"I can't carry on like this": A feminist perspective on the process of exiting sex work in a
South African context

Suvi Hakala & Marike Keller

Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town

Student numbers: HKLSUV001, KLLMAR014

hklsuv001@uct.ac.za, kllmar014@uct.ac.za

Abstract

This study aims to look at the challenges faced by women of low socio-economic status in exiting sex work, in a South African context where gender-based violence is normalized and widespread. In doing so, this research applies principles of feminist theory to create a contextualized understanding of the process of exit. Two focus groups, with a total of 18 non-transgendered women were conducted in an informal setting, resulting in an open-ended discussion around these challenges. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The categories and themes emerging from this analysis were past trauma, motherhood, partnerships, social support, economic necessity, employment and gossip. These themes are permeated by a pattern of escapism. This pattern exemplifies their disempowerment and lack of agency, which is symptomatic of the gender oppression pervading their lives. The results of this research will be used to draw up a policy in collaboration with the NGO *Embrace Dignity*, for parliament, to initiate legal reform relating to sex work.

Keywords: sex work; challenges; exiting; gender oppression; feminist theory

Cape Town has been classified as the sex capital of South Africa, with roughly 3% of its population being involved in the sex trade industry (Gould, 2008). A plethora of research has been published in recent decades on the experiences of individuals involved in sex work (Dalla, 2006; Gould, 2008; Mattu, 2007). A rich body of literature has developed on the individual's day-to-day experience of sex work. Research has mapped not only the precipitating factors including childhood abuse, substance abuse and economic adversity (Dalla, 2006), but also the many and varied ways in which men and women cope with their experiences in sex work (e.g. Mattu, 2007). The majority of this research was conducted in the United States and United Kingdom, thus creating a gap for the exploration of exiting sex work in South Africa, specific to low socio-economic status groups.

Sex work is defined as the "exchange of sexual services for financial reward" (Gould, 2008, p. 5). From the standpoint of this study, 'prostitution' is not seen as a 'profession' intent on empowering women through the autonomy and independence created through self-employment. It is rather constructed as a morally questionable means of earning an income, due to the derogatory connotations attached to it. The perpetuation of prostitution as a means of income generation is often justified through its acceptance as one of the oldest professions in the world (Cooper, 1989). The justifications given for the continued existence of what is essentially institutionalized male sexual dominance, derive from the notion that female sexuality is the property of men, and is available to be "bought or forcibly taken if it is not freely given" (Cooper, 1989, p. 114). In light of this, this research will focus specifically on women's experiences of the process of exit. Moreover, prostitution is seen as acceptable only to the extent that it is the only way for many poor, uneducated women to "achieve a measure of economic power and social independence" (Cooper, 1989, p. 109). 'Sex work', however, creates the illusion that there is an aspect of choice in the decision to become a sex worker. Thus, for the purposes of this research, 'sex work' will be used as opposed to the commonly used 'prostitution', to enable a potential sense of empowerment and agency that it could have for the women involved in this study, even if it is merely illusionary.

It should be noted that although this research focuses on women who have not been trafficked into sex work, due to contextual economic and social factors, entry into prostitution is by no means considered to be a matter of choice. Moreover, the importance of focusing on exit from sex work is highlighted by the popularity of the liberal feminist understanding of sex work as a legitimate means of income generation and a means to economic power. In fact, the continued existence of prostitution as a 'legitimate' profession "perpetuates the male

definition of women as available sex, which in turn insures their continued subjugation for that purpose" (Cooper, 1989, p. 112).

