know. They expect to see you in leopard skin. You know. You see your butt and let your tits flop out... that woman that's out on the street you know (1.02) dressed in fish net stockings and (1.26) wanting to go with any john." (Sharon 59/23)*

Many participants refuted these negative stereotypes of sex workers and alternatively constructed sex workers as being indistinguishable from the average women on the street. This is reinforced in several ways. First of all, sex workers are described as being a diverse group of people coming from all walks of life such as university students and mothers.

*"You'd run across a working girl on the street and you wouldn't even realise she was one you know and a lot of people's mouths would drop open if they found out that she working in the sex industry (1.07) you know cause there is a diverse range of women who work in the sex industry." (Tracy 43/5)*

Secondly, sex workers are also described as covering up more than most people. This is justified on the basis that sex workers don't want to stand out in the crowd or attract men outside of work because they are sick of having to do clients all day at work.

*"I mean if you looked at them on the street you wouldn't look at them twice the way they dress. They'd cover up more than the average person would on the outside...They're just dressed in your average everyday clothes...I mean you'd never know them if you fell over them...It's probably the one they're gonna say she's a working girl that probably isn't (1.07) because she's dressed trying to. We don't have to go out there and lure men. We're deadly sick of the sight of them usually at the end of the day. We've had enough... We're not bloody looking for sex out there I mean god doing clients every day." (Lydia 31/35)*

Thirdly, according to participants, those sex workers who do dress and act “cheap” and “trampy” are the minority. The majority of sex workers are described as dressing like the average person (as just mentioned) or as dressing better than average. That is, they look “*really classy*”, “*elegant*”, and “*sophisticated*”.

*“You see do many movies...the way that they portray working girls is horrid. Okay admittedly there are streetworkers that do dress like that I can't deny that but hey that doesn't put us all into the same category.”* (Sharon 60/40)

*“Most evenings we wear evening wear (.) which is the long dresses, the stockings (.) um high heel shoes (.) um jewellery (.) and when they learn that (.) it's not their image of a sex worker...They tend to think your really trampy (.)... instead of somebody that maybe really classy and elegant (1.13) and quite sophisticated. (1.48) They don't look at them like that. They always think they're cheap.”* (Rosanne 5/6)

These descriptions function to minimise the differences between a sex worker and the average person. Sex workers are constructed as being indistinguishable from the average woman rather than conspicuously looking and acting like a whore or a cheap slut.

### **The nymphomaniac stereotype.**

According to the participants, the public commonly stereotype sex workers as being nymphomaniacs who “*party down*” with all the men.

*“Outside of here I think a lot of people tend to have this preconceived idea that we're nymphomaniacs.”* (Sharon 53/47)

*“...in societies eyes they're got an incredible built up conceptions that we party down... with all the men folk that come through.”* (Sharon 60/16)

Rosanne stated that many years ago the legal system reinforced this popular stereotype that sex workers had an abnormally high sexual drive and furthermore suggested that it was impossible to rape a prostitute because she always wanted it.

*“I know years and years and years ago (.) um you used to hear a lot more... she's only a prostitute(.) you know(.) so what... you can't rape an escort because she always wants it.”* (Rosanne 6/14)

The participants emphatically challenged this nymphomaniac stereotype by promoting the alternative discourse of “sex as work”. For instance, one participant

explicitly stated that sex workers are not “sluts” (who she defines as being someone who sleeps around with anyone for nothing) because this is a job for money.

*“We::ll I DONT THINK that a prostitute is a slut because (1.40) this is our job. This is what we do and a slut is someone who just goes around and has sex with anyone for nothing... This is your job. You’re getting paid for it. It’s a different thing.” (Helen 85/45)*

Participants justify doing sex work because of financial reasons. Sex work was seen as being a viable way of “making ends meet” or “creating the lifestyle” that they desired. Sexual desire was not attributed to their choice of doing sex work. This functioned to challenge the nymphomaniac stereotype by constructing sex work as “work” like any other job that someone may do (e.g., factory work). Sex work (like factory work) may not be enjoyable but was a viable way of earning a living.

*“The financial sort of things that will push me back into it again. It’s not no desire. I just don’t choose to do it. Um it’s actually out of a need... I’ve never really enjoyed doing sex work to be quite honest (1.43) but I do it. You know it’s sort of like you know a factory worker may not enjoy going to work but they do it. They have to go to work.” (Nina 88/16)*

The only exception in this study was Rosanne who does come close to reinforcing the nymphomania stereotype. This is exemplified when Rosanne states that the reason she chose sex work was because she loved to have sex as often as she could with as many different people as she could. However, money was not totally discounted but was a less justifiable basis for doing sex work since she already had a job and didn’t really need the money. Nevertheless, over time her justification for doing sex work increasingly shifted from “sexual enjoyment” to “money”. Sex work was constructed as becoming less of a “game” and more like “work”.

*“Because I wanted to... It wasn’t a need... I had another job... No just that I love sex (1.0) and I like to have it as often as I can with as many different people as I can... So for me it was a good way of earning an income from something I love doing.” (Rosanne 1/9)*

*“How do you feel about sex work now after working four years? I see it as a job. (.) Just purely that.” (Rosanne 1/48)*

*“It’s not so much of a game (.) the more that you’ve been working... you get down to the business side of his visit... It’s a case of well we don’t really care about you. All I care about is your money.” (Rosanne)*

Another way that participants adopted the “sex as work” discourse to challenge the nymphomaniac stereotype was by differentiating “work sex” from social or domestic sex. According to participants sex work wasn’t a time to “*party down*” or just “*lay here and have fun*” or to “*just spread it and let men do what they want to do to us*”. Instead the participants spoke of taking control, having a systematic routine which involved every client being treated the same, and of having specific work rules and boundaries such as no kissing or “blowjobs”. In addition, participants spoke of how sex work was more than just sex but also involved a lot of talking.

*“Outside of here I think a lot of people tend to have this preconceived idea that we’re nymphomaniacs. (1.37) Um:: we have got no self respect. Um we:: (1.75) ah we just spread it and let men do what they want to do to us. It’s lack of education... We do take control. We don’t allow the guys to take control of us. Just a lot of negativity there.” (Sharon 53/47)*

*“I’m sure a lot of them think that you know that we kiss them and that... we go down on them and we allow them to do things to us... They’ve got such built up ideas whereas I have a routine literally... every john is the same. I don’t veer off too often... whereas in societies eyes they’ve got an incredible built up conceptions that we party down... with all the men folk that come through which is wrong AND a large percentage of the clientele that comes through this door (1.17) all they want to do is talk”. (Sharon 60/16)*

*“We’re not here to lay here and have fun... your always constantly working and checking. (Joe 72/45)*

### **The STD Carrier Stereotype.**

Participants spoke of how sex workers are commonly stereotyped by the public as being “*dirty working girls*” and “*walking diseases*”. This stereotype was directly refuted by participants who instead alternatively described sex workers as being a lot more “cleaner and healthier” than the average woman. Participants reinforced this assertion by employing the “sex as work” discourse to construct sex work as being a “*business transaction*” which involved a more rigorous enforcement of safe sex procedures and routine checks than would typically occur in personal relationships.

*“I just think (2.11) it’s a lot (.) cleaner and (.) healthier (2.22) probably for men to go to prostitutes and in some senses women wouldn’t agree with that because they’ll say ‘oh look at the amount of guys she’s going with’. (1.17) But I mean we’re not sitting at work pissed and we’re worried about our health. We don’t want any diseases... It was said recently working girls have the lowest incidences of um (1.76) sexually transmitted diseases that should*

*speak for itself and I mean we're probably got the highest incidences of (...) having sex... But I think that's another misconception people hold (...) that you know this dirty working girl. I mean it's not true... I mean for us it's a business transaction." (Lydia 28/38)*

*"And making them also aware that we're not walking diseases... They put it hand in hand with drugs and alcohol and disease and da de da (...) and if only they would realise (...) that we're probably cleaner than the average women because the average women has a check once every twelve months or three years... We're going in every twelve weeks...like if you have a broken condom your straight in the next day to get checked out again." (Sharon 60/52)*

*"We're all taught, educated on (...) um safe sex which is using spermicides, lubricants, condoms...check around their genital area for open sores... We're not here to lay here and have fun... I mean your always constantly working and checking." (Joe 72/29)*

### **The Drug Addict Stereotype.**

Another common stereotype is of sex workers being drug addicts. Participants strongly counteracted this stereotype by promoting the alternative discourse of sex workers as being a diverse group of everyday people. That is, rather than being drug addicts they were more likely to be university students trying to finance their education, and single mothers with children to support or whose husbands have gone into bankruptcy. Implicitly, Sharon also states this when she talks about how the public have a tendency of putting sex workers into a "*lower class*" and don't look at them like the "*average women walking along the street*."

*"There's that stigma of you know working girls, prostitutes, working girls, whatever they want to call us you know...drugs and alcohol seem to come hand in hand with it they seem to think. We have a pet dependence and so they tend to put us um in a lower class I s'pose. They tend to sort of don't look at us like they would the average woman walking along the street." (Sharon 49/48)*

*"And you hear the things they say that most workers are there supporting drug habits well where I am that's not true. (.101) I mean I see we've got (...) university students. We've got mothers. Um:: We've got (...) a couple of ladies working there who've got children. Their husbands have gone into bankruptcy. That's what they see as their only (...) way out, their only option and they've earn't really big money...Um yes you see varying different people." (Lydia 23/40)*

## Victims of sexual abuse stereotype.

A popular public stereotype cited by many participants is that sex workers often come from backgrounds of sexual abuse. This sexual abuse theory is endorsed by many mental health professionals. Joe and Lydia strongly refuted this stereotype by stating that this was a “*myth*” and a gross exaggeration of reality. In their experience very few sex workers have had a history of sexual abuse. Lydia states that the majority of sex workers are “*pretty regular people*” with boyfriends and husbands rather than “*man haters*”. Joe constructs sexual abuse as being a universal social problem whose victims are spread across all occupational groups not just sex work. Furthermore, to the contrary, she states that sex work and being sexually abused would be very incompatible. These descriptions function to loosen the connections between sex work and sexual abuse and therefore undermine the sexual abuse victim stereotype.

*“I think you do get that percentage of sex workers because they have been abused by men. I mean obviously your going to get that variety there again and I have definitely seen sex workers that absolutely hate men... But I mean the percentage (.) at our work of that, that I've been aware of is probably about one or two percent... whereas as I said most of the females there I mean they've got boyfriends or they've got husbands or whatever. So I mean they're just sort of (.) pretty regular people.” (Lydia 34/31)*

*“Everybody's got a background. I know lawyers that have been abused. I know doctors who were molested as children. I mean it's a world wide spread problem... It's a myth because we actually sat down and discussed it one day and I think that out of thirty girls three of them came forward and said they had been abused but they were issues that had been dealt with... and the job had nothing to do with it... and if you really think about it if you were abused and raped and molested... wouldn't you have a problem with being a sex worker... Don't you think that it would be the last thing that would be on your mind... in this jo::b you wouldn't be able to hack it... It would be so hard (1.43) to hide all of that (1.90) and to continue with the job. It's a myth... It's a widespread problem all around the world. I mean you'd find too a lot of abused people actually end up becoming counsellors themselves... It sounds good though doesn't it. Abused people and sexually abused people you know drawn to this industry.” (Joe 71/8)*

There was one variation. Sharon reinforced the sexual abuse victim stereotype by making the speculative statement that people who are sexually abused may be drawn to the sex work industry because they may have acquired attributes such as being

“good liars” and being “promiscuous” that would be compatible with doing sex work.

*“You know probably somewhere along the line in their life... there is a percentage of girls that have been...probably it makes it easier for them (2.38) you know to work in this industry (2.96) because you know sexual abuse is such a cold calculated thing... because let’s face it women who have been sexually abused are good liars. Can be very promiscuous. Um (1.44) yeah have, have probably a lot of attributes that would work well in this job (laughing) as horrible as it sounds.” (Sharon 63/10)*

In conclusion, the sex work industry is often negatively portrayed as being a “seedy”, “sick”, “deviant”, and “criminal subculture” deriving from negative stereotypes abound of sex workers as being nymphomaniacs, drug addicts, STD carriers, and victims of sexual abuse. Resisting the “whore stigma” discourse functioned to highlight the prejudice and stigma that sex workers experience from members of the general public. The participants active reconstruction of this discourse functioned to provide a more positive and realistic image of sex work(ers) as being a diverse group of everyday women trying to earn a living like everyone else and to promote more positive and realistic public perceptions of the sex work industry as being valid work.

