

Women's experiences of harm in prostitution: a feminist inquiry

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Abstract

Street-based prostituted women can be found on the major roads of every city in South Africa. The issue of prostitution raises complex questions around its nature and implications for prostituted women, an issue on which feminists are vehemently divided. This research was conducted from a radical feminist perspective, which views prostitution as the epitome of the oppression and exploitation suffered by women under patriarchy. This qualitative study explored women's subjective experiences in prostitution, the meaning they made of their work and the effects that the client-prostitute relationship had on their personal relationships and identity construction. Unstructured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 15 black South African women working as street-based prostitutes. A thematic analysis approach instructed the data analysis process. The findings of the study reflect a client-prostitute relationship, based on unequal power relations and male dominance, which serves to subjugate, disempower and exploit prostituted women. Not only did clients exercise physical power over prostituted women, through physical, verbal and sexual abuse, but also abused their positions of financial power. Participants' experiences of domination and objectification within the client-prostitute relationship pervaded and distorted their patterns of relating within their intimate relationships with men. The study found that the women's experiences in prostitution devastated their internal worlds, negatively affecting their identity construction and sense of self and negatively impacting on their mental and psychological wellbeing. The findings of the study suggest that, in the context of South Africa, poor black women's experiences of harm in prostitution cannot be understood in isolation from other interlocking systems of oppression, such as their race, class and gender, which interact to mutually maintain their disempowerment. Findings suggest that, rather than the legalization of prostitution, policies which aim to address racial, economic and gender inequalities as interlocking system of oppression should be advocated for in South Africa.

Key Words: Prostitution; gender violence; feminism; identity; client-prostitute relationship; patriarchy; intersectionality theory

Introduction

Street-based prostituted women can be found on the major roads of every city in South Africa (Gardner, 2009). This study, exploring the experiences of prostituted women in South Africa, takes place against the backdrop of a violent society. South Africa has the highest rate of violence against women in the world; both sexual and physical violence against women is a commonplace occurrence (George & Finberg, 2001; Wechsberg, Luseno, & Lam, 2005). According to South African Police statistics, 197 877 violent crimes were committed against women in South Africa for the year 2009/10 alone (South African Police Services, 2010). In reality, the actual incidence is expected to be much higher, as a large proportion of violence against women goes unreported. Despite the fact that both the buying and selling of sex is illegal in South Africa, the demand for the services of prostituted women has continued to grow over the past decade (Gardner, 2009). The issue of prostitution raises complex moral and social questions around its nature and its implications for prostituted women (Gardner, 2009). Although we may see prostituted women on the streets of South Africa on a daily basis, what we do not see is the negative physical and emotional effect that their work has on them. The study aims to gain insights into women's subjective experiences of prostitution and its impact on their lives. It is hoped that this study will not only serve to gain deeper theoretical insights, but may serve a conscientization purpose, creating awareness around harms related to prostitution in South Africa. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings may inform policy making in South Africa, where the question of legalization/decriminalization of prostitution has long been disputed (Gardner, 2009; Halland, 2010).

Framing and Defining Prostitution

Prostitution is a social issue which has been the focus of much feminist research and writing. However, prostitution is an issue around which feminists are vehemently divided (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). There exists great theoretical debate in feminist literature around the definition and nature of prostitution (Monto, 2004). The market-orientated approach to prostitution taken on by liberal feminists defines it as "sex-work", a vocational choice like any other. It sees sex as a neutral object of exchange, and the act of sex-work as a neutral transaction between two consenting and neutral partners - the buyer and the seller (Niemi, 2010, 2010; B. Sullivan, 1995). From a choice perspective, when a woman chooses

prostitution as a career, it is seen to be sexually liberating, and as emancipation from previous discrimination against women (Halland, 2010).

In stark contrast to literature based on the views of the liberal feminist ‘sex as work’ paradigm is a body of literature (Busch, Fong, & Willianson, 2004; Farley, 2006; Farley, Baral, Kiremire, & Sezgin, 1998; Farley, Lynne, & Cotton, 2005; Jeffreys, 2009) which proposes that prostitution is, in essence, always exploitative and harmful to the women. Prostitution is equated to other forms of violence against women such as domestic violence or sexual abuse. It is seen as nothing more than a manifestation of the male dominance and male “sex right” over women’s bodies present in our patriarchal society (Farley, 2004, 2005; Jeffreys, 2009; Miriam, 2005; Scoular, 2007; Shrage, 1989).

Proponents of this view see prostitution from a constraint perspective, suggesting that it not only results from, but also reproduces, the gender, race and class inequalities women face (Dalla, 2000; Jeffreys, 2009; MacKinnon, 2011; Miller, 2002; Outshoorn, 2005) . In support of the constraint perspective, studies have found history of childhood sexual abuse (Dalla, 2000, 2002; Farley et al., 1998, 2005; Halland, 2010; Silbert, 1981; Tutty & Nixon, 2002; Weber, Boivin, Blais, Haley, & Roy, 2004; Wechsberg et al., 2005); financial desperation (Bucardo, 2004; Dalla, 2000, 2002; Halland, 2010; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001) and/or supporting drug addiction (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Weber et al., 2004) to be the main antecedents associated with entry into prostitution. Throughout the literature reviewed, the antecedents which constantly reoccur as most significant are those linked with constraint, not choice (Halland, 2010; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001). Farley et al. (2008, p. 420) pose the question “If prostitution is a free choice why are the women with the fewest choices found doing it?”

Parallel to this debate around the nature of prostitution, exists a body of literature (Ekberg, 2004; Farley, 2004; Farley et al., 1998; Gardner, 2009; Jeffreys, 2009; Shrage, 1989; M. L. Sullivan & Jeffreys, 2002) around the debate of whether legalizing prostitution will serve to protect or further exploit prostituted women (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Proponents of the legalization of prostitution, propose that the legalization of prostitution will recognize and protect the rights of prostituted women and allow for more controlled and safer working conditions (Gardner, 2009; Weitzer, 2005a, 2005b). Those opposed to legalization of prostitution see it as a *public* proclamation of men’s sex right and their right to ownership of women’s bodies (Scoular, 2007; Shrage, 1989).

Both the liberal feminist sex-as work approach and the radical feminist exploitation approaches have been challenged by third wave feminism for their essentialist view of prostituted women's experiences. Third wave feminist theorizing suggests that there can be no absolute truth about the nature of prostitution, but that it should rather be seen as a unique and dynamic intersection between choice and constraint (Halland, 2010). Third wave feminists contest the notion that there is a shared experience amongst all prostituted women, suggesting that this ignores the context of prostitution (De La Rey, 1997). Rather, drawing on intersectionality theory, they suggest that women's experiences in prostitution cannot be viewed in isolation from other aspects of their social identities. Intersectionality theory suggests that women's gendered experiences are influenced by interlocking systems of oppression such as race, class, sexuality and socio-economic status, which work mutually, to reinforce and maintain women's overall oppression (Collins, 1990; De La Rey, 1997; Kempadoo, 2001; Magnet, 2007).