Two dominant lines of research are distinguishable in present literature on exiting. The first line of research centers on the process of exit using models of behavior change, whilst the second focuses mainly on the barriers and challenges experienced by individuals in exiting. This research was mainly conducted in the United States and Canada. No research has been done on the process of exiting sex work in South Africa; nor their needs once they have exited, particularly in the context of low socio-economic status (SES) areas. Leaving sex work is not a spontaneous event, but a process (Dalla, 2006). Furthermore, the importance of structural and societal factors influencing the exiting process means that strategies employed must be specific to the population and cannot be generalized to all populations (Dalla, 2006). Research is needed to fully understand how the process of exit and barriers to it manifest in the lives of low SES South African women, before policies can be developed to provide interventions to facilitate the process of exit.

In order to fully understand the nature of the exit process, an integrated model and a myriad of barriers that have been established as significantly hindering efforts to exit, must be considered.

An Integrated Model for the Process of Exit

The integrated model by Baker, Dalla and Williamson (2010) has been chosen as useful framework for understanding the process of exiting sex work as it encapsulates both models of behaviour change (e.g. Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988; Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992) as well as models specific to the process of exiting (e.g. Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Sanders, 2007). The first stage of exit according to this model is characterized as *immersion*, referring to the full involvement in the sex work industry where the individual has no intentions of exiting. Immersion is followed by a stage in which the individual becomes *aware* of desires to exit, first viscerally, and later consciously accepting these desires. The third stage of exit is termed *deliberate planning*, where an individual begins to assess their resources – both formal and informal – for exiting. Then follows the *initial exit*, where the individual makes her first break from sex work and begins to actively engage with supportive resources. What follows this may either be a re-entry into sex work, and a return to stage two – *awareness* – or, a successful and permanent exit from sex work.

It is commonly accepted that most women will experience at least two cycles of entry-exit-re-entry prior to successfully leaving sex work. Although this model has not been used in research before, it is based on a comprehensive review of the literature that

synthesizes models that have been previously used in sex work research (Baker, Dalla & Williamson, 2010).

Barriers to Exiting Sex Work

Research focusing on the barriers or challenges to exit emphasizes the substantial economic difficulties, as well as other practical issues such as finding alternative work or housing, that women are faced with in the process of exit (Manopaiboon et al., 2003). This line of research has produced a rich knowledge base, which forms an understanding of the difficulties faced in exiting. Baker, Dalla, and Williamson (2010) provide the following framework for considering the predominant barriers to exit.

Individual Factors

Research among women in the process of exiting sex work has illustrated that psychological trauma and other mental health issues (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, bipolar disorder) are very common among those who have not been successful in exiting (Dalla, 2006; Dalla, Xia, & Kennedy, 2003; Farley et al., 2004; Rabinovitch, 2004). Research on successful interventions that assist women in exiting sex work have also confirmed, that the opportunity to begin healing old wounds, whether they are ones that result from sex work or childhood abuse, is critical in facilitating women's successful exit (Hedin & Månsson, 2004; McClanahan, McClelland, Abram & Teplin, 1999; Saphira & Herbert, 2004). Additionally, substance abuse is often cited as going 'hand-in-hand' with sex work (Dalla, 2002; Dalla, 2006; Williamson & Folaron, 2003) and research indicates that the process of exiting sex work can only be completed once substance abuse has been dealt with (Brown et al., 2006; Gould, 2008; Nuttbrock et al., 2004)

Structural Factors

Economic necessity is one of the most widely cited structural barriers to leaving the sex work industry (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Brown et al., 2006; Gould, 2008; Manopaiboon et al., 2003). Different studies reveal differing particularities in how economic factors are experienced as preventing exit. Common themes often center on the difficulty of finding alternative employment that provides equivalent financial gain, is further compounded by practical issues, such as lack of experience (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Brown et al. 2006; Gould, 2008; Manopaiboon et al., 2003). Moreover, many individuals in sex work often become accustomed to an addictive 'instant lifestyle' made possible by the lucrative nature of the trade (Benoit & Millar, 2001).