### **The Problem with Labelling: "Sex Workers", "Prostitutes", and "Whores."**

The participants were asked about their feelings and opinions on terms such as “prostitute”, “whore”, “hooker”, “working girl”, and “sex worker” used to describe their type of work and which term that they preferred. The majority of the participants mostly preferred the term “sex worker” which was described as being “more nineties”, “more appropriate” although “more blatant” in terms of explicitly defining what a sex worker was. The term “sex worker” was seen as being less offensive than other terms such as “prostitute”, “hooker” and “whore” which have ugly connotations attached to them.

*“Ah sex worker... because prostitute has certain connotations attached to it as well... sex worker is more blatant... I guess with sex worker it’s a fact you know your saying what you are... with prostitute you get all those other um ugly connotations associated with the word.” (Tracy 45/4)*

*"I like sex worker it's more nineties... It's more um (1.47) appropriate name (.) than just whore, hooker or (1.09) prostitute... It defines (2.62) what you are (.) but not in a (1.33) slangy approach. Not in a scummy way." (Helen 85/34)*

The term "sex worker" was described as being a better technical definition for what they do since it more accurately defines and reinforces "sex as work" (i.e., like factory work) and encompasses all the possible different types of work in the sex work industry. However, it was not seen to be a word that they would personally use to describe themselves.

*"I suppose we are sex workers aren't we. We have sex and we work...It's basically just combining everything and that's a good term for that. Sex worker. There's nothing offensive about that and it does explain... But I wouldn't call myself like 'oh thank you for visiting me. I'm [Joe] the sex worker'. I'd use it for you know generalising." (Joe 74/22)*

*"I don't like the terms. (.) Um. Yes I am a sex worker. Yeah that's what I do. Yeah rather than a factory worker. I'm a sex worker." (Rosanne 9/25)*

Next in line as favourites were "escort" then "working girl", and "professional". The terms most disliked by participants were "whore", "hooker" and "prostitute" because of the ugly connotations attached to them. These words were described as being very degrading although not inherently degrading .The degrading connotations of these words were spoken of as coming from the way that these words have been used by the public.

*"Um. (.) Prostitute and hooker. (1.33) I think it's, it's society's put that stigma on... They expect to see you in leopard skin... You see your butt and let your tits flop out... These words to me are quite degrading but it's only the way that society has put it across as being degrading... you know when you say the word prostitute it makes you (.) look at that (.) that women that's out on the street you (1.02) dressed in fish net stockings and (1.26) wanting to go with any john." (Sharon 59/23))*

There were a couple of variations. For instance, Maria said she preferred the term "prostitute" and Rosanne said she was not too fussy on it. Both described other terms such as "sex worker" as just being euphemisms for what sex workers do with the superficial function of political correctness (e.g., calling a disabled person mentally or physically challenged), and as glamorisation of a job that was in fact illegal and was merely a way of making ends meet.

*"Sex worker and escort are nice words for prostitute. (1.27) Um:: like instead of calling someone disabled now (1.20) they are you know mentally challenged or physically challenged. You ask a disabled person. They don't mind being called disabled (1.27) names. But yeah I'm not too fussy on it." (Rosanne 9/34)*

*"That is u::tter crap:: Absolutely shit. You know. Um (3.93) Prostitution which is what I choose to call it (1.10) and people glamorise it but the thing is that the moment we call it something other than prostitution then it's not illegal... It's about making ends meet." (Maria 19/48)*

As was just suggested by Sharon these words employed to describe sex work are not inherently offensive but more depend on how people use them. This is reiterated by Nina and Joe who also suggest that it depends on the source (i.e., other working girls versus outsiders), who they're directed at, and their function. That is, "it's all in the way that you say it and how you say it and who to." For instance, these participants discuss how using terms like "whore", "prossies", and "bitches" are often used jokingly with each other but this is completely different from when these terms are directed by someone outside of their group or the sex work industry which immediately have offensive connotations.

*"We can call each other those names like 'oh you whore! We call each other bitches and prossies and stuff like that. But once...it's directed by someone outside of your group or the sex industry perhaps um (1.01) it's immediately ah offensive... BUT WE USE THESE TERMS JOKINGLY with each other." (Nina 94/43)*

*"Like I'll joke to one of the girls 'oh you such a whore!' You know but it's all in the way you say it and how you say it and who to. (1.99) You know if a man off the street yelled at me 'hey whore!' then I'd joke with one of the girls 'oh your such a whore!' aren't you. They're two completely different things." (Joe 74/39)*

One participant suggested that these terms used to describe sex work maybe used quite casually and naively some people as a form of fashionable slang.

*"People are naive. (.) People (1.51) um (.) follow the trends. I mean they're slang words." (Joe 74/14)*

Other participants compared these terms employed to describe sex work to other terms such as "niggers" and "kidfuckers" attributing the use of them to "uneducated", "redneck attitudes", "hatred" and "the kind of person they are." Therefore describing the use of these words as being like another form of prejudice similar to "sexism",

“facism”, and “racism” which are a fundamental part of the social structure of our society and worldwide.

*“Because people can be cruel. They don’t think... A lot of it’s got to do with I think education and the kind of person they are... You know. People say a lot of stuff (.) like bastard, nigger (1.53) you know (.) um:: kidfucker. I mean (1.36) you know what do they call Jews. I mean (.) you know everybody’s got slang words and a lot of it just comes from hate and lack of education... I mean it’s stuff all around the world.” (Joe 74/37)*

*“It’s like (1.48) people who call blacks niggers you know and, and stuff. It’s just a (1.29) redneck attitude. It’s always gonna be there. There’s always gonna be sexists and facists and racists and facists and all the rest of it in society.” (Maria 21/21)*

Furthermore, according to several participants, labels such as “whore”, “prostitute” and “slut” are not only exclusive to describing sex workers but are used to describe women in general. Therefore these terms not only function to degrade sex workers but also function to denigrate all women in general.

*“Yeah I mean I don’t like whore and (1.01) um (1.51) yeah slut and all that sort of stuff. I mean it’s derogatory to women not just sex industry women.” (Tracy 45/12)*

*“I mean the biggest put down for a woman is to hear another woman call you, oh your just a dirty whore, you’re just a dirty slut, prostitute whatever.... Yeah there’s this yeah dirty sign around that word itself. You know what I mean. It’s very degrading. Very degrading.” (Sharon 59/33)*

*“You get those opinions and you know the dreaded, oh she must be a hooker... you hear it too often you know or women being accused of being prostitutes... and that’s a way of getting to a woman. A way of upsetting a woman.” (Sharon 53/49)*

According to Sharon, these terms may be employed by one woman to another woman as a way of exerting power and control when a woman is confronted by feelings of lack of control over a situation, general insecurities or more specifically sexual insecurities.

*“Yeah it’s very effective... to me there’s an insecurity when other women tend to use that you know. It’s almost like a (1.54) sexual insecurity within themselves... where they feel a lack of control over a situation.” (Sharon 59/44)*

Participants also implicitly state that these terms may also maintain gender inequalities in our society by acting as a form of social control over women especially over their sexuality. For instance, Rosanne speaks of a sexual double standard underpinning these derogatory terms revealed in the following quote:

*"Anyone that sleeps around though. You get guys too that (.) call women who::res you know girlfriend a whore because she ha::d (.) a fling. Um I don't think it's fair because (.) the same old thing. If a guy fools around he's a stud. If a woman does it yeah (.) she's a slut or a whore (.) or yeah a prostitute." (Rosanne 9/22)*

In conclusion, there is an old saying that “sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me”. Personally, I think that there is more validity in the alternative version that goes “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will do more permanent damage”. In this study, the participants discussed how terms such as “whore”, “prostitute”, and “hooker” have very negative connotations. However, participants did add that these terms do not have inherent negative meanings but that it more depends on the way that people use these terms. These labels are spoken of as having very powerful functions and consequences. Primarily functioning as a form of social control over women and maintaining a sexual double standard that has consequences for all women not just sex workers. This discussion of labelling has relevance to the issue of identity politics. Various minority groups such as the prostitutes rights groups, gay and lesbian right groups, and black power groups are all similarly attempting to gain back ownership of words such as “prostitute”, “whore”, “faggot”, “black” and “nigger” but replacing the negative connotations of these words with more positive meanings as a form of group empowerment. .

### **The Decriminalisation of Sex Work.**

In response to the question "Do you think that decriminalisation of sex work would change how people view sex work(ers)?" Participants stated that they thought that this was a step forward in the right direction. However, participants also stated that they did not think that the decriminalisation of sex work was sufficient on its own to bring about significant changes in public attitudes on sex work. Participants strongly endorsed the idea of educating the public through more research like this

study. Tracy spoke of the need for changes at the social structural level and issues of power and control. She compared the stigmatisation of sex workers as being similar to other prejudice such as racism. According to Tracy, change will not come easily and that there will always be an "*underdog*" in our societies structure.

*"Decriminalising. I suppose it's ... a step forward in the right direction but I think this sort of thing [this study] is really important. Women need to read this and hear this just as much as the men folk do. You know. Because they have an incredible ooh yeah opinions about us girls." (Sharon 60/6)*

*"Well probably not in my lifetime. You know it's the same as all the racism and (.) everything like that... There's always gonna be an underdog in, in our um societies structure... there's always gonna be that power and control and ... different standards ... But hopefully one day hopefully with the decriminalisation (.) um (1.93) yeah people may start looking at it differently." (Tracy 46/2)*

In conclusion, there is a potential for change in the pool of cultural ideas that may benefit not just sex workers but all women in general. However, such change will not come easily. Decriminalisation of sex work may be a positive first step to break down these old sexual double standards with the addition of further research. However these may barely make an impression on our societies social structure which is the product of thousands of years of history. Unfortunately, such changes may merely remain at the level of lip service, which has been the case with racial issues, gender inequalities, and gay rights in the past and present.

## A Construction of Clients as Everyday Men.

According to participants, the general public frequently draw on negative stereotypes of men who visit sex workers as being “not nice”, “sleazy”, and “perverted or strange” types of men. Participants admitted that they also drew on these negative stereotypes of clients before they began working as a sex worker.

*“I thought it would be just all sleazy little men...”* (Nicole 11/11)

*“They probably have that perception of the men that (.) visit places. (.) Nice men don’t go there. They’re all (1.15) perverted or strange.”* (Lydia 24/11)

In the context of direct experience of working as a sex worker these negative stereotypes were labelled as “naïve”.

*“I never realized the calibre of (.) men that we see actually ever use services like this in my naivete (laughs) of pre-working days...”* (Lydia 30/52)

These were replaced with alternative constructions of clients as being quite ordinary everyday types of men that we are familiar with in our day to day lives. For instance, rather than being the expected “sleazy” type, Nicole repeatedly and emphatically described clients as being absolutely “anyone” and similarly Joe describes clients as being “people just like me”. Clients were constructed as coming from all walks of life. The following extracts illustrates the wide diversity of clientele that they meet.

*“You find (.) anyone (.) anyone will (.) will (.) get an escort. (.) Anyone. You know from a good looking gu::y that’s like eighteen to (.) you know an ol::d (1.03) wealthy fa::rmer (laughing) dairy farmer whose ninety whose wife has died. You know. Anyone will have one.”* (Nicole 11/11)

*“Anyone. (1.13) Like you walk down the street. Like I (.) when I (.) you see a client and you think he’s my grandfather, my father, my uncle, my brother, my little brother (.) you know (.) my boyfriend.”* (Nicole 12/49)

*“Yeah. (.) They’re people just like me.”* (Joe 67/28)

Lydia expressed surprise at the number of nice and respectable types of men that visit sex workers. For example, many of their clients are described as being family men and high earning professional men. Hypocritically, many of their clients were also described as being lawyers, policemen and even politicians.