Experiences of Violence in Prostitution

Research exploring women's subjective experiences of prostitution, although still limited, has increased over the past decade (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). What is perhaps most alarming about the collective findings of this body of research is the unfailing reoccurrence of the theme of physical violence. Many of the studies reviewed found that, for their participants, physical, verbal and sexual abuse had become normalized and were perceived as an intrinsic part of prostitution (Dalla, 2002; Farley et al., 2005; Miller, 2002; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). The vast majority of participants in these studies reported being raped and reported physical injuries such as stab wounds, concussions, beatings, broken bones and black eyes. Many had injuries through violent assaults with crowbars, baseball bats or being slammed against walls or dashboards.

Research shows that clients are the main perpetrators of violence against prostitutes (Farley et al., 2005; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). However, police have also been shown to be prominent perpetrators of violence against prostitutes (Halland, 2010; Miller, 2002, 2002; Okal et al., 2011; Tutty & Nixon, 2002; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001). Wojcicki and Malala (2001) found that all of the women in their sample had been verbally abused, harassed and bribed by policemen in South Africa. Many had been beaten and sexually assaulted. Prostitutes have also been found to suffer abuse at the hands of their pimps and intimate partners (Dalla, 2002; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Stadler & Delany, 2006).

Through the review of these studies it can be seen that prostituted women endure significant physical violence at the hands of the men that they encounter. This leads to the question of what the emotional impact of prostitution may be.

Experiences of Emotional Harm in Prostitution

Very little research has been conducted on the emotional effects that prostitution has on women (Sanders, 2004). Although, there has been an attempt to explore the link between prostitution and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Farley, 2006; Farley et al., 1998, 2005). Farley et al. (2005) found that 72% ($n = 100$) of their respondents met the criteria for PTSD diagnosis. A similarly high prevalence was found by Farley et al. (2008). However, because of the high incidence of child sexual abuse among participants of these studies, inferences around the cause of high levels of PTSD could not be made. Regardless of its origin, it appears that PTSD may be an intrinsic part of the lives of prostituted women (Herman, 2001).

Saunders (2004), in her ethnographic study of British indoor prostitutes, and Halland (2010), in her study of prostituted women in Cape Town, explored the emotional processes associated with prostitution. Participants reported that the commoditization and objectification of their bodies generated negative emotions, was internalized, and affected their personal and social identities. Participants in both studies reported that their experiences in prostitution were detrimental to their private relationships and sex lives, many abstaining from intimate and sexual relationships outside of prostitution. Prostituted women reported experiencing a sense of depression, anxiety, shame and guilt as a result of the work that they do. In order to cope with these feelings of moral tension as well as the emotions involved in the actual act of sex, participants disassociated themselves, either through substance use or imagination.

The prostituted women in studies by Halland (2010), Ribeiro & Sacramento (2005), and Sanders (2004) reported a pervasive fear of being “found out” by family and friends. They reported that their constant efforts to hide their prostitution permeated their lives 24 hours a day. Saunders (2004) and Riberio and Sacramento (2005) found that participants perceived the emotional and social risks associated with prostitution to be, in some ways, greater than the physical risks. They suggested that being “found out” as well as the effects of the stigma, marginalization and sense of social isolation they endured in their personal lives and communities damaged their self esteem and hindered their ability to construct a positive self-image.

Almost no literature was found on the more complex emotional dynamic of the prostitute/client relationship. This dynamic briefly arises and is discussed in Halland (2010)'s study. She found, due to the power imbalances inherent in the prostitute client relationship, that the prostituted women viewed the client with great ambivalence. On the one hand he was seen as a villain and a source of distress. On the other hand he posed as a possible hero - many women had an underlying hope that a client would fall in love with and rescue them from prostitution.

Regardless of whether prostitution is viewed from a choice or a constraint perspective, the literature reviewed clearly shows that prostituted women are at risk of various types of harm. The literature clearly shows that prostituted women endure shocking levels of physical violence at the hands of their clients, police and other men in their lives. Although there exists much less research on the emotional effects of prostitution, some research did touch on the intricate emotional risks and dynamics associated with prostitution. These studies have indicated that the emotional impact of prostitution is pervasive, permeating all aspects of women's social and emotional lives. The complex dynamics of the client-prostitute relationship have briefly been identified but these studies seem to uncover more questions than they answer.

Although current research has begun to give us insight into the extreme physical abuse that prostituted women may be subjected to, the emotional effects and harms are still suffered very much in silence. Little is known about subjective emotional experiences and consequences of prostituting one's body; the dynamics and emotional effects of the client-prostitute relationship; and the meaning that prostitutes make of their work and their personal lives.

Aims and Objectives

Aim

The overall objective of this research is to explore prostituted women's subjective experiences of harm resulting from the work that they do. Specifically, it is hoped that the project may yield insights into the more covert forms of emotional harm experienced by prostituted women. Furthermore, the project aims to gain insight into the dynamics and emotional effects of the client-prostitute relationship; and the meaning that prostitutes make of their work, their intimate relationships and their personal identities.

Main Research question:

How do prostituted women describe the impact of prostitution on their lives?

Sub-Questions:

- How do prostituted women describe their experiences of violence and harm in prostitution?
- How do prostituted women describe the dynamics of the client-prostitute relationship?
- How does prostitution affect the meanings that prostituted women make of men and their intimate and sexual relationships?
- How do women's experiences in prostitution and the meanings they make of their work, affect their identities, sense of self and psychological wellbeing?

Methodology**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is located within a feminist paradigm. Feminism is grounded in the assumption that personal and political spheres are interrelated and interdependent elements of women's realities (DeVoe, 1990). Thus, although this study explored the unique experiences and personal identities of individual prostituted women, it was conducted with the understanding that their identities and experiences are partly a product of broader social constraints with which women in South Africa are faced. More specifically, feminism recognizes the social inequalities which exist between men and women and assumes that women are oppressed and disadvantaged within a patriarchal, male-dominated society (DeVoe, 1990).

The research was conducted from a radical feminist perspective of prostitution. As discussed in the introductory section, in radical feminist theory, prostitution is seen to epitomize the social, sexual and economic oppression and exploitation suffered by women under patriarchy (Weitzer, 2005a, 2005a). Thus, the project was guided by the understanding that prostitution is, in its essence, violence against women (Weitzer, 2005a).