Formal social support services are often included in the discussion of structural factors, and refer to aid agencies and programs that offer various services to women who are

trying to exit. Such initiatives offer various types of support, such as supportive housing, counseling and mental health care, vocational and life skills training, as well as assistance in gaining legal employment (Rabinovitch, 2004). Moreover, McClanahan et al. (1999) and Sanders (2007) have suggested that different mental health and social resource services should be on offer to women wanting to leave prostitution, depending on the way in which they came into the profession. This is reiterated by Strega et al. (2009) that these women should not be treated and seen as a homogenous group with the same needs, but rather as a group of people who have had various experiences in the industry and thus require differing interventions and needs from one another.

Relational and Societal Factors

Positive informal support from family has been identified as one of the most important factors in facilitating exit (Hedin & Månsson, 2004). Hedin and Månsson (2004) state that the importance of social support in facilitating exit lies in the ability of the women themselves to mobilize resources around them to help them heal old wounds, as well as to build new social networks separate from their old lives (Dalla, 2006; Williamson & Folaron, 2003).

Although the lack of social support is an important consideration, sex workers often experience a more general level of complete alienation from society as a whole (Brown et al., 2006). As a marginalized population, women in sex work are subject to heavy stigmatization and often discriminated against by 'mainstream' society (Baker, Wilson & Winebarger, 2004; Brown et al., 2006; Sanders, 2007), which prevents women from seeking help and from shedding their past identity in order to integrate into mainstream society (Brown et al., 2006 ; Oselin, 2009; Sanders, 2007).

A South African Perspective: Exit in a Context of Violence and Deprivation

Much of the above-mentioned research on barriers to exit from sex work has highlighted the importance of healing psychological trauma in the exit process. The extant literature recognizes the heterogeneity between the individual situations which lead to and out of sex work. Moreover, South African women in the sex work industry are subject to what is in many ways a unique context. The country's history of segregation, repression, enforced racial discrimination, malnutrition and poverty (Kale, 1995) as well as the status quo of deprivation and high exposure to violence makes the South African population rather distinctive. The South African population is at high risk for trauma (Williams, Williams, Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007), with 94% of a sample of urban Xhosa individuals reporting at least one traumatic life event, and a mean of 3.8 traumatic life events per person

(Carey, Stein, Zungu-Dirwayi & Seedat, 2003). Of such traumatic events, rape and assault – both of which sex workers are extremely vulnerable to – are the most likely to result in mental health problems (Williams et al., 2007). The context of multiple trauma (e.g. rape, assault and other violent crimes), compounded with the vulnerability of sex workers, as well as abject poverty and deprivation, are likely to significantly influence women's experiences of exit. Poverty and deprivation (Belle, 1990) as well as trauma (Carey et al., 2003), have significant adverse effects on mental wellbeing. The South African population has been shown to consist of generally low SES communities, as well as being at high risk for trauma (Williams et al., 2007).

This context of trauma and deprivation is compounded with a culture of violence against women (Coombe, 2002), in which rape has become normalized through the prevalence of rape myths (Cotton, Farley & Baron, 2002) e.g. sex workers cannot be raped (Gould, 2008). All of the above factors put sex workers at high risk for developing posttraumatic symptoms. Moreover, the lack of social support experienced by women in sex work further increases their vulnerability to developing posttraumatic stress (Ozer, Best, Lipsey & Weiss, 2003). Considering the heterogeneity recognized by the literature between the individual situations which lead to and from sex work, as well as the unique situation in which South African women in sex work are subject to, the local context of exit provides a valuable and necessary avenue for investigation.

Aims

This research aims to explore the experiences of women in exiting sex work, in the context of potential multiple trauma and poverty in informal settlements in Cape Town, in relation to the barriers to and processes of exit identified in the extant literature. The results of the study will thus inform the development of local psychosocial interventions to assist women in navigating the entry-exit-reentry cycle so common in sex trade. The management of psychological trauma has been cited as having a crucial role in facilitating successful exit from sex work (Hedin & Månsson, 2004). Therefore, the prevalence of trauma in South African communities, combined with a context of abject poverty and deprivation, is suggestive of the inapplicability of Western models to the South African context. The pertinence of existing models for exit will be evaluated through exploring the challenges and barriers women are faced with when exiting and the needs experienced specifically by women in the sample. The final results will be used to draw up a policy for parliament, which aims to address the need for interventions and formal support services in impoverished South African communities, to facilitate the process of exiting.