*"The things that probably stand out the most about working are probably the amount of nice men I've actually met in that industry." (Lydia 24/11)*

*"You do have a lot of men come in that are married... A lot of men coming in do earn big money." (Lydia 25/41)*

*"Look god. We get policemen coming to work. We've got (...) politicians... You only gotta look at the people that come in (...) I mean some of our biggest clientele (1.13) are lawyers." (Lydia 30/52)*

To conclude, by alternatively constructing clients as being everyday types of men functioned to counteract negative portrayals of the sex industry as being a “seedy”, “sick”, “deviant” “criminal subculture” and instead constructs the sex industry as being a legitimate business. Furthermore, descriptions of clientele as coming from quite high standing positions in society such as politicians, lawyers and policemen functioned to reveal societies hypocrisies and sexual double standards.

### **A Construction of Clients as Wounded.**

Constructing clients as wounded was a discursive theme used quite strongly and explicitly by all the participants in this study especially when asked about their direct feelings towards their client but also occurring at various points throughout the interview as the participants related their experiences of working in the sex work industry. Participants spoke of two main categories of wounded clients which ranged from everyday people wounded by human everyday problems (e.g., loneliness, stress, sexual frustration, problems at work and/or at home.) to the more pathologically wounded type of clients described as being “sick”, “kinky”, “warped”, “sexual perverts” and possibly potential child molesters and rapists.

This first category is consistent with the previous discursive construction of clients as being everyday men. Participants speak of clients as being men wounded by everyday “human” types of “problems” and of having “lives that are really sad”. This was described as occurring at several different but overlapping levels - sexually, emotionally, psychologically and socially. These included: (a) men looking for sexual relief and intimacy because they are feeling sexually frustrated and tensed because they haven’t had sex for quite some time, or they are feeling sexually unfulfilled in their personal relationships, (b) men needing someone to talk to, unload to, carrying

emotional baggage, and having problems at home or/and at work, and (c) lonely men needing some female companionship because of the difficulty of meeting women for a relationship or for sex. Constructing clients as “wounded” essentially acted as a repertoire of power. Male clients were constructed as being weak and inferior and in need of the services provided by sex workers. In contrast, it promoted discourses of sex workers as being powerful and superior women offering valuable sexual and therapeutic services to societies wounded men.

*"There is so many different types of clients... Some need a sexual need met... Some of them are lonely and they, they need company... Some of them yeah just need somebody to talk to... Their lives are really sad.... I mean it's a human thing that we've all got problems."* (Tracy 42/12)

*"He's usually the suit and tie... married... between thirty and fifty... I mean they love their wives... Like in any relationship sex starts off good and then sort of settles down... I just think (1.40) they haven't got any sort of sexual total fulfilment at home and obviously that's why they come to us... They come for (2.29) um (2.19) emotional reasons too... We've gotta be psychologists... I mean they come in carrying a lot of... emotional baggage and they quite often offload it on you."* (Lydia 27/30)

*"If they haven't had sex for quite some time they do get quite sort of tensed... so we're good therapy in that respect because we talk a lot too... I've had guys in the room that had ended up in tears and it felt so good about getting it out. It's something they can't discuss whether it be their sexuality or whether it be hang ups in the office or hang ups at home."* (Sharon 53/3)

At the other end of the “wounded” continuum, clients were constructed as wounded in more pathological ways which was illustrated by descriptive phrases such as “sick”, “kinky”, “*fucked in the head*”, “*sexual perverts*”, “*old dirty perverts*” and even being described as being potential child molesters and rapists. Constructing clients as being psychologically, sexually and socially “abnormal” or “deviant” types of men offers a variation to the everyday men discourse. However, this pathological discourse is downplayed by the participants as representing only a small minority of the clients. The majority of clients are consistently constructed as being everyday types of men.

*"You do get that percentage that are kinky... Some of these men are just really warped and sick... I actually look at them and I think they could be child molesters... I don't think that everyone that's got (1.33) a high standing in society is wonderful cause I've been with some of these men and some of them are sick to say the least...They'll fantasize about having sex with their*

*daughters or (.) you know your playing out some (.) fantasy about (.) your a schoolgirl".* (Lydia 28/4)

*"Some of them you know (1.52) are pretty fucked in the head."* (Lydia 29/30)

*"You encounter them as you work you know like sexual perverts or whatever."* (Tracy 41/12)

*"Here's these old dirty perverts."* (Sharon 49/28)

Constructing clients as “pathologically wounded” had the similar function as acting as a repertoire of power by constructing clients as weak, sick and inferior men who are in need of the services of sex workers. In contrast, it promotes discourses of sex workers as powerful and superior women providing valuable sexual and therapeutic services to societies wounded men. In addition, it also functioned to promote sex work as being valuable and beneficial to the general public in the sense of deterring men from committing sex crimes.

*“I certainly see that there’s a need for sex workers in the community. (.) Definitely... there’d probably be more affairs, more divorce rates, more rapes, more um (1.35) child molestations. All that sort of stuff because clients cover that broad range of (.) um:: of sexual deviance.”* (Tracy 42/19)

Constructing clients as wounded strongly influenced sex worker’s descriptions of the type of men who frequented their workplace. Participants spoke of having “*no respect for them*”, “*feeling sorry for them*”, and having a “*condescending attitude*” toward their clients. Participants prolifically employed condescending and derogatory terms such as “*weak*”, “*pitiful*”, “*pathetic*”, “*disgusting*”, “*jerk*”, “*loser*”, and “*assholes*” to describe their clients.

*“I feel sorry for them (1.08) I really do aye (laughs( (1.06) and I look at them and I think how pathetic (1.50) your so pathetic... I do tend to look just at how weak and pathetic they are as menfolk.”* (Sharon 51/50)

*“I’ve got a very condescending attitude towards my clients. I think they’re quite pitiful... I quite often sit back and, and (2.83) think about (.) how disgusting I think they are...I actually think they’re quite pathetic”* (Maria 17/52)

Furthermore, clients were objectified as being merely a monetary commodity. For example, Rosanne and Maria speak of not respecting clients as people but just viewing them as a source of revenue.

*“You tend to disrespect them. (.) You’ve got no respect for them. So to you they are just money.” (Rosanne 2/20)*

*“A lot of them are married and (.) um (.) like I do them because I want the money but I have no respect for them as such.” (Maria 18/30)*

Although participants asserted that they didn’t actually tell clients this but instead pandered or played up to their clients (male) ego with the intent of making them feel special or desirable so that they would come back again which was just part of the job.

*“Not that I’ll tell them that but (laughs) you know. Rather I tell them that they’re the cat’s pyjama’s and things like that.” (Sharon 51/50)*

Objectifying clients as being merely a work tool or source of revenue and describing them in condescending and denigrating ways reinforced the view of the male client as being insignificant to their lives. It essentially acted as a repertoire of power promoting discourses of sex workers as being powerful and superior women in contrast to a weak and inferior male client. It also functioned as a way of psychologically coping with their work (i.e., a form of dissociation of the self) especially when dealing with difficult clients. These condescending and derogatory terms were used jointly by the sex workers as a form of mutual support and empowerment to help them deal with clients and the day to day hassles of sex work.

*“You, you just share your frustrations with the girls. You know. Oh what an asshole that jerk was... yeah we all agree loser.” (Joe 66/21)*

In summary, constructing clients as “wounded” essentially operated as a repertoire of power. It had several functions: Firstly, it functioned as a way of psychologically coping with doing sex work (i.e., a form of dissociation of the self) by denigrating clients as being insignificant to their lives. Secondly, it also functioned as a form of self and group empowerment by downgrading clients/men and elevating the position of sex workers. Thirdly, it functioned to legitimise and justify their choice of work by constructing sex work as being valid and valuable work.

## **A Construction of Men as having a Higher Sexual Drive than Women.**

Participants constructed men/clients as having a higher sexual drive than women. The language of this theme is characterized by generalizing all men as being one homogenous group. The terms “client” and “men” were used interchangeably throughout these descriptions.

*"Men are wanting sex more than women." (Helen 85/51)*

*"Men seem to have a higher sex drive." (Joe 75/6)*

*"Men are so:: preoccupied with their penises and women get on with day to day living. You'd be amazed at how much time men spend preoccupied with their dicks each week (.) in wanking. It's ridiculous." (Maria 21/28)*

Sociobiological and psychological discourses are employed by participants to reinforce this construction of men as having a higher sexual drive than women by providing the power of “naturalness” to the higher male sexual drive. For instance, men's higher sexual drive is attributed to a different male biology (e.g., *"men and women's bodies are made differently"*) and to man's inherent animal nature (e.g., the *"animal instinct"*). Sex is described as being a natural and fundamental biological *"need"* for men that they cannot live without much like food and water.

*"They are animals at the end of the day. They got that animal instinct." (Sharon 53/18)*

*"He's lacking out on that sexual part and all men do need that. I mean they are like animals when it comes to that. It's a need for a man." (Joe 67/35)*

*"Um:: because men and women's bodies are made differently... men tend to be driven by sex more than women do." (Tracy 45/17)*

According to one participant, men are more driven by sex than women because of sex differences in psychology. Men are more “*ego-driven*” and women are more “*emotionally driven*” in sexual relationships. That is, sex is an important part of a man's self-concept and self-esteem whereas for women sex is more an expression of love and intimacy.

*"Men tend to be driven by sex more than women do... sex for men is a really important part of who they are whereas for women it's not so much. For women it's more about the touch and love thing. For men it's about getting their rocks off basically... men are very ego-driven people... Hence they always have fast cars and da de da da." (Tracy 45/17)*

Sexual frustration is spoken of as having a larger negative effect on a man's cognition and behaviour than a woman.

*"Men can do stupid things when they are sexually frustrated." (Tracy 40/33)*

*"Why are men always horny? I've become aware that men have a need to ejaculate... They can't think straight." (Sharon 49/36)*

*"I think men would go insane... if we weren't there." (Nicole 13/13)*

Constructing men/client's as having a higher sexual drive than women functioned to justify why men rather than women need the sexual services of sex workers. Furthermore, it functions to reinforce sex work as being valuable work in the sense of offering sexual services to societies men and also as being valuable and beneficial to all of society since men are described as being capable of doing "stupid" things when sexually frustrated.

### **A Construction of Clients as being Friends and Lovers.**

In a few cases, participants constructed clients as being like "friends and lovers". The client-sex worker relationship took on a much more personal, intimate, egalitarian and mutually satisfying function that went beyond the work role of sex worker. For instance, Lydia speaks of how she "gelled" with, felt "attraction", developed "close associations" and "intimate relationships" with certain clients. Similarly, Joe speaks of forming "friendships" with some clients. Mutual enjoyment of each others company was highlighted. This didn't always involve sex. This breach of professional relations is justified on the basis that it was difficult to avoid getting personally involved sometimes because of all the different men they see in their work and the nature of their work.

*"The things that probably stand out the most about working are probably the amount of nice men I've actually met in that industry and the close associations (1.41) that you have with these men... I feel I know them second best to their wives... because of that intimate relationship... your always talking with them..." (Lydia 24/11)*

*"You might get a client that you end up kissing because you actually quite attracted to him... statistically if you work long enough (1.26) you have to*

*have that percentage of clients that come in that, that you gel with." (Lydia 26/25)*

*"I've got a couple of regular clients that I see (1.03) and they're such gentlemen. They're so: interesting and it's really good and I mean sometimes sex isn't even involved but we'll go out for dinner when they're in town.... and um it's like you know having a friend. It's really good." (Joe 64/51)*

Clients who were constructed as being friends or lovers were more positively and affectionately described with terms such as "*real honeys*", "*absolutely lovely*", "*real sweetheart*", "*real gentlemen*" and as being "*special clients*." This is in stark contrast to the earlier denigrating and condescending descriptions of clients. However, these different descriptions of clients function in different contexts. In this context, clients were seen as being friends and lovers and some personal satisfaction is involved. In other contexts, clients were just seen as a source of revenue and were sometimes very unpleasant to deal with.

*"Some clients they're real honeys ... I've got a couple of regular clients that are absolutely lovely." (Sharon 52/5)*

*"He's a real sweetheart. A real gentlemen." (Joe 67/23)*

*"I think differently about all different clients. I mean I have clients I absolutely adore. I have special clients." (Lydia 26/32)*

In conclusion, clients are fundamentally constructed as being "everyday type of men" coming from all walks of life. This included quite respectable, high-standing men in our society. This discourse primarily functioned to counteract the negative portrayals of the sex industry as being a "sick", "seedy", "deviant" and "criminal subculture" and instead promoted a more positive portrayal of the sex industry as being a legitimate business. However, it also revealed societies hypocrisies and sexual double standards.