Research Design

Feminist qualitative research. There is no single feminist methodology for conducting research (Watts, 2006). However, feminist research does require certain approaches with regards to method and process (Watts, 2006). A qualitative research design was selected as it shares many of the principals of feminist research and is best suited to answering the current research question (Babbie & Mouton, 2007; De Vos, 2002; Willig, 2001). Qualitative research, as in the current study, aims to describe and understand people's everyday lives and the meaning they attach to it (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). Central to the

feminist approach is the principal and goal of empowerment (Bowen, Bahrack, & Enns, 1991; McRobbie, 1982). Thus, all measures must be taken to attempt to equalize the power imbalance which is, in feminist research, believed to be intrinsic to the researcher-participant relationship (England, 1994; Tang, 2002). Qualitative research may be said to empower participants as it privileges the voice of the participants over that of the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). Feminist research and practice is considered to be value based. Thus, as in this study, the researcher enters the research process with a particular viewpoint and set of beliefs about the social issue under study (Corey, 2009; DeVoe, 1990; Watts, 2006). Finally qualitative research and feminist research acknowledge that research findings generated are a product of the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participant (Babbie & Mouton, 2007).

Sample

Access to the sample was gained through Embrace Dignity, a Non-Governmental Organization which advocates for law reforms which address the harm done to victims of human trafficking and prostitution. Affiliated to Embrace Dignity is an organization called Masiphakameni. Masiphakameni consists of small self-help groups for prostituted women to empower themselves to exit prostitution. The purposively selected sample consisted of 15 street-based prostituted women who are members of these self-help groups. All participants are black South African females from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds who live in informal settlements in Cape Town. All of the participants considered themselves to be in the “process of exiting” prostitution – but all were still involved in prostitution to some degree, with some participants still working on a daily basis and others working less frequently. Table 1 details the names, ages, home province and which Masiphakameni group they attended.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Home Province	Masiphakameni Group
Alice	48	Gauteng	Cape Town
Joy	34	Eastern Cape	Khayelitsha
Thandi	34	Eastern Cape	N7
Paricia	42	Eastern Cape	N7
Linda	27	Eastern Cape	Langa
Agnes	32	Eastern Cape	Langa
Miriam	51	Eastern Cape	Cape Town
Kate	34	Kwazulu Natal	Khayelitsha
Busi	27	Eastern Cape	Cape Town
Alex	39	Western Cape	Cape Town
Victoria	37	Eastern Cape	Cape Town
Kim	27	Western cape	Khayelitsha
Mandisa	29	Eastern Cape	Khayelitsha
Babalwa	30	Western Cape	Khayeltsha
Hope	31	Eastern Cape	Cape Town

Data collection Tool and Procedure

Data was collected through the use of unstructured or narrative face-to-face interviews. The narrative interview process is not dictated by a predetermined interview schedule, rather participants are asked to tell the story of their lives as they experience and understand it (Corbin, 2003). Thus the interviewer has less control over the interview process than when using more structured techniques. This, in line with feminist research principals, places the participant in the role of the active participant and expert in her own life, legitimizing her knowledge and contributing to the democratization of the participant-researcher relationship (Corbin, 2003; England, 1994; Fraser, 2004; Watts, 2006).

Most of the interviews were conducted at the venues where Masiphakameni meetings were held – these were at group members' houses in Khayelitsha, Langa and Du Noon. Some interviews were conducted at the Methodist church in Cape Town.

In each interview I asked the participants, "I'd like to hear about your experiences of working in prostitution, perhaps you could begin by telling me how you started prostitution". In the cases where participants were not forthcoming with information I asked questions such as

“what are clients like?” “How do police treat you?” “Do your family and friends know about the work you do?” and I explored the emotional aspects of their lives.

Participants received payment of R50 each. The interviews were recorded using a portable voice recorder. Recordings were transcribed.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze interview transcripts. Thematic analysis focuses primarily on the content of participants’ talk – it focuses on “what” is said rather than on “how” talk is structured, how language is used, or who it is directed at (Riessman, 2008). This content-driven approach was most suited to this research which aimed to explore and report on participants’ actual accounts of their experiences of violence and harm (Riessman, 2008). However, the study also aimed to explore the meaning prostituted women make of their experiences and how prostitution affects their sense of self and identity. In light of these aims, my analysis called for a little more than a purely thematic approach. To enrich my analysis, I also drew heavily on principles characteristic of narrative methods of data analysis, which are primarily concerned with analyzing how identities are constructed and how meaning is created through narratives (Riessman, 2002, 2008; Smith, 2000). Furthermore, in line with both narrative and feminist approaches to research, my analysis paid attention to macro contexts, making connections between the participants’ personal experiences and the larger social inequalities faced by the women in a patriarchal society (DeVoe, 1990).

In thematic analysis, data is interpreted by identifying common themes across research participants, the events they report and the actions they take (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008). Although I did approach the analysis with some expectations on reporting on the harms of prostitution, my analysis was largely inductive, as I allowed for themes to emerge from within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I analysed each participant’s transcript individually, identifying stories and categories of interest within each interview. Then, through a circular process of identifying, comparing and analyzing differences and similarities between interviews, I organized the data according to the common themes which emerged across interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for conducting the study was granted by the Psychology Department Ethics Committee, University of Cape Town.

Harm to Subjects

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of prostitution, talking about their experiences of abuse could have caused participants to become emotionally distressed (Corbin, 2003). However, the unstructured format on narrative interviews allowed for participants to control the content and emotional tone of the interview, meaning that they were not pressured to talk about experiences that were too private or painful for them to bear. Due to the stigma associated with prostitution, damage to the reputation of participants was a consideration. Thus the identities of all participants were safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms throughout the report.

Informed Consent & Deception of Respondents

In line with the feminist principal of transparency, participants were not deceived regarding the research purpose, process or any other aspect of the research (DeVoe, 1990). Participants were given a consent form (See Appendix 1) which detailed the research purpose and process, as well as participants' right to withdrawal and issues of confidentiality. Furthermore the researcher verbally confirmed that participants had a full understanding of these processes and their implications.

Debriefing and Referrals

All participants were debriefed directly after the interview was concluded. This allowed for the interviewer to identify and manage any anxiety which may have been elicited through the interview process. Each participant was given a list of organizations and resources (see Appendix 1) which they could contact for additional support after the interviews.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the fact that the interviewer could not understand or speak an African language, as none of the participants spoke English as their first language. Although some participants were fluent in English, others were not fully conversant. Due to this language barrier, some of the meaning of interviewer and participants' talk would inevitably have been lost during the interview process. Furthermore, some participants were not confident in speaking English and thus, during interviews, did not take the lead or speak as spontaneously as is ideal in narrative interviews.

It may be important to consider that the relatively small (15), homogenous sample of women in the study may not be representative of all prostituted women. The sample consisted of women who worked primarily as street based prostitutes and thus the study does not explore the experiences of prostituted women working in other contexts. Furthermore, it may

be said the prostituted women in the sample, who sought and gained assistance from organizations such as Embrace dignity and Masiphakameni and who have taken active steps towards exiting prostitution, could have different characteristics and experiences to prostituted women who have not done so. However, the aim of this study is not to generalize findings to a broader population, but rather to explore the unique experiences of individual participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2007).