These aims lead to the research question - "What are the challenges faced by women of low socio-economic status in exiting sex work in a South African context."

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of this research are in feminist methodologies. Feminist research, like feminism itself, is not monolithic and resists the acceptance of any one type of methodology as being characteristically feminist. Although eclectic in nature, all feminist research methodologies do have certain commonalities – namely, (a) their focus and emphasis of women's experience, (b) the challenging of traditional 'malestream' scientific enquiry, (c) emphasis on issues of power in research, and finally (d) highlighting the political nature of research (Akman et al., 2001).

The importance and validity of women's experiences is a cornerstone of feminism and thus also feminist research methodologies, and is central to the manner in which feminism aims to highlight the experiences of oppressed and marginalized populations (Akman et al., 2001). Feminist research aims to generate knowledge on social injustices experienced by women. The importance of producing knowledge based on women's experiences lies in the critique of dominant social discourses (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). By giving voice to women's experiences in research, it hopes to produce knowledge that is not represented by dominant discourses. Although an exclusive focus on women is a debatable aspect of feminist theory and is in some ways considered 'standpoint' and outdated, this research subscribes to the view that gender is the most important oppression experienced by women in the global south, and thus focused exclusively on women sex workers (hooks, 2005; Mohanty, 2003).

To facilitate the exploration of women's experiences, feminist research challenges traditional scientific enquiry by highlighting the masculine values embedded within it (Akman et al., 2001). These 'malestream' values of objectivity and experimental research obscure the social context in which research participants are nonetheless enmeshed. This is especially harmful for the exploration of women' experience as it can cloud the importance of gender oppression and patriarchal value systems that determine women's lives (Akman et al.,2001). This research made use of qualitative research methods in order to better portray these experiences, as opposed to masking it in masculine, quantitative language (Campbell & Schram, 1995). Moreover, by identifying the challenges faced by women in the sex work industry, this research will challenge the power inequalities that operate to hold these women in an 'Othered', disenfranchised position.

In challenging traditional methods of scientific inquiry, feminist research methodologies concede the researcher's position as 'expert', and in this way, highlight the importance of power in the research situation (Akman et al., 2001). The importance of addressing power issues in feminist research stems from the understanding that by engaging in exploitative research practices where participants receive little real benefit for their participation or worse yet are deceived, will inadvertently contribute to "perpetuating their subordination" (Akman et al., 2001, p. 220). This research addressed power issues mainly through the use of focus groups, which have the potential to empower women through validation of experience. Moreover, the researchers were outnumbered and the women were given the freedom to discuss the issues they felt were most significant, with little steering of the discussion.

Finally, feminist research acknowledges that all knowledge is politically 'charged' (Akman et al., 2001). The researcher's freedom to choose ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies for producing knowledge highlights the political nature of knowledge creation, and prevents the researcher from "[escaping] their ideas, subjectivity, politics, ethics and social location" (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p.16). Importantly, this highlights the role of the researcher in producing an interpretation. In this way feminist research rejects the empiricist assumption that research has the ability to tap into an external reality, which is independent of the researchers assumptions, or dominant social discourses. Furthermore, this research will draw on an interpretative framework in conceding the impossibility of directly accessing the participant's life worlds. This will facilitate personal reflexivity throughout the process of data analysis, which is also central to feminist research (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002).