Clients were also constructed as being "wounded" ranging from every day human problems to the more pathological type of man. The pathological type was downplayed as only representing a small minority of clients. The majority of clients were men with every day sorts of problems. Therefore the wounded discourse is largely consistent with the everyday men discourse. Clients were also constructed as being "men" who have a naturally higher sexual drive than women. This construction

functioned to explain why men rather than women require the services of a sex worker. These constructions of clients influenced their descriptions of clients. Clients were disparagingly and patronisingly seen as being “weak”, “pathetic”, “disgusting”, “assholes”, “jerks” and “losers” and objectified as being a monetary commodity. This wounded discourse essentially acted as a discourse of power. Sex workers were constructed as being powerful and superior women in contrast to weak and inferior male clients. The wounded discourse also reinforced other discourses in this research such as “sex as work” and “sex work as valuable” in the sense of offering valuable sexual and therapeutic services to societies wounded men and also acting as a deterrent in reducing the number of affairs, divorces, rape, and child molestation in society. The wounded discourse also reinforced the “dissociation of the self” discourse. Clients were denigrated, patronised and objectified. This constructed the client as being insignificant to their lives. It functioned as a way of separating their private selves from their work selves and therefore functioned as a way of coping psychologically and emotionally with sex work. It also functioned as a form of self and group empowerment.

Some participants spoke of a variable discourse to the wounded discourse, constructing the clients as being “friends and lovers”. The client-sex worker relationship is described as being more personal and intimate, egalitarian and mutually satisfying. These clients were positively and affectionately described as being “real sweethearts” and “real honeys”. This is in stark contrast to the wounded discourse, which patronised and denigrated men. However, the context is different. The clients in the wounded discourse were only viewed as a source of revenue. The clients in the friends and lovers discourse were viewed as being a source of personal satisfaction.

The construction of clients as wounded and men as having a higher sexual drive has continuities with discourses in the past. For example, 19th century religious and scientific discourse constructed women as being asexual and men as having a high sexual drive that could be easily provoked by women. The burden of sexual responsibility was heavily placed on women. In particular, sex workers were seen as being a necessary evil functioning to control men’s uncontrollable lust and to protect the sanctity of the “respectable” women. Prostitutes were also seen as having a wider function of possibly deterring men from committing adultery and sexual crimes.

This was also the case in early legal discourses concerning rape cases. Men were often constructed as having a higher sexual drive than women that could be easily provoked by women. Again, the burden of sexual responsibility was placed on women. For instance, if an attractive, scantily clad woman, was walking down town at night, she was often seen as “looking for it”. Consequently, if she became the victim of a sexual assault she was often attributed a considerable amount of blame. Contemporary legal discourses on prostitution also place the burden of sexual responsibility on the women since only prostitutes can be prosecuted for soliciting and not clients.

The participants in this study also employ similar discourses, taking most of the burden of responsibility themselves. Constructing clients as being wounded types of men and constructing men as having a naturally higher sexual drive than women have the inadvertent consequence of reinforcing sexual double standards.

## **A Construction of Sex-as-Work.**

The construction of sex-as-work is a hidden discourse. That is, it is language of the sex industry that is rarely used in popular everyday communication. Participants claimed that the public lack of understanding of sex as “work” derives from the reliance on the “whore stigma” discourse (i.e., stereotypical constructions) to describe sex work and lacking information about what sex work is actually like. For instance, according to the whore stigma discourse, sex workers are stereotypically described as being nymphomaniacs, drug addicts, carriers of disease, victims of sexual abuse, and generally living sordid and debauched lifestyles. Consequently, constructing the sex industry as being a sexually deviant, pathologically sick and criminal subculture. Such popular whore stigma views are further ossified in the New Zealand laws which label doing sex work or more specifically soliciting as being a criminal offence. The popular “whore stigma” discourse and the New Zealand soliciting law pose major obstacles to sex work being considered valid and legitimate employment in New Zealand.

Therefore, the participants in this study have attempted to challenge these public misconceptions of sex work and have provided alternative constructions of sex work as being “real work”. This was achieved in several ways by: (a) focussing on the similarities between sex work and other types of employment, (b) focussing on the unique qualities of sex work, (c) discussing the financial justification for doing sex work, (d) differentiating “work” sex from domestic or social sex, and (e) constructing sex work as providing many other services other than just sexual services.

## **It's a Job Much Like Any Other Job.**

Participants reiterated and strongly emphasised the phrase “it is a job” which reinforced the “sex-as-work” discourse. The “sex as work” discourse was further reinforced by discussing how similar sex work was to other types of work. For instance, Nina generally describes sex work as being the same as any other job in the work place. Rosanne, more specifically, describes sex work as being equivalent to other professions such as being a secretary, an accountant or a lawyer in the sense that these are all viable choices of work. Her choice being sex work.

*"It would be good if they would perceive sex work as being a professional job, just like a job, just like any other job that someone maybe employed in."* (Nina 87/35)

*"I see it as a job. (.) I actually see it as (.) the same thing if I was a secretary. It's a job that I choose to do...I didn't choose to become (.) an accountant or a lawyer um (1.49) I chose to do this. It's my choice."* (Rosanne 6/34)

Several participants commonly drew on the example of factory work as being similar to sex work in the sense that factory work like sex work may not be work you enjoy doing but still people do them because they need the money. However, Rosanne saw sex work as being a choice whereas Nina and Tracy felt that they had no choice and instead viewed doing sex work as being like a "slave" to some employer and as just a way of making ends meet.

*"I don't see sex work as being any different to working in a factory or working as, as you know a slave to some employer or whatever."* (Tracy 43/33)

*"I've never really enjoyed doing sex work to be quite honest (1.43) but I do it. You know. It's sort of like you know a factory worker may not enjoy going to work but they do it. They have to go to work."* (Nina 88/16)

Another participant describes how the job of being a waitress is similar to sex work (but referring exclusively to massage parlour work) in regards to its "tipping" procedure. According to Joe, the tips that sex workers receive for any "extras" (i.e., sexual services) is similar in function to the tips that waitresses receive for any "extra services" provided (e.g., providing a quick and friendly service). In both cases, tipping is non-taxable sources of income that are relied on to make a living.

*"I'll give you another example of a business that operates the same as this and that is a restaurant. You go in. You pay for a meal. Blah, blah, blah. You tip the waitress. You go in for a service and you tip the lady, the waitress. These people come in the door. They pay at the door for a massage. They come in here. They want a bit more. They tip me. That's how I make my money."* (Joe 69/20)

Joe also describes how the sex work industry (again referring mainly to massage parlour work) functions just like any other business in terms of having a regular staff

including managers, accountants, receptionists, and cleaners and also in terms of generating a substantial profit not just in New Zealand but also world wide.

*"I mean it's an industry and business... It's:: like any other place... we're generating money... as any you know functioning business. An industry in New Zealand and world wide (.) and it's a very profitable business." (Joe 78/17)*

*"It's like any functioning business. I mean it's a registered business. (1.03) We have managers... receptionists, cleaners and accountants." (Joe 68/45)*

By focussing on the similarities between sex work and other types of jobs, such as factory work and waitress work, functioned to minimise the differences between sex work and other types of work, and therefore reinforced that sex work is valid employment.

### **It's a Different Type of Job from Regular 'Straight' Jobs.**

Some participants offered a slightly different version of the sex work as work discourse by constructing sex work as being "just a job" but a "different type of job" or not a "straight job." In this version, the participants focussed on the unique nature of sex work by describing sex work as being a job that was not easy to do. It was a job that required a certain nature (e.g., "really sharp", "really switched on", "in control of your emotions") and sufficient experience (e.g., "sexual personal experiences) to be able to handle doing this sort of work. Individuals without these qualities, as Sharon says, would probably be better off doing a "straight job".

*"It's just (1.03) another job. It's a different type of job... You only get the money as the clients come in... You gotta be really switched on. You gotta be really careful. You gotta be really sharp." (Helen 86/16)*

*"She's so young and sweet... She's better off with a straight job... Her minds too young for it... She hasn't had personal sexual experiences enough to deal with this industry...The ones who are you know thirty and over... I mean you've had your flings with men folk... Your just more in control of your emotions." (Sharon 61/36)*

By focussing on the unique nature of sex work this functioned in the opposite direction which was to maximise the differences between sex work and other jobs. This had the similar consequence of reinforcing sex work as valid employment but also as being work only suitable for certain people since it was not a job that everyone could handle doing.

### **The Financial Justification: A Way of Making Ends Meet and Getting Ahead in Life.**

All the participants dogmatically employed a financial rhetoric to justify their doing sex work. The “financial justification” challenges the nymphomaniac stereotype of sex workers. Instead, as Nina asserts, to her it was not a choice to do sex work based on some desire or sense of enjoyment rather it was a need based purely on money. Similarly, Joe speaks of doing sex work out of desperation for money. It was not something that she ever contemplated doing in her life.

*"Financial. Total financial. (.) We were in dire, dire shit." (Sharon 50/46)*

*"The financial sort of things that will push me back into it again. It's not no desire. I just don't choose to do it. Um it's usually out of a need... I've never really enjoyed doing sex work... but I do it." (Nina 88/16)*

*"Out of desperation I called... Um:: quick money and cash... It's not something I ever, ever thought of doing in my life." (Joe 63/21)*

There was one slight variation. Rosanne employed a “high sexual drive” and “sexual pleasure” rhetoric to justify her choice of doing sex work. She is the only participant who comes close to reinforcing the nymphomaniac stereotype. However, the financial rhetoric is employed as a secondary justification since she didn’t need money desperately because she already had a job. Instead money acted as a nice addition for doing what she loves doing and had been doing all along anyway which was frequent sex with different partners.

*"Basically I wanted to... It's a good way of getting sex and (1.3) getting an income with it. (1.7) Basically. (1.4) It wasn't a need. I didn't have to. I could have done other things. I had another job... No just that I love sex (1.0) and I like to have it as often as I can with as many different people as I can (audible intake of breath). (1.0) So it was a perfect way of getting an income and (1.10) having all the sex I wanted... Well you know if your going to do it anyway like (.) um I used to (.) you know um have frequent partners,*

*different partners a lot. (1.0) So for me it was a way of earning an income from something I love doing." (Rosanne 1/9)*

However, after Rosanne had been working in the sex work industry for four years sex work had become less of a "game" and had become more like just a "job." Clients were no longer viewed as objects of desire but instead were objectified as being a source of revenue and were treated accordingly in a business like manner. Therefore "fun" had become substituted by "money" as a primary justification for doing sex work.

*"How do you feel about sex work now after working for four years? I see it as a job. (.) Just purely that." (Rosanne 1/48)*

*"It's not so much of a game (.) the more that you've been working... you get down to the business (.) side of his visit... It's a case of well we don't really care about you. All I care about is your money." (Rosanne 2/17)*

The financial rhetoric employed by participants ranged from making ends meet to getting ahead in life. The majority of the participants adopted the rhetoric of "making ends meet" as justification for doing sex work. They constructed scenarios of quite desperate financial circumstances. For example, Tracy and Lydia are both single parents; Joe with an eight thousand dollar debt after a drink driving accident; Maria on ACC with neck and arm injuries; Nicole, only 18, struggling on a thirty dollar a week student allowance; Nina, only 16, living on the streets; Helen was broke and had lots of bills to pay; and Sharon was struggling to keep her farm. Sex work was described by these participants as being a quick solution to a problem and a relatively easy way of gaining lots of "*quick money*." Therefore, sex work was constructed as being just a "job for money" which was reinforced with phrases such as "*to make ends meet*", "*get by*", "*surviving*", and "*quick money and cash*."

*"I got children... this relationship broke up and I couldn't financially survive in this job I was in... I didn't want to change their style, standards of living... purely financial that was the only thing that motivated me to get into it... I was looking for a quick solution to a problem. I was thinking about getting money and surviving and that's about it." (Lydia 23/8)*

*"I had a car accident. I was caught drink driving (1.27) and:: wasn't covered by insurance and had like a lot of massive bills (1.39) and:: my other job nursing just wasn't (.) cutting it and:: out of desperation I called... Um::*

*quick money and cash... So yeah I came into it accidentally. It's not something I ever, ever thought of doing in my life.*" (Joe 63/21)

*"I just get by:: (1.29) That's how I live. (1.15) It brings in my money."* (Maria 16/29)

*"It's something that people do to make ends meet."* (Maria 17/10)

A few participants employed the rhetoric of “getting ahead in life” and “creating a lifestyle” as a justification for doing sex work. Doing sex work provided cash quickly and enabled them to “*create the lifestyle*” that they desired much more quickly than would be possible on a minimum wage. Therefore, again reinforcing that sex work was just a job for money but to enable them to create a more luxurious lifestyle rather than just survive.