Reflexivity

It is important for me, as the researcher to reflect on and acknowledge my active role in the construction of meaning throughout the data collection and analysis process: In line with the principals of feminist research, I did not enter the research process from a position of neutrality (Corey, 2009; DeVoe, 1990; Watts, 2006). Rather, I approached the research process from the radical feminist understanding that prostitution is a form of gender violence, and is harmful to women.

In any interview process participants display a *preferred* version of their identity which they wish to display to the *specific* audience (Parker, 2005; Riessman, 2002, 2008). Although I did not explicate my position on prostitution, participants were aware, to some extent, that I was interested in hearing about their experiences of harm. This may partially account for why participants' narratives contained so many accounts of violence and exploitation.

The lack of shared experience between myself and participants may be noted as a limitation to the study. It became evident, in entering the homes of participants and conducting interviews with them, that my life experiences as a white middle class student, differed greatly from their experiences as poor black women working in prostitution. This lack of shared experience between us is well explicated by a participant named Kate who said "I think the woman who didn't be a prostitute don't have experience in this world, really". As Kate suggested, this lack of shared experience would have affected my ability to develop a true understanding of the participants' experiences and is likely to have acted as a barrier to me building rapport with participants (McRobbie, 1982; Tang, 2002).

Results and Discussion

Violence Against Prostituted Women

Of all the kinds of narratives told by participants, narratives of the abuse and violence that prostituted women endured at the hands of their clients were the most common. Agnes'

narrative below depicts the kinds of verbal, physical and sexual abuse which emerged repeatedly throughout participants' accounts of violence.

The other one he took me to the bush, and then he said I must take my clothes off, I tell him "no I can't take my clothes off because we are in the bush". He point the gun and he say "take off all your clothes bitch!" then I didn't have a choice because it's only the two of us here and I'm afraid. I take all my clothes out, after we done, he have sex with me. When we finish, he take my clothes, he go with my clothes, he left me there naked. (Agnes)

Agnes' narrative reflects the way in which clients abuse their physical power over prostituted women to intimidate them into compliance or to force access to their bodies. Participants' accounts of violence perpetrated by clients resemble those identified by previous studies (Farley et al., 2005; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). They include being pushed, thrown, beaten by clients, both with their hands or objects like crowbars, and being threatened by gun or knifepoint. For many participants, these acts of violence were relatively regular occurrences, some participants bore multiple scars from gunshots or stabbings. Most participants told stories of prostitute friends who were murdered by clients - they told of women found buried under the sand on the beach; found beheaded; found with their throats slit; or found dead with objects such as bottles inserted up their vaginas. For many participants, these images haunted them on a daily basis, and served as a constant reminder of the risks they faced.

Agnes' narrative also tells of the sexual abuse and subordination women endure at the hands of their clients. In addition to rape facilitated by physical force, women also experienced sexual abuse within their paid sexual interactions with clients. Clients often treated them roughly during sex, causing pain and physical damage. Participants described client's demands for sexual acts which involved more than peno-vaginal penetration. Most common amongst these was the demand for anal sex. Other demands included demands for participants to urinate or defecate in the client's mouths or on their faces; insert their hands up client's anuses and for clients to ejaculate in their faces. Both Alice and Alex spoke of how bestiality involving dogs had become a "trend" amongst clients.

Oh, it's bad, because now most of the clients now they use their dogs, they will just watch you, let the dog fuck you and just watch you, and then pay you. So you know now when you knew that I slept with a dog, what is that gonna be? That conscience, as the woman how you feel for the rest of your life... (Alice)

The harms of these sexual acts run deeper than the physical harm and discomfort which may be involved. The true harm lies, as is evident in Alice's talk, in the meaning the participants make of performing these acts. Many participants felt that such acts were morally wrong, were repulsed by them or they felt humiliated by being forced to complete them. Thus through demanding that women perform these sexual acts, clients actively degraded, humiliated and dehumanized these women, reducing them to nothing more than sexual objects.

Clients were not the only perpetrators of abuse. Across each and every interview it became clear that the police very rarely were a source of protection and safety for prostituted women – they were more likely to publically humiliate and verbally, physically or sexually abuse them. As found in previous South Africa research (Halland, 2010; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001), participants' narratives contained overwhelming accounts of police abusing their power and authority – it was seen as a common occurrence for policemen to “arrest” prostituted women and then to demand sex in exchange for not laying charges against them.

Be it physical abuse, verbal abuse, or sexual abuse, all of these narratives reflect men's explicit acts of domination, degradation or intimidation of prostituted women (Herman, 2001). Sadly, these stories of physical, verbal and sexual abuse against women, although disturbing, are far from unusual in South Africa (George & Finberg, 2001; South African Police Services, 2010; Wechsberg et al., 2005). Having myself counseled at Rape Crisis, I was struck by how closely participants' stories of abuse resembled those told to me by survivors of rape and sexual abuse. The types of abuse experienced by the prostituted women in this study are the same types of abuse experienced by all types of women at the hands of all types of men in South Africa. Thus, it may be said that violence against women occurring in the context of prostitution reflects the patterns of male domination and violence against women in patriarchal South African society as a whole.

Power Imbalances in the Client-Prostitute Relationship

The liberal feminist view on prostitution suggests that the act of selling sex may be seen as a transaction between two neutral and consenting business actors, the buyer and the seller (Niemi, 2010, 2010; B. Sullivan, 1995). The accounts of abuse prevalent in participants' narratives discussed above seriously call this position into question. Even when disregarding explicit forms of abuse, participants' narratives still reflected a client-prostitute relationship which, by its very nature, is a far cry from neutrality. Rather their narratives reflected relationships riddled with power imbalances.

In line with previous research which suggests that women's entry into prostitution is due to constraint (Bucardo, 2004; Dalla, 2000, 2002; Halland, 2010; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001), utter financial desperation and lack of alternative income-generating choices were the reasons given by all 15 participants for entering (and remaining in) prostitution. Many participants spoke of how, after their first experience of being paid for sex, they were faced with the realization that their bodies represented a source of income – in many cases the *only* source of income for their children or entire families. With this realization came new responsibility - to sell their bodies in order to ensure the survival of themselves and their dependents. Thus, *paying* clients were automatically placed in positions of financial power over these financially disempowered women. Participants' narratives, like Linda's below, commonly illustrated how clients abused this financial power to coerce women into complying with their sexual demands such as demands for condomless sex (Jeffreys, 2009).

[Sighs].. And then some of them they don't want condoms, some of them they need condoms. If they said to you they don't want condoms then they going to give six hundred rand (R600) you go for it because you don't have. (Linda)

Linda's narrative can also be seen as an example of how participants' low socio-economic status, served not only to ensure they entered and remained in prostitution, but lead to their inability to negotiate sexual practices. This in turn illustrates, as suggested by intersectionality theory, women's experiences of oppression related to their gender, are inextricably linked to, and often reinforced by other systems of oppression such as poverty (Collins, 1990; De La Rey, 1997).