*"What I'm doing is creating a lifestyle for me and I'm just wanting it to happen a lot quicker than having a twenty five year mortgage you know. I want the place paid for lock, stock and barrel and have my niche."* (Sharon 62/6)

*"I've met a girl (.) who is thirty about thirty three and she'd been doing it since she was seventeen. She had a mortgage free house. She had a car a beautiful car. She had so:: much... she had more (.) more than most people have (.) that work you know have worked their whole lives."* (Nicole 12/8)

*"Yeah I'm investing the money. I've got my own apartment. I've got a new car. I've got a beautiful wardrobe. (1.40) Um:: I used to take two overseas holidays a year. I still am now. (laughing) I never thought I'd do that again. I'm just yeah getting ahead quicker."* (Joe 66/25)

Participants also employed a materialistic ideology to justify their choice of doing sex work. According to participants, sex work had the potential to buy them more freedom and status. That is, earning lots of money could buy them luxurious possessions, allowed them to do more things and to go places. Furthermore, owning nice possessions like luxurious cars and homes and going on overseas holidays are regarded as highly valued status symbols in our society. Therefore sex work provided them with the tools to become someone in our society.

*"Unless you've got a nice car and a nice house your nobody in today's society."* (Tracy 46/7)

*"I've become more ambitious... It's true. Money. You can't do anything without money today. You're absolutely nobody. You basically just exist on a minimum wage." (Joe 64/5)*

*"You can't do anything without money. (1.24) You can't have anything unless you've got money. You can't go anywhere unless you got money." (Joe 66/25)*

Although the rhetoric of “making ends meet” was employed as an initial justification for doing sex work, it became increasingly replaced with the rhetoric of “getting ahead in life” and “creating a lifestyle” the longer that they remained working in the sex industry. Money was described as being like a “*drug*”, “*addictive*” and “*a trap*”. Participants spoke of becoming increasingly “*used*” to a higher standard of living and of being “*addicted*” to having lots of cash all the time and being able to buy things whenever they wanted. Some sex workers have acquired such incredibly high debts from excessive hire purchasing that even if they wanted to leave sex work they couldn’t because a “*straight job*” couldn’t pay for their higher expenses.

*"They've got all this money and they think oh yeah this is me... and then it starts depleting but then by that time they've gone and hire purchased this and hire purchased that... got themselves that deep in hock (1.26) that they can't get out and a straight job wouldn't pay for it." (Sharon 62/12)*

*"I know it's a trap. It's a trap. You get used to the money... You get used to buying things when you want to." (Helen 84/38)*

*"You can't do anything without money... Cash (1.39) I mean it's addictive." (Joe 66/25)*

*"It's almost like a drug... when your in... but when your on the outside like I took a couple of weeks off and it's like do I really want to come back to this sort of work." (Sharon 49/18)*

Other ideologies such as the “patriarchial society” and “family values” were incorporated into their justifications for doing sex work. For instance, some participants adopted a patriarchial society ideology claiming that women have less access to money and job opportunities and therefore that sex work is and always has been a viable source of employment to make ends meet and to get ahead in life.

*"I consider that prostitution's been there (.) for time and memorial for women (.) women are (.) have less access to money and that it's something that people do to make ends meet." (Maria 17/10)*

*"There isn't a lot for young girls to do (.) like and for women in general to do." (Nicole 12/4)*

Lydia and Tracy, both single parents, adopt a family values ideology by asserting that sex work is helping rescue many families from conditions of poverty and helping to improve their standards of living. This could not be achieved from being a beneficiary or working in a factory. Therefore sex work is constructed as being a viable source of employment for many women in our society.

*"I needed the money. (2.62) Tch I had a little child... I had absolutely no money... So yeah I saw it as an option and took it... You know being able to financially support my son and give him some of the better opportunities in life that he wouldn't have been able to have (.) had I been (.) just a BENEFICIARY or (.) worked in a factory or something." (Tracy 40/46)*

*"That's what they've seen as their only (.) way out ... and they've earnt really big money and probably been the saviour of those families." (Lydia 23/38)*

Lydia, again, adopts a family values ideology when she asserts that sex work is advantageous work for many women with children since the hours and locations are flexible and therefore can be easily fitted around family commitments. This reinforces sex work as being viable employment for many women.

*"I think the advantages are because it's flexible you can probably (1.08) especially if you got children (.) pick your (1.0) hours and days of work. Your not tied down... You suddenly decide you want two weeks off it's quite easy to do where in most jobs you can't do that... you can travel and work anywhere." (Lydia 25/17)*

In response to the question, "Do you consider sex work a viable career option?", most of the participants in this study objectively viewed sex work as being a viable career choice primarily because of the financial benefits it provided and also because of its flexible hours, being able to travel and work anywhere (which makes it fit in well with family commitments), comradeship, friendships, and the possibility of having a fun time with clients.

*"Oh yes definitely... you can make a very good earning off of it... and you do find some clients that you can have a real good time with." (Rosanne 3/13)*

*"... another advantage is the comradeship between the women." (Tracy 41/18)*

*"It's flexible you can probably (1.08) especially if you got children (.) pick your (1.10) hours and days of work... you suddenly decide you want two weeks off it's quite easy to do... you can travel and work anywhere." (Lydia 25/17)*

However, due to the many more disadvantages associated with doing sex work itself and from it being such a highly stigmatised profession many participants personally viewed sex work for themselves as being more of a short term option to make money rather than as a long term career choice. Only a few participants considered recommending sex work to other people but only as a last option for someone who was in deep financial strife since the money was very good. However, they additionally advised careful handling of their money and to set a time limit on their working.

*"I would never rule out sex work as an option to make money... I personally wouldn't want to make it my career... I'm:: not sure if I would recommend it... I'd probably advise them... to perhaps think about not getting into sex work first and have they sussed out better options... There's certainly more disadvantages and that's really only due to public response." (Nina 89/14)*

*'It's a good way of making money if you're really in the deep. (1.59) Um for a career (1.71) I wouldn't recommend it... It's not an easy job... you can have really nasty clients." (Helen 81/4)*

*"There are a new breed of prostitutes who consider it a career but I, I don't... It's something that you do to make ends meet." (Maria 17/10)*

*"Well unless they really didn't have to I'd tell them not to go into the industry and if they were going to go into it (1.93) to have (1.36) a time limit on it (2.25) and to most definitely save the money." (Lydia 25/4)*

All participants said that if they won lotto (although for some participants it would have to be a considerable amount) they would quit sex work. However, a couple of participants said that they would like to stay associated with the sex work industry

such as opening and running their own sex work business rather than doing sex work. In a nutshell, most of the participants considered sex work as just being a job for money rather than a career.

*"See that's the difference between you and I. What you're doing is a career. This is a job. Yeah. Um. I'm doing this for a reason as a job for money and of course if I won lotto of course I'd quit." (Joe 77/39)*

### **Sexual Services Constructed as 'Work Sex' Different from Social or Domestic Sex.**

The participants in this study constructed the sexual services offered by sex work as being “work sex” differentiating this from social or domestic sex. Unlike social or domestic sex which usually involves an exchange of mutual gratification and an expression of emotional tenderness and closeness between consenting adults, work sex is differentially constructed as being clinical, expert, emotionally detached and business-like. This is bound by a business agreement that being an exchange of “sex for money” and bound by a work routine and clearly defined rules. Any display of emotions (e.g., enjoying it and showing interest in the client.) was described as playacting and therefore just part of the job of making money.

Participants constructed themselves as being like “sexperts” in terms of being knowledgeable about sex, providing “*good sex*” for their male clients, and also educating their male clients about sex. This functions to construct sex work as being professional work involving expertise and therefore differentiating work sex from just ordinary social or domestic sex. This generally reinforces that sex work is work.

*"These guys come in and they want good sex... They want someone who knows about sex. Knows about orgasms and they want someone they're gonna get sexually satisfied off." (Lydia 38/35)*

*"I've taught them a few tricks... on how to charm a lady you know how to treat a lady. Not you know just grab their tits and grab their fanny and hope like hell that door does the trick and then you're away." Sharon 52/47)*

The participants constructed “work sex” as being simply a “business/cash transaction” involving an exchange of “sex for money” between consenting adults. The client needs sex and the sex worker needs money. The relationship has “*no strings attached*” and “*no emotions involved*” so once the sex for money exchange is

complete then the relationship is ended. Describing sex work as being just a “business/cash transaction” functioned to highlight the commercialisation of the contract and reinforced that sex work is “real” work.

*“No strings attached and no emotions involved... it’s a cash transaction... There’s not gonna be any emotional attachments. He’s gonna get rid of his sexual urge and the job’s done.” (Sharon 52/1)*

*“We’re purely there usually for the money... They want sex. (1.29) So they find it a lot easier to just walk in and pay for it and when they walk out that’s the end... It’s a bit like a business transaction for them. I mean they go out satisfied.” (Lydia 27/47)*

*“There’s a mutual understanding... basically your both fulfilling needs for each other. I need money. They need sex.” (Tracy 43/43)*

*“Your two consenting adults and you’ve got a business agreement.” (Tracy 44/48)*

Participants spoke of conducting their job in a very business like, systematic and almost robotic manner. For example, according to one participant doing sex work was described as being analogous to a “*little factory line*” with each client systematically receiving the same routine. Therefore “work sex” is devoid of the emotions, intimacy, fun and spontaneity characteristic of domestic or social sex and instead is quite repetitive, predictable, and controlled work oriented behaviour. This functions to refute the popular nymphomaniac stereotype (i.e., that sex workers “*party down hard*” with their clients) which tends to undermine sex work being seen as real work. Alternatively sex work is constructed as being systematically routine and business like in approach therefore reinforcing that sex work is work.

*“I’m sure a lot of them think that you know that we kiss them and ... go down on them and we allow them to do things to us... I have a routine literally. I massage their backs. Ask them if they’d like to hear my menu... Roll them over...I systematically do the job and every john is the same. I don’t (laughing) veer off too often aye. It’s, it’s like okay I’ve got to put the condom on, gonna do the job, should take da de da. Um. (.) Put him in the shower and it is like a little factory line. You know. (1.03) Um yeah and whereas in societies eyes they’ve got incredible built up conceptions that we party down hard with all the men folk that come through which is wrong.” (Sharon 60/21)*

Work sex is constructed as being a "business transaction" and like any other business has clearly defined rules and boundaries (or "standards") which both the sex worker and the client must abide by. That is, the client can't "*run rampant and do whatever he wants*" and similarly the sex worker is "*not to lay here and have fun*" but is "*always constantly working and checking.*" This includes checking for STD's, practising safe sex, telling clients what they can or can't do, and following rules such as not kissing clients. The construction of work sex enabled the sex worker to establish more power and control over the client during the provision of sexual services than would typically be the case in social or domestic sex. Therefore applying work rules and boundaries functioned to highlight the dissimilarity between work sex and social or domestic sex.

*"I mean this is a business transaction and I mean your gonna have to conduct yourself in that manner or otherwise goodbye... he's got to (.) adhere to our standards... he can't just run rampant and do whatever he wants."* (Lydia 37/26)

*"We're not here to lay here and have fun... Your always constantly working and checking."* (Joe 72/45)

*"You do tell them like they're not allowed to do this... We don't have to actually kiss our clients... well it's a lot more intimate."* (Lydia 26/14)

Doing sex work was constructed as being like "acting" or "role playing" and "not reality." It didn't involve their "private" selves nor did it involve "real" emotions. Participants spoke of "*completely cutting off*" (*i.e.*, dissociating) while doing the job. That is, switching off their "real" self and substituting this for the "work" self by adopting the personality of their constructed sex work character.

*"Like when I come in here it's pretty much like I mean like a roleplay... So [Sharon] is a different person to who she is at home... At the end of the day it's not reality."* (Sharon 50/4)

*"This is work... I completely cut off. I'm an actress in the room when I'm doing a job."* (Joe 76/38)

The acting angle of sex work had an exploitative function which participants referred to as "*playing the game*" or "*put it on*" to make the client think that they did "*really, really like them*" and to show them the "*best time*". This had the

manipulative purpose of attracting clients and their money but was devoid of any genuine emotions.

*"Your playing the game with them that (.) if they think that you really, really like them they'll come back again and see you again but (.) we don't. It's a case of well we don't really care about you. All I care about is your money (laughs) but you still (.) the art of it is still to try and give them the best time (.) that we can. We're actresses." (Rosanne 2/21)*

Furthermore, the client-sex worker relationship was depersonalised and the client was objectified as being a mere work tool (e.g., just "another job") or a commodity (e.g., just another "wallet").

*"You don't see them see them... We want to know what they've got in their wallets." (Sharon 63/15)*

*"I don't see them as anything... I just see them as another job." (Rosanne 4/24)*

This "play acting" and "depersonalisation/objectification" functioned to create a division between the private self and the work self, which provided a way of protecting themselves psychologically. It also functioned to reinforce that sex work was real work and not ordinary (i.e., social / domestic) sex.

There were some inconsistencies to the "sex as work" discourse. Participants spoke of occasionally having quite personal, intimate and "*close*" relations with clients such as feeling attracted to clients, and falling in love with certain clients that went beyond the work role of a sex worker. Therefore, these relationships were more similar to social or domestic sex rather than work sex. However, this inconsistency was explained as being a breach of professional relations. Therefore, it was the exception rather than the rule.

*"The things that probably stand out the most about working are probably the amount of nice men I've actually met... and the close associations with these men." (Lydia 24/11)*

*"You get a client that you end up kissing because you're actually quite attracted to him." (Lydia 26/25)*

*"I've found it hard to ... realise that he is just a client not a boyfriend... Just this guy I'd used to see all the time like I fell in love with him." (Nicole 11/18)*

*"This guy pressed my button the other day and it was like oh no no no. I had to click myself. I'm at work here. This is a job. No and I had to stop because he was yeah we clicked damn it and that's not meant to happen in this field of work. You're a professional." (Sharon 48/41)*

Another interesting variation occurred in the opposite direction. One participant constructed “work sex” as being fundamentally similar to social and domestic sex. According to Lydia and Maria, all women are basically prostitutes exchanging sex for something whether it was for money or something else. Lydia illustrates this with the case of the housewife who provides sexual services in exchange for her husband’s wage. The only difference she states between sex workers and other women is that sex workers are paid more for their services and thus are a lot better off financially. The explicit function of this alternative discourse is to minimise the differences between “work sex” and domestic and social sex. It implicitly functions to condescend the popularly used “sex as love” discourse and raise the status of “sex as work” discourse. It does this by drawing on a capitalistic ideology that endorses the idea that everything is a potential commodity today including sex. Therefore, lending more power and legitimacy to sex work as being valid work in our capitalistic society.

*"I'm no different than a housewife at home. I mean (.) every women wants (.) some sort of (1.29) financial thing at the end of the day and I mean people say this is wrong but I actually think this is true (.) and I've only just realised that This rlately ... I mean you marry a man and you stop working. I mean (1.41) he's paying you ultimately for sex really in itself anyway because I mean (.) everything your getting off him. You can basically say that I don't feel any different to the average (.) housewife. In fact I feel a lot better off than those females that go in pubs and go and have there one night stands cause at least I can say well god I'm getting paid a hundred bucks each time for one a day... I mean every females basically in the end getting paid for it." (Lydia 34/41)*

*"I think that most women um do prostitution in one form or another. You know and (3.35) being nice to somebody to get what you want it's just that we get what we want in, in more monetary form..." (Maria 17/42)*

## **Sex Work isn't just Sex: Sex Work also involves other Valuable Services.**

The participants in this study invested a considerable amount of talk discussing how sex work is more than just sex. The sexual services component of sex work was described as being only a small portion of sex work and sometimes sex wasn't a part of their work at all. Other services provided by sex workers included companionship, entertainment, education, and counselling which was accepted by the participants as being an integral part of their work. Constructing sex work as being more than just sex functioned to neutralise and de-emphasise the strong sexual connotations involved in sex work and to shift the focus toward the other valuable services provided by sex workers. This reinforces the sex work as being real work but furthermore as being socially beneficial and valuable work (see the "Sex Work as Valuable" section).

In conclusion, "sex as work" is a hidden discourse, which is partly due to the lack of knowledge of the real nature of sex work and the reliance on stereotypical constructions of sex work. Current discourses surrounding sex work are the product of an ongoing ideological struggle going back thousands of years. For instance, in our current patriarchial based society with it's strong Christian foundations, a dichotomy between "good sex" (i.e., sex as love) and "bad sex (i.e., sex for money) has been constructed. Sex work is still largely regarded as being socially reprehensible but more so for female sex workers than the male client. This is reflected in popular "whore stigma" views of sex workers residing in society (see 'Whore Stigma' section) and current New Zealand soliciting laws which convey a sexual double standard operating. Public attitudes have been a little more tolerant of women doing sex work as a means of survival (although this is seen as being less relevant today) but deplores it as a source of personal comfort and lifestyle creation. However, the majority of women in this study constructed scenarios of quite desperate financial situations (e.g., participants were single parents, a student, an ACC rape victim, living on the streets, etc.). Their choice of work is more suggestive of the material disadvantage that women still face and therefore is more a sad reflection on our society if anything. Commoditising sex contradicts Christian discourses and western ideals of sex as love but they are compatible with many other

views in our capitalistic, market values, materialistic, and work oriented culture. According to participants sex work is a business that is offering valuable sexual services (e.g., companionship, education, and counselling services), which are seen as equivalent to other services being provided in our marketplace, and is also providing a valuable source of income to many families in our society, as well as generating huge profits in New Zealand and world wide. The issue of decriminalisation of the sex work industry has a key position here in helping promote public recognition and acceptance of sex work as being real work.

## A Construction of Sex Work as Valuable.

“Sex work as valuable” was a discursive theme employed by the participants throughout the interviews to describe both themselves and their work. The language of this theme was characterised by generalising clients and men as being one homogenous group. The terms “client” and “men” were used interchangeably. That is, all men are seen as being potential clients. This theme was also used in conjunction with the “wounded” discourse constructing clients/men as being wounded and therefore in need of the services of a sex worker.

Sex work is constructed as providing valuable sexual services to societies wounded men. Many participants constructed sex work as providing a necessary and valuable role in society in terms of immediately relieving men’s sexual frustrations and having the wider result of acting as a powerful deterrent in reducing the number of affairs, divorces, STD’s, and sexual crimes.

*“I certainly see that there’s a need for sex workers in the community. (.) Definitely.... there’d probably be more affairs, more divorce rates, more rapes, more um (1.35) child molestations. All that sort of stuff because clients cover that broad range of (.) um:: of sexual deviance.” (Tracy 42/19)*

*“I think we stop um (1.36) a lot of people catching STD’s”. (Joe 67/33)*

Men are constructed as having a much higher sex drive than women that is constantly frustrated because of the social difficulties of finding a partner for sex or for a relationship. According to several participants, sexual frustration could lead a man to commit rape. Therefore, sex work was constructed as being valuable in the sense of deterring men from committing rape.

*“I think men would go insane... if we weren’t there. There would be like so:: (.) so:: much more rape I reckon...Like so many more people like that are frustrated about their sexuality.” (Nicole 13/13)*

*“If there’s no sex workers around... where are they gonna go for sex. Are they gonna rape somebody... There is a need for it (1.90) and guys get horny.” (Helen 82/52)*

*"Let's face it. There's always gonna be men out there... who um (...) in the small hours of the morning who've done the bars and:: couldn't pick anyone up and:: so they'll pay for some light relief at the end of the night... So:: I guess in a way it stops people from (...) going out and raping and pillaging."* (Maria 18/51)

However, there were some slight variations. For instance, not all participants endorsed the idea that men would rape if there were no sex workers. Instead, some participants constructed sex work as being valuable to society in terms of reducing the amount of sexual harassment by men rather than rape.

*"I s'pose yeah there is, there is some service that we do for the public...I'm not inclined to go as far as saying... if there were no parlours men would rape... But we as women would be probably just harassed that bit more than we are now."* (Sharon 53/25)

The majority of the participants also constructed sex work as being valuable to society in terms of keeping relationships and marriages together and controlling STD's.

*"I think I keep a lot of marriages together (1.49) I think I keep a lot of relationships together. I think we stop um (1.36) a lot of people catching STD's."* (Joe 67/33)

Visiting a sex worker was described as being a much "cleaner" and "healthier" option than having an affair or a one night stand because of the standardised practise of using safe sex procedures in the sex industry today, and also since the construction of sex work as being a "*business transaction*" gave the sex worker much more control over the situation than would typically occur in an affair or a one night stand. Therefore, sex work is constructed as valuable in the sense of controlling the spread of STD's.

*"If I had a husband I'd much prefer him to use a prostitute myself than go to a pub and pick up a girl that's half pissed probably not gonna use a condom... I just think (2.11) it's a lot (...) cleaner and (...) healthier... I mean we're not sitting at work pissed and we're worried about our health...we don't want any diseases... I mean for us it's a *business transaction*."* (Lydia 28/38)

Visiting a sex worker was also described as keeping relationships and marriages together. This was justified on the basis that visiting a sex worker was a much safer option than having a one night stand or an affair because there were "*no strings*

*"attached" and "no emotions involved". Sex for money was strictly a business/cash transaction. Therefore, according to participants, clients can leave a sex worker feeling sexually satisfied and without fear of comebacks threatening his relationship or marriage unlike an affair or a one night stand.*

*"It's much cleaner and:: no strings attached and no emotions involved... It's a cash transaction...I can't deny I would allow my husband (1.22) later on in life if he still had sexual urges and I couldn't satisfy it I would prefer him to come to a parlour quicker than pick up somebody from a bar (1.09) cause at least I know it's clean, it's a safer environment. There's not gonna be any emotional attachments. You know he's gonna get rid of his sexual urge and the jobs done and then he comes home." (Sharon 52/1)*

*"It sort of stops um you know we get a lot of married men who probably would have affairs if there wasn't the sex industry. You know so it saves a lot of pain and anguish for wi:ves and because (1.15) um affairs are emotionally tied whereas working isn't. (1.31) Yes I certainly think there are a lot of positives toward it." (Tracy 40/35)*

*"I think we actually probably do keep a lot of marriages together because (1.35) we're a lot better option (1.43) than like um (.) a man... having an affair with his secretary and suddenly she wants something else emotionally off him. We're purely there usually for the money." (Lydia 27/44)*

In addition, going to a sex worker was also spoken of as helping these men at home in terms of reducing sexual frustrations and other tensions before going home and consequently placing less sexual burdens on their partner. Sexual frustration is spoken of as having a "*big effect on your life.*" Therefore, sex work is constructed as being valuable to men and to the general community in the sense of siphoning off men's surplus sexual energy and consequently helping to maintain domestic harmony

*"They want the sex so they find it a lot easier to just walk in and pay for it and when they walk out that's the end... like a business transaction... they go out satisfied... it probably helps a lot of these men at home... I mean if your sexually frustrated (1.70) it does have a big effect on your life." (Lydia 27/44)*

Sex work is also alternatively constructed by some participants as actually being pro-family values rather than undermining them in the sense that the client is

described as making a more responsible choice by going to a sex worker rather than having an affair or a one night stand to relieve his sexual frustrations. Visiting a sex worker is described as being the much safer option (in terms of “stopping relationships from breaking up”) and a cleaner option (in terms of “controlling STD's”) and therefore this indicates a responsible attitude on behalf of the male clientele to protect their family and marriage.

*“It is doing a service... It is stopping relationships from breaking up. Um it is controlling STD's... men would rather come here than pick up a women in a bar today (1.73) because of all those risk factors... which shows that they do want to protect their family and marriage and that's a responsible attitude.” (Joe 78/38)*

Similarly, another participant also suggested that women shouldn't feel threatened by sex workers but should instead feel “*happy about it*” since it is relieving the wife of the burdens of her husband “*hounding her for sex*.” She proposes that women need to realise that men can have sex for the physical act itself without the emotional baggage and therefore without intending it to be destructive to their girlfriends or wives.