The power imbalances present in the client-prostitute relationship were further elucidated through the way in which participants' narratives reflected clients' assumed "sex right" over the prostituted women's bodies (Jeffreys, 2009). Babalwa's narrative reflects how, through financial payment, the client (in his mind) is not merely buying a sexual service, but rather is buying ownership over the prostituted women's body, to do with as he pleases for a given period.

Some of them they speak very rough. Some say 'you don't have to complain, even if I fuck you for a whole hour, I paid you'. Babalwa

Thus, as suggested by radical feminist theory, the very nature of the client-prostitute relationships reflected in participants' narratives seemed to be based on unequal power relations. Paying clients automatically assumed positions of economic power over financially desperate women. Moreover, what was being sold to the client was in fact the *power* and the

sex-right over women's bodies. Thus it may be suggested patterns of male dominance and female oppression which are present in our patriarchal society may not only be reflected, but *reinforced* through the institution of prostitution (Miriam, 2005; Scoular, 2007; Shrage, 1989; B. Sullivan, 1995).

The “Good” Client

However, not all narratives reflected this picture of the client as an exploitative villain. Amongst participants' many narratives of abuse, were some accounts of the “good client”– the client who treats prostituted women with respect and pays well.

The regular client. In most participants' narratives, the “good client” was also the regular client. The picture of the “regular client”, which is painted across the narratives of every participant, is as follows: The regular client has been using the services of the prostituted women for an extended period of time, sometimes a few months but sometimes over a period of years. In most cases, the prostituted woman believes that the regular client uses only her services. Usually a sense of rapport is established between the prostitute and the client as they begin to know one another over time.

If he always come to buy you alone, he don't buy another girls, you are mine. He say I am going to give you money for the grocery, if you say you want a phone he buy you a phone, you take like a boyfriend mos. So when he come everything, you love him. But you don't have feelings for the guy who just come with the R50, then mercher (have sex) then go. Mandisa

Many participants described their relationships with their regular client as being “like a boyfriend”. This is a complex dynamic whereby the prostituted woman is well aware that the client is not her boyfriend, but in many ways, the client's behavior towards her closely resembles that of a boyfriend. He may show interest in her life outside of prostitution and appear to show some real concern for her general wellbeing. He may even “take her” for a few nights, spending extended periods of time with her. The regular client was often constructed as the “the provider” in participants' narratives. For many participants, like Mandisa, their regular client was “like a boyfriend” because he provided financial support, partly through regular patronage, but also through additional financial support.

Emotions and feeling of love often became intertwined within the “like a boyfriend” client-prostitute relationship. Participants explained that some regular clients would confess their love for them or make promises such as to marry them or buy them cars or houses.

However, for most participants, their relationships with their regular clients were marked by uncertainty and ambiguity. Client's behavior and attitudes towards them were often sporadic and contradictory. Participants' narratives reflected a sense of confusion with regards to their clients' behavior and feelings towards them.

It's confusing, because one day he promised to buy me a car. But now I don't like his actions. (Busi)

Sadly participants' feelings of ambiguity were often coupled with feelings of disappointment and rejection. Many participants told of how a "like a boyfriend" client would suddenly stop "coming to buy" them or would openly start using the services of another prostituted woman. Miriam explained that whenever a client started using the services of another prostitute instead of her it felt like he was saying "you are not worth it now". Thus these narratives reflect the way in which participants relationships with their regular clients may negatively affect their sense of self worth. Furthermore, they show how such relationships serve to objectify and commodify women. In their relationships with regular clients, prostituted women are still little more than passive objects who can only patiently wait and hope that the regular client will "come to buy" them. She is still little more than a commodity which, at any time, can be traded in by her "like a boyfriend" client for a more worthwhile deal or better product.

The client as rescuer. Despite this rejection and disappointment, as well as abuse and subjugation, that participants experienced at the hands of their clients, most participants' talk reflected the narrative of the "client as the rescuer". As found by Halland (2010), most participants had hopes and dreams that someday a truly "good client" would come along, fall in love with and marry them, thereby rescuing them from the life of prostitution.

You must say 'thank God' if a guy pick you up from the street and marry you, you know? (Alice)

The participants' placing of the client in the role of the heroic rescuer sheds light on how they construct their *own* identities in relation to clients – here they clearly construct themselves as the "damsel in distress", who should patiently wait to be rescued by their all-powerful and heroic clients. It can be seen that even the most "ideal" client-prostitute relationships were not exempt from the power imbalances inherent to the client-prostitute relationship. Be it the "like a boyfriend" client or the "heroic rescuer" fantasy figure, the client is still placed in a position of power over the prostituted woman, who in her powerlessness, is at the mercy of her client.

Prostituted Women's Experiences and Construction of Men, Intimacy and Sex

The abuse and level of subordination and objectification that participants were subjected to within the client-prostitute relationship brings into question how this may affect their construction of and patterns of relating with men outside of prostitution.

Some participants said they were able to assess each man according to his individual actions and intents, allowing for their construction of the lovable and trustworthy man. These participants were able to form intimate relationships with men. However, many participants transferred their experiences of men in prostitution onto all men. Through participants' narratives it was clear that many had developed an essentialist view of men, constructing them as all-bad, evil and as potential sexual predators. For many participants, like Miriam, this construction did not allow for the possibility of a man as a loving and trustworthy partner, nor did it allow for a man to be the object of their love, but rather only an object of their anger or hate. As a result, as found by Halland (2010) and Saunders (2004), many participants could no longer engage in intimate relationships with men.

...I don't have that trust. But it's like someone is using me, he wants to, he wants to use me. So I don't; I've got that hate, that anger. (Miriam)

Prostitution did not only affect how women came to construct and value men's potential for being loving and worthy partners in relationships. It also led to them devaluing their own worth as relationship partners. Many participants felt that no man could be interested in them because, as Agnes explained, "...you can't love someone who is selling sex". This identity of the "unlovable prostitute" emerged throughout the narratives of many participants. Many participants felt that being a prostitute rendered them useless, not only as intimate partners, but as women. It was evident through narratives such as Joy's that the notion of the unlovable prostitute" was reinforced through participants' actual experiences of rejection and abuse by men.

He (fiancé) beat me, he beat me and chase me out on his house, I was staying in Mfuleni, not here. I was staying with him in Mfuleni and then he did beat me and then he chase me out, and said he can't, can't stay with a prostitute, Magosha, because I am a useless woman you see? (Joy)

Participants' narratives also shed light on how prostitution affected women's construction and experiences of sex outside of prostitution. Some participants, like Mandisa, were able to protect their intimacy and sex lives by constructing separate meanings for sex

with clients as “business” and sex with intimate partners for pleasure, enabling them to value and enjoy sex outside of prostitution.

It's different, because when you make sex with your boyfriend, you make sex with your lover, nice sex. But when you make a business, it's not your lover, it's different.