*“I think women are very threatened by it but I think they should be the opposite. (1.42) Um I mean you look at the geisha girls. They're there and accepted in that society and the wife's quite happy about it because she's quite often got little kids. She doesn't want a husband hounding her for sex. She doesn't feel like it. She's quite happy for him to visit (1.02) the geisha... because men (...) that sexual act is sex. They don't need that emotional baggage... sex is a lot more emotional for women... It's this love thing... I think we look at it differently and we find it hard to accept that men can just go and have (...) sex for the act itself without wanting it (...) to be destructive to their girlfriends or wives.” (Lydia 28/24)*

Sex work was constructed by participants as involving many other valuable services other than just sexual services such as companionship and entertainment. Providing the “*best service*” for money means “*entertaining*” their clients. This includes not just sex but also providing good conversation and fun. This is regarded as being an integral part of sex work to the extent that sex work businesses actually require that their workers “*are well informed*” on all the latest news by reading the newspaper every morning before work. This functions to construct sex work as being a valuable service providing companionship and entertainment not just sex.

*"He's paying for a service so he should get the best service that he can get.(.) Um you're there mainly to be entertainment... the sex is only part of it." (Rosanne 2/22)*

*"You're the seductress... an all around good entertainer... somebody that you can have a good conversation with... enjoy being with but that they can also have a good time in bed with too." (Rosanne 5/20)*

*"I mean when they come in here they want to be able to conversate with people... I mean we even have to read the paper every morning. (1.11) We're told we have to read it. We've got to pep up (1.22) with business, news, everything. If a client wants to start talking to us about things she expects us to be well informed about what's going on and to be able to conversate with our clients. I mean at the same time they're coming in for sex." (Lydia 33/35)*

Sometimes sex was not a part of sex work at all. Instead some clients just wanted companionship such as someone to cuddle and talk with. This functioned to construct sex work as providing valuable companionship services.

*"They come for (2.29) um (2.19) emotional reasons too because I mean we do have that percentage of clients that come in that don't have sex. They just want to come and pay you for the hour and have a cuddle." (Lydia 27/36)*

*"Some of them just want company. Just purely someone to talk to. Have a nice cuddle with." (Rosanne 4/41)*

Sex work was constructed as offering many other valuable services which was described as being equivalent to those offered by educators, psychologists, therapists, counsellors, and social workers. Participants constructed sex work as being a valuable educational experience for both the sex worker and the client. For instance, a few participants spoke of learning more about male (especially sexual) behaviour and about their own sexuality from doing sex work.

*"I have a better understanding of men folk so there's that sort of positive aspect and um as a woman you become less inhibited and that's not to say that your out there and strut your stuff and so forth but just being more educated about our sexuality." (Sharon 49/41)*

*"It's sort of offered me another inside into male behaviour you know especially where sex is concerned that's for sure." (Nina 90/48)*

As well as becoming more educated themselves while doing sex work, participants, in turn, spoke of educating their male clients. Male clients were

described as being “*sexually inadequate*” and “*boring and non-adventurous*” by participants, and therefore this implicitly functioned to construct men to be in need of sexual education.

*“I think (. ) a lot of the time these men think they are (1.91) pretty good sexually. Well I think the majority of men are (. ) probably sexually pretty inadequate really... God I feel sorry for their wives.” (Lydia 37/1)*

*“The clients (1.78) they are just so boring and non-adventurous. I mean there's no way their wives are gonna be stimulated (. ) at all.” (Sharon 53/27)*

In contrast, participants constructed themselves as being more powerful and knowledgeable about sex and therefore of offering a valuable and necessary service as sex educators (or ‘sexperts’) to societies men which they referred to as “*showing them the ropes*” or “*teaching them a few tricks in how to charm a lady*.” Implicitly this suggests potential benefits to the general public in terms of helping to create more satisfying sexual relations between couples.

*“I've taught a few the odd young ones that I do get I've taught them a few tricks (laughs) you know tricks as in how to charm a lady. You know how to treat a lady. Not you know just grab their tits and grab their fanny and hope like hell that does the trick and then you're away.” (Sharon 52/47)*

*“We're good for virgins... You just show them the ropes.” (Nicole 13/21)*

Sex work was also constructed as valuable in terms of providing beneficial therapeutic services equivalent to that of psychologists, counsellors, therapists, and social workers. To justify this therapeutic role the “wounded” men discourse was strongly employed by the participants. This therapeutic role included listening to men's problems, helping them release pent-up feelings, and giving advice in an environment of total confidentiality and neutrality.

*“I feel like we've gotta be psychologists ourselves in dealing with these guys because I mean they come in carrying a lot of sort of baggage, emotional baggage and they quite often offload it on you and you've got to be a good listener.” (Lydia 27/38)*

*“We're good therapy... because we talk a lot too... I've had guys end up in the room that have ended up in tears and it felt so good about getting it out... so yeah we're potential counsellors at the end of the day.” (Sharon 53/2)*

*"Here there's no commitment. Everything's confidential. They get whatever they want out of their system... They talk about their relationships... where they are going wrong. We give them advice... or be able to talk to someone completely neutral about it." (Joe 67/43)*

This therapeutic role is constructed as also being indirectly beneficial to the general public. For instance, one participant described sex work as playing a “*really healthy role*” in terms of helping men get their frustrations out and talk about things and therefore consequently reducing the number of affairs, divorces, STD’s, abuse, and rape in society.

*"So I think we play a really healthy role because that need is there and you can't tell me it's not because look at the number of affairs (.) that people have today. The number of STD's going around. Marriage break ups. Women that are um abused or raped. Um men not being able to get their frustrations out or be able to talk to someone completely neutral about it especially a woman...." (Joe 67/43)*

This sex work as valuable discourse operated as a repertoire of power. Participants described themselves as being *strong*” people because of having to take so much on board in their job equivalent to the job role of a “*social worker*”. Therefore promoting discourses of sex workers as being powerful and superior women in contrast to a weak and inferior wounded male client.

*"The other side will be looking at being a social worker... you take a hell of a lot on board... we're very strong in this industry." (Sharon 62/42)*

In conclusion, “sex work as valuable” was a discursive theme employed by all the participants which essentially operated as a repertoire of power and functioned to validate their choice of occupation and to designate value to the contribution they perceived themselves making to society. In particular, participants constructed sex work as providing companionship, entertainment, education and therapeutic services as well as sexual services. Sex workers were constructed as being powerful women offering valuable services to societies wounded men.

“Sex work as valuable” (like “sex as work”) is a hidden discourse which is partly due to the lack of knowledge concerning the real nature of sex work and the reliance on stereotypical constructions of sex work. Discourses surrounding sex work are the

dynamic product of thousands of years of ideological struggle and continue to be so. Considering sex work is one of the oldest professions in the world it would be relevant to examine past discourses of sex work, how they have evolved over time, and how they relate to the present in order to gain a more complete picture of the sex work industry today. For instance, during a prehistoric period (about 25000 BC) one of the first cultures ever recorded in history was a matriarchal based society although this is rarely mentioned in most history books. Dominant discourses surrounding sex work during that period of history are similar to the minority discourse voiced by sex workers today. For example, women's sexuality was constructed as being much highly valued. Sexuality and spirituality were strongly seen as being connected. Sex workers were constructed as being powerful, knowledgeable, sexual/spiritual healers of men, as having a civilising influence on men which involved a combination of mother-love, tenderness, comfort, mystical enlightenment and sex, of being in control of their sexuality and uninhibited in sexual expression. (Roberts, 1992) This is similar with the "sex work as valuable" discourse used by the participants in this study which construct sex workers as being educators and healers and generally as women in power offering valuable services to societies men.

Some history books mention a patriarchal revolution (which they said also coincided with the introduction of Christianity) which bought about a radical transformation of discourses surrounding sex work (Roberts, 1992; Davis, 1971). Since then discourses surrounding sex work have been strongly influenced by patriarchal and Christian doctrines. For instance, more recently in early Victorian New Zealand society, sex workers were seen as being a necessary evil. They were viewed as the "other women" created by society to take on the burdens of men's animalistic lust and protect the sanctity of the majority of women. "Sex as work" (i.e., sex for money) was constructed as being socially reprehensible and prostitutes constructed as being of immoral character. Prostitutes were described as being like "the temptress" seducing men, breaking up marriages, and leading young girls astray (Walkowitz, 1980). This is in direct contrast to the "sex work as valuable" discourse in this study which constructs sex work as being valuable educators and healers to societies wounded men, and of actually keeping marriages together.

Throughout most of history women who have asserted their sexuality were seen as a threat and have been demonised or belittled. The character "Eve" is one such

example (Husain, 1998). Women's sexuality has been devalued and degraded. This has been the focal point of oppression over all women not just sex workers. In comparison, men's sexuality has not been subject to this devaluation and degradation. Even more relevantly male clients of sex workers have not been held responsible for their actions nor subjected to the same negative treatment as sex workers have been. This reflects a "sexual double standard" and reveals the gender inequalities that still exist in our society today. Discussing how discourses surrounding sexuality in general and sex work have shifted in meaning over time and relating this to current discourses on sex work such as "sex work as valuable" has the main implication of suggesting a potential for change in the pool of cultural ideas. Constructing sex work as valuable has the hidden potential benefits of not just empowering sex workers but also women in general.

## DISCUSSION.

A review of previous research on sex work indicates that there is a paucity of research on the sex work industry. Within social psychology itself traditionally research has focussed on assessing public attitudes towards marginalised social groups in society. This original research project instead focussed specifically on the experience of the “self” as a sex worker. It provides a “voice” to this marginalised social group by providing them with the opportunity to describe their own experiences in their own words. This research, however, does not claim to be the definitive “truth” on sex work nor offers a definitive resolution of the social, legal, and moral questions concerning sex work. This thesis does present a version of reality that is constructed by sex workers themselves. But it does not claim to be representative of all sex workers views.

Five main discursive themes were investigated in this study. These presented powerful and positive ways of talking about the experience of being a sex worker. They reflect the participant’s recognition of the prejudicial, oppressive, and stigmatised ways in which sex workers have been constructed in public discourse (which I have labelled the “whore stigma” discourse). For instance, in the “whore stigma” section, participants alternatively constructed sex workers as being a diverse group of everyday women trying to earn a living like everyone else to counteract the negative stereotypes provided in the “whore stigma” discourse. In the “sex work as work” section, sex work was alternatively constructed as being “work” primarily justifiable for financial reasons. In the “sex work as valuable” section, sex work is constructed as offering valuable and beneficial services to society equivalent to that of “sexperts”, safe sex educators, social workers, and counsellors. Sex work was also constructed as acting as a safety valve functioning to keep marriages together and deterring men from committing sexual crimes.

The “dissociation of the self” section requires special attention since it deals with the difficulties of doing sex work and the long term psychological, emotional, and social costs involved. Further research is required in this area to investigate the effects of dissociation of the self as a coping strategy within sex work and perhaps other types of work.

This research has provided valuable information on sex work(ers) that will add to, reinforce, undermine, and transform current knowledge about sex work and the women and men who engage in it. However, discourses surrounding sex work have altered throughout history and will continue to change. Therefore ongoing research will be necessary to investigate the discursive dynamics surrounding sex work. The need for replication of research in different contexts, and time locations are necessary. To exemplify, comparisons of this research with a similar research project conducted by Guarana (1995) on Adelaide sex workers found many similarities and variabilities that need to be explored. For example, Guarana (1995) singularly constructed clients as being wounded. In contrast, this research project found a more inconsistent picture in which clients were variously constructed as being “everyday men”, “wounded”, as having a ‘higher sexual drive’, and as “friends and lovers”.

This thesis has benefits that go way beyond research on the sex industry. The discourse of sex workers presented in this thesis exemplifies the power of constitutive language used in contradicting negative stereotypes and morally loaded stories in social interaction. It furthermore demonstrates the ways in which societies so-called “victims” can empower themselves through their talk and construct their own versions of reality which oppose public discourses. These findings have relevance for other social psychology research involving participants from other marginalised social groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, migrants, gays and lesbians, and single parents) who are subject to social prejudice and stigma. Further discourse analysis research may explore themes of validating lifestyle choices in many other marginalised social groups such as single parents, gays and lesbians, and migrant communities.

Certain methodological issues requiring consideration in further discourse analytic research on this topic. Much research evidence indicates that adopting a feminist interviewing style (as advocated by Oakley (1981)) and repetitive interviewing would produce more beneficial results. Power differentials between interviewer and interviewee also require addressing. Some research indicates recommends that it is preferential that the interviewer and interviewee occupy the same gender and social class. In this research repetitive interviewing was not conducted due to time and monetary constraints.