(Mandisa)

However, for other participants, their experiences in prostitution had a negative effect on their sex lives. For some participants this effect was seen in simple terms - after a long night or day of working they were too tired to be interested in having sex with their partner. But for other participants the effects ran deeper - their experiences in prostitution affected the way in which they had come to construct and experience sex as a whole. Many participants explained that they had lost all ability to differentiate between sex for work and sex for pleasure – for many participants *all* sex had become a form of prostitution.

Many participants, like Hope, explained that they could not enjoy sex with an intimate partner because they experienced the same feeling of “being used” as they did when having sex with clients. As a result, many chose to abstain completely from sex outside of prostitution. In addition to indicating the effects prostitution had on participant’s sex lives, this fear/feeling of “being used” suggests that “being used” may be one of the most pervasive, hurtful and damaging aspects of prostituting one’s body.

Even now I have got problem with boyfriend – I can't take a boyfriend without money. I'm used to that. Even a boyfriend who doesn't give me money, I can't take him because I am used to money. I don't want boyfriend for free. Because he is going to use me and leave me. When he leave me I know I didn't lose nothing. (Hope)

The effects of prostitution on participants’ intimate relationships were also reflected through their tendency to reproduce the dynamics of the client-prostitute relationship within their own intimate relationships. Hope’s narrative above reflects her compulsion to recreate the transactional element of prostitution within her romantic relationships. For her, and many of the other participants, money and intimate/sexual relationships with men had become inextricably linked.

Participants’ narratives also reflect the way in which they reproduced actual behaviour, commonly expected of them within the client-prostitute relationship, within their own intimate relationships. Below Busi describes an incident where she found herself speaking to her boyfriend in the same highly sexualised way she spoke to her clients. Thus these narratives reflect how participants came to be sexualised objects, which could be

bought and sold, in their personal relationships. Given the positions of subordination and abuse prostituted women experience in the client-prostitute relationship, the possible danger of reproducing these patterns of relating in their personal lives is clear.

...The clients will talk like thing like, "I want to fuck you, I want to." this, just strong words, strong words. So this white man I have (boyfriend) is from Germany. So me, I'm, I'm, I'm used to the clients, to the white people they talk strong word, you see? About sex, things like that. So I thought this one also maybe is like that. So he used to call me and I used to see always when he calls me, like everything is straight, "why, what kind of white man is this, this one?" My first time I see a white man like this, he never talk things like this...So I ask, one day we talking on the phone, I just try to be sexy to him, and then he said to me, "you are going too far my dear". (It's) because I'm used to the clients. (Busi)

Busi's narrative also brings into question the relationship between race and prostitution in South Africa. The "white man as client" narrative arose frequently throughout participants' talk, largely due to the fact that all participants were black and, according to them, many of their clients were white men. Busi's narrative illustrates how, through her experiences in prostitution, she developed certain perceptions of how white clients, act, speak and treat prostituted women. Her narrative illustrates how she generalised these perceptions to all white males, expecting them all to treat her in this way in all contexts of her life, thereby reinforcing pre-existing power imbalances of race and gender. It may thus be asked, how may prostitution, a relationship based on power imbalances, affect male and female patterns of relating in the broader South African context where, due to its history of Apartheid, pre-existing racial inequalities exist? (De La Rey, 1997). Thus it may be seen, as suggested by intersectionality theory, that participants' race and gender functioned as interlocking systems of oppression, mutually reinforcing and maintaining one another (Collins, 1990).

The effect that participants' experiences in prostitution had on the meanings they made of intimate relationships with men, as well as the effect that the client-prostitute relationship may have on men and women's patterns of relating in the broader South African context has been discussed. However, it may be asked, how does prostitution affect women's internal worlds?

Exploring Participants' Internal Worlds

Participants' narratives allowed for a look into their internal worlds - the identities they constructed for themselves, the meaning they made of their work, their sense of self and the way prostitution impacted on them emotionally and psychologically.

Construction of identity. Analysing participants' talk allowed some insight into the way they understood, constructed and negotiated their identities in relation to their experiences in prostitution. The "unlovable prostitute" and the "damsel in distress" are two such identities already discussed. Through the many stories of violence, abuse and exploitation participants told, it was also clear that they constructed themselves, in the interviews, as "exploited victims". These represent identities which participants constructed in relation to their clients. However, participants also had to make sense of their "prostitute" identities in relation to their existing social identities and the broader social contexts within which they were positioned.

As found by Ribeiro & Sacramento (2005), in their study of the experiences of prostituted women, participants were highly stigmatized and discriminated against within their communities. When they walked in the streets they were called names such as "bitch", "whore" and "magosha" and were often labelled as "AIDS carriers". Participants' narratives highlighted the difficulty, discomfort and pain they encountered in trying to negotiate, accept and integrate this stigmatized identity of "prostitute" into their self concepts. For participants like Thandi this meant an active acknowledgment of their shift in social positions from the ridiculer to the ridiculed.

So I see my brother laugh at that prostitute there and me too I laugh. That time I was married, I don't think. But when the suffering starting for me, Ayi! I'm thinking today it's me - I am standing this place. I am laughing years and years I laugh this people...today it's me. I don't believe that. (Thandi)

For many participants the identity of "prostitute" was incongruent with other aspects of their identities or roles in their lives – for them roles such as being a mother, being religious, or simply being a woman were incongruent with being a prostitute. This dissonance elicited a great deal of distress and emotional pain. For some women accepting the identity of prostitute meant the perceived loss of another valued identity, this sense of loss is evident in Babalwa's talk below.

Yeah, I am useless mother now - how many men see my body? The woman's privacy, the body used to be private. (Babalwa)

Although participants could, to varying degrees, make sense of or integrate the identity of “prostitute” internally, none of the participants were willing to fully integrate their identities as prostitutes into their public identities. Instead, participants went to great measures to conceal their identities as prostitutes from their loved ones. Miriam explained that “you live a lie when you are a prostitute”. Participants’ narratives revealed how, as was found by Halland (2010), Ribeiro and Sacramento (2005) and Sanders (2004), participants’ attempts to conceal their identities, as well as the constant and pervasive fear of being “found out”, consumed and pervaded every facet of their lives.

It became clear through participants’ narratives that it was not always possible for prostituted women to separate the “prostitute” identity from their other identities. Many participants made meaning of prostitution in economic terms. This was reflected through their talk which contained much market-orientated discourse - the term “doing business” being the commonly used term for having sex with a client. Like many participants, Agnes constructed for herself an identity as a “prostitute-businesswoman” which was *separate* from her identity as “a woman” outside of prostitution. Agnes’ narrative below elucidates the anger and distress which prostituted women may experience when the boundaries between these two identities are threatened or become intertwined: Agnes tells of how she and her friends went to a pub for drinks. They stayed late and only the owner and the barman were left behind. The owner then demanded that Agnes take off her clothes, when she refused he beat her badly and raped her in front of her friends:

.... he knows I am a sex worker, he’s supposed to ask me that ‘Agnes can I do business with you?’ then I will say ‘yes’ because I’m, I’m doing business. I will never say ‘no’, I will take that R200. So he gave me this R200, he didn’t give it on my hand he just put it between my breasts. I took it, I drop it down. (Agnes)

Agnes was infuriated because the boundaries between her two identities had been violated: Because she was a prostitute, the owner could use money as justification for raping her. In her mind, she was in the pub in the role of a *woman* and not as a “*prostitute-businesswoman*” and thus she had been outright raped by the owner. Agnes’ narrative illustrates the way in which women’s identities as prostitutes often permeated other aspects of their social lives and identities. Moreover it illustrates how the disempowerment, exploitation and violence participants experienced in their working lives followed through to their personal lives, again indicating the pervasive nature of prostitution (Ribeiro & Sacramento, 2005; Sanders, 2004).

Sense of self & body image. Participants' narratives also reflected the impact that prostitution had on their sense of self. The words "useless", "cheap", "used", "worthless", "filthy", "dirty", "weak", "ugly" were the most commonly reoccurring adjectives in women's talk around how prostitution made them feel about themselves. These words clearly reflect participants' sense of being spoiled or defiled. Miriam's talk below reflects the perceived permanence of this internal defilement: She suggests that, although it is possible for a prostituted woman to make herself look smart or respectable in her appearance, she will always remain dirty on the inside.

Dirty, dirty. Even, you can, you can be smart but you are dirty inside... (Miriam)

For participants like Mandisa, the notion of being "spoiled" had not only internal, but also external manifestations. Her narrative of her physical deterioration resulting from years of prostituting her body seemed symbolic of her emotional deterioration. Through contrasting the powerful imagery of a beautiful, vibrant long haired woman with a scarred and weary old lady, she seemed to be lamenting the loss of a previous self.

Yes, yes, when I started prostitution that time, I was very beautiful, now I am just like an old lady. I was beautiful, very beautiful, my hair was long, and I was not having the scars. You see I find the scars there. (Mandisa)

It was clear that participants directed a great deal of negative emotion and anger, inwards, towards themselves. Similar to the narratives of participants in Halland (2010) and Saunders (2004)'s studies, participants' narratives were riddled with accounts of self-loathing, self-blame, guilt, and regret. Many felt intense feelings of guilt for both placing themselves in physical danger and dishonouring themselves as women, through the work that they did. This had devastating effects on participants' sense of self, as Victoria explained "Sometimes when you look by the mirror you *hate* yourself."

It is clear that accepting and integrating the identity of "prostitute" was a painful process for many prostituted women and had devastating effects on their sense of self. Participants' narratives also eluded to ways in which their mental and psychological wellbeing may have been jeopardized through their experiences in prostitution.

Psychological implications. The notion of the prostituted women living in a constant state of fear and uncertainty of her fate arose throughout narratives. Participants all explained that every single day, when getting into every client's car, they were repeatedly faced with the uncertainty of whether or not they would return unharmed. Hope likened this experience

to being “like a soldier going to the bush”, who was never certain whether he would return from battle.

So each and every night there was a painful time where I’m sitting in front of my mirror, I watch myself, I say “Oh my God, I don’t think I’m coming back.” I make-up myself. (Alice)

Judith Herman (2001) defines sexual violence against women, as a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a constant state of fear. Could clients’ incessant violence against prostituted women be seen in a similar light?

The notion of living in a constant state of fear and being the repeated victim of sexual or physical violence raises questions around psychological effects prostitution may have on women. Herman (2001) suggests that those who are subjected to repeated trauma may develop a particularly insidious form of PTSD. Melissa Farley certainly has found links between PTSD and prostitution (Farley, 2006; Farley et al., 1998, 2005). Although this study did not seek to measure the presence of PTSD in participants, possible symptoms of PTSD were evident in many of their narratives. Participants reported fluctuating and unstable moods and feelings of confusion. Many participants reported intrusive symptoms such as having painful memories constantly replayed in their heads or in their dreams. Joy described how she had reoccurring nightmares of a past incident where a customer violently raped and sodomised her at knifepoint. In Agnes’ narrative below symptoms of hyperarousal (always shaking) and constriction (isolating herself) are evident.

... my body is always shaking those days. After maybe 2 weeks, 3 weeks I started to go because my body doesn’t feel fine after I heard that or if I saw it. I just stay at home, not go. [Brief pause]. It’s very painful. (Agnes)

Disassociation is both linked to PTSD and has repeatedly been identified as a strategy for coping with the emotional effects of prostitution in previous research (Farley, 2004; Halland, 2010; Herman, 2001). Indeed, for most of the participants the fear, physical risks and the emotional pain attached to prostitution was too much to face on a daily basis – thus many participants made use of strategies to numb or disassociate themselves from these realities of prostitution. Some were able to “block out” and numb themselves from such emotions naturally. However, for participants like Alice, drinking was the only way they could escape feelings of guilt and emotional distress resulting from her work:

...if you are still in this prostitution, you, you, you just come back home and ‘oh my God’, and what you gonna do? You just go and drink, you just go and drink because

you don't want to, to feel this, you don't want to nest this worrying. You just want to drink. (Alice)

Participants, like Busi, told how they completely disassociated their minds from their bodies, emotionally leaving their bodies, during the physical act of sex with clients.

You don't feel nothing because your mind is not there. Haai, your mind is not there. You just leave them to do it until they finish and then, yeah! That's why we always drinking, drinking, drinking. (Busi)

It may be suggested that participants' narratives of disconnecting themselves from their bodies during sex with clients reflect more than just a coping strategy. They reflect acts of submission. It may be said that through disassociating herself from her body the prostituted woman commits the ultimate act of submission: she wholly surrenders her body and her power over it to the client, who in an act of dominance, penetrates her, assuming full power and ownership over her body for a given period. Thus participants' narratives of disassociation can be said to epitomize the dominance-submission dynamic of the client-prostitute relationship reflected throughout this paper.