I conclude that this research has demonstrated the significance of interviewing sex workers about the nature of their work. This research presents original content that

will aid the accumulation and advance of social psychological knowledge concerning sex work in our society. This research also has much relevance to understanding other marginalised social groups in our society such as single parents, gays and lesbians, and migrant communities who are subject to social stigma and prejudice.

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# **APPENDICES.**

## **Appendix A: Research Questions.**

- (1) So how did you come to work as a sex worker?
- (2) What were your pre-working expectations of this type of work?
- (3) So how do you feel about sex work and yourself now?
- (4) Are there any particular experiences of sex work that stick in your mind?
- (5) Do you consider sex work a viable career option?
- (6) What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in the sex industry?
- (7) If you had a friend considering becoming a sex worker what advice would you give them?
- (8) What do you think about your clients? What types of clients do you get? What do you think are their reasons for coming to a sex worker?
- (9) How do you deal with difficult clients or clients you do not like?
- (10) What sort of role/function do you think that you fulfill for clients and for the general community?
- (11) Do your family and friends know about your choice of work, and how have they reacted to you working in the sex industry?
- (12) What do you think people in the general community think about the sex industry?
- (13) What do you think people in the police department think about people working in the sex industry? What are your experiences and feelings concerning police response to problems occurring in the sex industry such as violent customers or rape claims?
- (14) Some say that a sex worker can't be a feminist as well. What are your views on this?
- (15) How do you protect yourself against Aids and violent customers?
- (16) What about the issue of decriminalisation or legalisation of the sex industry. What are your thoughts and feelings about the NZ law concerning sex work?
- (17) I'm interested in hearing of your ideas and feelings on terms used to describe this type of work (such as "prostitute", "whore", "hooker", "working girl", and "sex worker"). Which term(s) do you prefer to be called?

- (18) Why do you think that there are more female sex workers than male sex workers in the sex industry? Do you think that male sex workers have similar experiences?
- (19) If you won lotto tonight would you quit your job?
- (20) Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- (21) Are there any questions that you would like to ask?

## **Appendix B: Advertised Letter.**

### **VOLUNTEERS REQUESTED FOR RESEARCH ON THE NEW ZEALAND SEX INDUSTRY.**

My name is Jill Whibley and I am currently a postgraduate student doing my masterate thesis in the psychology department at Massey University. My research project involves interviewing sex workers, in order to gain their accounts of working in the sex-work industry. Any forms of sex work (e.g., employment at parlours, escort agencies, streetwork or self-employment) can be included in this study. Any interested persons, who are aged 18 or over, and currently or recently employed in one of these areas are welcome to participate.

There is much published literature on the sex-work industry but very little of this literature includes the views of sex workers themselves. This is the primary interest of my study, to learn about the diversity of experiences of sex workers from sex workers themselves, which will have the beneficial function of challenging stereotypes that currently exist about sex work and sex workers.

The project will involve an audio taped interview with you for about one hour, which will take place at the university or another convenient location. This interview is not intended to be a form of treatment or counselling. It is solely for research purposes. I also stress that your confidentiality is of primary importance in this study, and you can be assured that measures will be taken to safeguard this. No one will have access to your tape-recorded interviews except myself and my supervisor, and all identifying or incriminating information will be masked on the tapes, and in the writing up of the research. You can remain completely anonymous throughout the entire study. Once the study is complete, you may have the option of having the tapes destroyed or mailed to you to keep. You will also be posted a summary of the findings.

If you are willing to participate or would like more information about this research, then please feel free to phone at the times listed below. Thank you for taking the time to read this advertisement.

Phone: Researcher (Jill Whibley) on STD (06) 3587870 .

Times: Anytime, but the best times to contact me include 8am -5pm.

## **Appendix C: Information Sheet.**

MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
INFORMATION SHEET.

Project Title: A Discourse Analytic Study of Sex Work in New Zealand.

Hello my name is Jill Whibley and I am currently a postgraduate student doing her masterate thesis in the psychology department of Massey University.

Aims of this study:

Please read this information sheet very carefully so that you have a clear understanding of the details of this study. Feel free to ask any questions that you have about this study. The primary interest of my study is to learn about the diversity of experiences of sex workers from sex workers themselves, which will have the beneficial function of challenging stereotypes that currently exist about sex work and sex workers.

Confidentiality:

Safeguarding your identity is of great importance to this study. You can be assured that we will take measures to protect your identity. This will include masking any identifying or incriminating details on the audio tape, using pseudonyms (false names) instead of your real name, and altering or deleting any other identifying details (such as place names, name of workplace and other persons names etc.) in the writing up of the research. Further, the only people who will have access to the audio tapes on which the interviews are recorded will be the research student and her supervisor. Once the study is complete, you can choose to retain the tapes or have the tapes destroyed.

What happens during the interview:

The interview will last about an hour, and will consist of a variety of questions about the sex industry. Some of the questions discussed in the interview may be of a personal nature, but I am not concerned with any specific details of your work place activities. You have the right to refuse any questions and ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any point and you are entirely free to withdraw from the study at any time. At the end of the interview, I will provide you with the opportunity to ask any questions, so that you can clarify any issues, and delete or add onto any points made during the interview.

What will happen to the data:

The audio taped interviews will be transcribed into written transcripts. You will be sent a copy of the written transcript so that you have the opportunity to add onto any points and make any alterations or deletions. The edited interview transcripts will then be read several times and analysed, to explore the various ways that sex work is constructed and the functions and consequences that these have. All data in this project will be used for the purposes of research only, and publications arising from this research. Once the study is complete, I will post you a summary of the findings from the study and the interview tapes if you decide you want to keep them, rather than have them destroyed.

Who are the researcher and supervisor in the study:

The study is being conducted by Jill Whibley (a postgraduate student) and Mr. Keith Tuffin (a senior lecturer of Social Psychology) at Massey University. They can be contacted at the following phone numbers:

Phone: Researcher (Jill Whibley) on STD (06) 3587870.

Times: Anytime, but best times to contact me include 8am -5pm.

Phone: Research Supervisor (Keith Tuffin) on STD (06) 3504140.

But please only use this phone number as a very last resort since Keith Tuffin is often busy lecturing, conducting his own research, and supervising many other students..

## **Appendix D: Consent Form.**

MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
CONSENT FORM.

Project Title: A Discourse Analytic Study of Sex Work in New Zealand.

Name of Researcher: Jill Whibley.

Name of Research Supervisor : Keith Tuffin.

- (1) I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- (2) I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.
- (3) I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that any identifying and incriminating information will be masked on the audio tapes, and that pseudonyms (false names) will be used instead of real names. Also that any other identifying details will be altered or deleted in the writing up of the research; and that the information will only be used for this research and publications arising from this research project.
- (4) I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.
- (5) I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- (6) I understand that I have the option of retaining the audio tape or having the audio tape destroyed at the end of the study.
- (7) I understand that the procedure may involve discussion of material of a personal nature.
- (8) I understand that the project is for the purposes of research and not treatment or counselling.

(9) I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

## Appendix E: Transcription Notation.

(1) Left hand double brackets indicate simultaneous utterances.

Tom: I used to smoke a lot when I was young.

[[  
Bob: I used to smoke Benson and Hedges.

(2) Extended square brackets mark overlap between utterances.

Marianne: Right so you...

[  
Belinda: I'm not so sure.

(3) An equal sign at end of speakers utterances and at start of next utterance indicates the absence of a discernible gap.

Sue: Anyway Brian =

Brian: = Okay, okay.

(4) One or more colons indicates an extension of the preceding sound. The more colons the longer the sound.

Ron: What happened to you?

Mae: I ju::sst can't come.

Tim: I'm so sorry rea::::lly I am.

(5) Underlining indicates that words are uttered with added emphasis.

Ann: It happens to be mine.

(6) Words in capitals are uttered louder than the surrounding talk.

May: It's not right, not right AT ALL.

- (7) Numbers in brackets indicate pauses timed to the nearest tenth of a second. A full stop brackets indicates a pause which is noticeable but too short to measure.

Henry: I went (3.6) a lot further (.) than I intended.

- (8) A full stop before a word or a sound indicates an audible intake of breath.

Sally: I think .hh I need more.

- (9) Round brackets indicate that material in brackets is either inaudible or there is doubt about its accuracy.

Benny: I (couldn't tell you) that.

- (10) Square brackets indicates that some transcription has been deliberately omitted such as identifying information (such as names of people and places) and information the participant wanted removed. Material inserted in square brackets is classificatory information.

John: Brian [the speakers brother] said [ ] it's okay.

## **Appendix F: A Summary of Results.**

MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
A SUMMARY OF RESULTS.

Project Title: 'This Is Work Not Your Private Life': A Discourse Analytic Study Of Sex Work In New Zealand.

Name of Researcher: Jill Whibley.

This letter is to inform you that the thesis project that you participated in a few years ago has finally been completed and here is a summary of the results of that study.

My initial background research on the topic of sex work found that there was a paucity of research (especially in the field of psychology) focussing on the sex work industry despite its long history. Most of the research that was conducted seemed to reinforce negative cultural stereotypes. Very little has been said about the actual nature of sex work. Therefore this research can help fill this gap in our understanding of the sex work industry.

Five main discursive themes were investigated in this study. These presented powerful and positive ways of talking about the experience of being a sex worker. They reflect the participant's recognition of the prejudicial, oppressive, and stigmatized ways in which sex workers have been constructed in public discourse. The five discursive themes explored include:

- (1) Dissociation of the Self: This discursive theme focussed on how the 'private' self and the 'work' self were kept separate and functioned as a way of coping with sex work. It was not always successful though. Many participants spoke of long term psychological, emotional and social costs involved in doing sex work, and the possible need for counseling afterwards.

(2) A Construction of the ‘Whore Stigma’: This discursive theme focussed on the way that sex workers had been negatively stereotyped in public discourse (such as being nymphomaniacs, drug addicts, disease carriers, and sexual abuse victims) and the stigmatic effects that this had on their lives. The participants strongly resisted these negative stereotypes and replaced them with alternative, realistic and positive constructions of sex work. In general, sex workers were alternatively described as being a diverse group of women trying to earn a living like everyone else..

(3) A Construction of Clients as being Everyday Men: Clients were also constructed as being ‘wounded’ ranging from everyday men ‘wounded’ by life’s problems to the ‘pathologically wounded’ types of men (that is, ‘sick’, ‘perverted’, ‘sexually deviant’ types of men. ) Men were constructed as having a naturally higher sexual drive than women. This functioned as a justification as to why more men than women go to sex workers. Clients were also sometimes constructed as being friends and lovers although it was stated that this was not meant to happen.

(4) A Construction of Sex-as-work: Participants described sex work as being similar to other types of work. Their choice of work was justified mainly for financial reasons. All of the participants viewed sex work as being just a job for money rather than a career. In response to the lotto question, all of the participants said that they would leave sex work if they won lotto. Although, a couple of participants said that they would perhaps run their own sex work business. When describing sex work, the participants strongly differentiated between ‘work’ sex and social or domestic sex in terms of ‘work’ sex as being like playacting, being businesslike, routine and involving specific work rules and boundaries.

(5) A Construction of Sex Work as being Valuable: Participants spoke of sex work as providing services equivalent to that of social workers, therapists, counsellors, safe sex educators and ‘sexperts’. Furthermore, participants

spoke of sex work as being valuable in the sense of helping keep relationships and marriages together, preventing the spread of STD's, and deterring sexual crimes.

As well as being informative about the actual nature of sex work, this thesis has benefits that go way beyond the sex work industry. The discourse of sex workers presented in this thesis exemplifies the power of constitutive language used in contradicting negative stereotypes and morally loaded stories in social interaction. It further demonstrates the ways in which societies so-called 'victims' can empower themselves through their talk and construct their own versions of reality which oppose public discourses. These findings also have relevance for other marginalised social groups such as ethnic minorities, migrants, gays and lesbians, and single parents who are subject to social prejudice and stigma.

Those participants who are interested in reading this thesis can access a copy at the Wellington New Zealand Prostitutes Collective and at the Massey University Library. Anyone who would like to speak to me about this thesis can contact me at the phone number listed below:

Jill Whibley: (06) 3562067.