Summary and Conclusion

One cannot claim, based on the findings of this research, that prostitution is harmful to women. However, it can be said that prostitution is harmful to the poor black South African women who participated in the study, and perhaps to others like them. Prostitution can be said to be harmful to women not only because of the countless acts of physical, verbal and sexual abuse participants endured at the hands of men. Rather, the findings of the study reflect a client-prostitute relationship, based on unequal power relations and male dominance, which serves to subjugate, disempower and exploit prostituted women. Even participants' relationships with the "good client" positioned the prostituted woman as little more than passive object or a commodity which could be discarded at the client's discretion. This study shows that women's experiences in prostitution cannot be viewed in isolation of their broader social and political contexts. The findings suggest that prostitution is harmful to participants because it mirrors and reinforces patterns of male dominance and violence against women present in our patriarchal South African Society (Jeffreys, 2009; South African Police Services, 2010). However, participants' narratives also invite the reader to take an even deeper look at the dynamics of the harm of prostitution in the context of South Africa. Drawing on intersectionality theory, it can be said that poor, black, prostituted women's experiences of harm in prostitution can only be truly understood in relation to the other

interlocking systems of oppression such as race and class which form part of their social identities (Collins, 1990; De La Rey, 1997; Magnet, 2007). Participants' narratives clearly showed how poverty simultaneously served as both the reason for participants entering and remaining in prostitution, and served to grant paying clients financial power over them. Furthermore, race and gender inequalities, present in South African society, were mirrored and intensified by client-prostitute relationships between black prostituted women and their white clients. Not only were these preexisting systems of oppression mirrored and intensified within the client-prostitute relationship, but they were again reproduced and re-enacted, in their intensified form, within participants' broader social contexts. Thus, in the context of South Africa, prostitution is harmful to women, because it forms part of a broader matrix domination: interlocking systems of oppressions such as race, class and gender, work to mutually maintain women's experiences of domination in their lives (Collins, 1990; Kempadoo, 2001; Magnet, 2007).

Prostitution may harmful to women due to the way in which it pervades and distorts (and sometimes destroys) women's patterns of relating within intimate and sexual relationships with men in their personal contexts. Many participants were unable to construct separate meanings for clients and men in general. Thus, for many participants, all men became clients, capable of violence, abuse and disappointment; all intimacy and sex became a form of prostitution, leaving women feeling "used" or exploited; and participants themselves became prostitutes within their intimate relationships, sexual objects which can be bought and sold.

Furthermore, prostitution can be said to be harmful due to the way in which its effects may manifest themselves in prostituted women's internal worlds. For many participants, accepting and integrating the identity of "prostitute" into their self-concepts and personal and public identities was a confusing, conflicting, invasive and often extremely painful process. For prostituted women, accepting the identity of "prostitute" meant accepting and internalising the stigma, ridicule, and humiliation which they were subjected to within their communities. Prostitution has the potential to devastate the prostituted woman's sense of self - participants' narratives reflect a definite sense of defilement, worthlessness, an inescapable sense of dirtiness, as well as the internalization of intense feelings of self-loathing and guilt. Furthermore, findings suggest that women's mental and psychological wellbeing may be jeopardised through their experiences in prostitution. For many participants living with the constant fear and uncertainty of their fate and dealing with emotional effects of violence and

trauma was too much to bear. Many participants reported symptoms, commonly associated with PTSD, such as painful flashbacks or dreams which intruded and constricted their lives. Thus it can be said that prostitution is harmful as it has the potential to permeate and devastate the internal worlds of women.

The findings of this study, particularly the highly relational and internal nature of many of the harms of prostitution, and the notion that women's experiences in prostitution are part of a broader matrix of domination, may offer insight into how the harms of prostitution may be addressed in South Africa. These findings serve to call into question the merits of the pro-legalization approach, which is based on the assumption that the harms of prostitution can be addressed through merely increasing control and improving *physical* working conditions within the industry (Gardner, 2009). Drawing on intersectionality theory, it may be suggested that it would be fruitless to address one system of oppression while ignoring the others which are inextricably linked to it and serve to maintain it (Magnet, 2007). Thus we cannot address the harms associated with prostitution without addressing the racial and economic inequalities as well as broader issues of gender inequality experienced by poor black women in South Africa (De La Rey, 1997). It may be suggested that, rather than the legalization of prostitution, policies which aim to address racial, economic and gender inequalities as interlocking systems of oppression should be advocated for in South Africa.

This study has essentially described a client-prostitute relationship based on unequal power relations and male dominance and discussed the negative impacts that this relationship has on prostituted women. However, this has been a one-sided account of the client-prostitute relationship. It may be suggested that, to truly gain an understanding of the client-prostitute relationship and its dynamics of dominance and submission, it would be necessary to draw on *clients'* accounts of their experiences of prostitution. Thus a future study which explores clients' experiences of prostitution and the meanings they make of the client-prostitute relationship would enrich the findings of the current study, allowing for a deeper, more holistic understanding of the dynamics of prostitution.

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Appendix 1

Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Women's Subjective Experiences of Working in Prostitution

1. **Invitation and Purpose**

You are invited to take part in this study which explores women's personal experiences of working in prostitution. I am a research student from the Psychology department at the University of Cape Town.

2. **Procedures**

- If you decide to take part in this study I will interview you about your experiences of working in prostitution, asking you to share your experiences from when you first started until your most recent experiences. By interviewing you I hope to find out what it is like to work as a prostitute and talk about any aspects of prostitution that you wish to add to the discussion.
- The interview should take about an hour; however, you are free to speak to me for a shorter or longer period.
- Participating in this study is voluntary. You are free to end the interview at any time with no penalty or any other consequences.

3. **Risks, Discomforts & Inconveniences**

- This study poses a low risk of harm to you.
- Speaking about your experiences of working in prostitution could bring up sensitive issues and could potentially be emotionally distressing. However, you will decide what you would like to discuss in the interview and you will not be obligated to speak about anything you do not feel comfortable speaking about.
- You might be inconvenienced by having to give up an hour of your time.
- If you would like to contact a counsellor to further discuss your experiences, you can contact one of the organizations: Rape Crisis (021 447 9762) Life Line (021 461 1113) Famsa (021 447 0174). For more information on these organizations and the services they provide please refer to the referral list provided.

4. **Benefits**

This project gives you an opportunity to voice your opinions about and share your experiences of prostitution, thus raising people's awareness about a side of prostitution that they do not usually see.

5. **Privacy and Confidentiality**

- Interviews will take place in a private room.

- Any information you share is strictly confidential. You will remain anonymous throughout the research process. You have the right to request that any information you have shared be removed from the study.

6. **Money Matters**

You will receive R50 to compensate you for your travelling expenses.

7. **Contact details**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study please contact:

- Monique Huysamen (student researcher) on 074 1584005
- Dr Floretta Boonzaier (my supervisor) at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT) 021 650 3429.
- Rosalind Adams (admin assistant for the UCT Department of Psychology) 021 650 3417

8. **Signatures**

{Subject's name} _____ has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above including any risks involved in its performance. He or she has been given time to ask any questions and these questions have been answered to the best of the investigator's ability. A signed copy of this consent form will be made available to the subject.

Investigator's Signature Date

I have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose, possible benefits, risks, and discomforts. I agree to take part in this research as a subject. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit this project at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any penalty or loss of benefits that I would otherwise be entitled to enjoy.

Subject's Signature Date

Appendix 2
Transcription/Quotation Information

- ... Ellipsis points are use to indicate that parts of participant's original speech have been omitted from the quotation
- () Brackets indicate words which have been inserted into quotation for extra clarification
- Underlining indicates emphasis in participant's original speech

Magosha: A Xhosa word meaning prostitute