Methodologies

Design

Qualitative methodologies have been chosen, as they are suitable to the aims of the research as they leave more space for open-ended, inductive exploration (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2008). Furthermore, the feminist theoretical framework also informs the adoption of qualitative research methods. Although the issue remains contested, quantitative research methods have been described by some feminist researchers as producing masculine meanings through its "translation of individual experiences into categories" (Campbell & Schram, 1995, p. 89). Some researchers argue that this translation into categories defeats the aim of giving voice to women's experiences by effectively silencing the female aspects of experience (Campbell & Schram, 1995).

Finally, as sex work is a highly sensitive issue, assuming complete objectivity and impartiality on the part of the researchers does not seem advisable. Clearly such an issue will provoke thoughts and attitudes informed by the 'social imaginary' in which researchers find themselves (Brinkman, 2008). Acknowledging the importance of the researcher in interpreting the experience of participants leaves space for exploration of issues around reflexivity and meaning-making on the part of the researcher, which seems of great importance in researching sensitive issues like sex work (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

Participants

Sampling of participants was carried out on a purposive sampling basis. Sex workers are a highly marginalized population, and therefore, the researchers cooperated with an NGO, *Embrace Dignity*, currently working with sex workers who are in the process of exiting sex work, in identifying an opportunistic sample of participants. The women came to *Embrace Dignity* through a snowballing effect. An ex-sex worker, Susan, who was our translator during the focus groups, who has successfully exited sex work was initially recruited by the creators of *Embrace Dignity*. Through her contact with other sex workers, she spread the word of this NGO and its purposes, thereby recruiting further members as word spread. The women in *Embrace Dignity* were informed about the research and given the option of participating, resulting in our random purposive sampling.

Sampling was conducted among women sex workers active in the NGO, who were already engaging in the process of exit through participation in an intervention developed by the NGO. The intervention involved nine weekly self-help support group meetings for the women, each with a specific theme: affirmation, identity, cooperation, community, conflict, communication-listening, transforming power, individual goals. Broadly, the aim of these meetings was to empower women through sharing and validation, as well as teaching strategies for enhancing self-worth and developing a sense of self-identity.

Women who were currently in the process of attempting to exit from the sex industry were suitable to participate in the study. We limited this criterion to women who were not transgendered, as we believe that due to the institutionalized oppression of women in South African society, gender is thought to significantly influence experiences of the process of exiting sex work. Moreover, the research aims to address a particular juncture in the broader matrix of oppression, and thus focused only on women in sex work (Hill-Collins, 1990).

The researchers aimed to conduct three focus groups, with four to six participants per group – the recommended number (Willig, 2001) – and 12-18 female participants overall.

Due to the unpredictable nature of the lifestyle of sex workers, only two of the proposed three focus groups were conducted. Despite only conducting two focus groups, the desired total of 18 participants was still met. Moreover, as mentioned above, sampling was limited to women sex workers who were not transgendered and who had already begun the process of exit. As sampling was limited to the existing self-help groups arranged by the NGO, the researchers were unable to access any more groups that met all of the above criteria. Furthermore, the possibility of conducting more than one focus group interview in the groups that met criteria for participation was considered. However, it was rejected as the focus group interviews reached saturation quickly in terms of emerging themes, and the women expressed frustration at missing clients and losing income during these focus group interviews. Respecting these limits placed on the research context by the women was considered extremely important for addressing the imbalance of power between researchers and participants.

Data Collection and Procedure

The focus group method was chosen, as it is appropriate for exploratory and interpretive research questions, such as the one addressed in this research. The groups were given a question to discuss. Six broad questions were determined before the focus groups to aid in the flow of the discussion. These were: 'How long have you worked in the sex work industry?', 'What have your experiences been like?', 'When did you decide you wanted to leave sex work?', 'What made you decide you wanted to leave sex work?', 'Have you tried exiting before?' and 'What makes it difficult for you to leave?/What are the challenges you are faced with?'. The researchers acted as facilitators to steer the discussion of the group, as well as facilitate participation by all members of the group (Wilkinson, 1999). As the research aims to capture the nature of a group of women's experiences in the sex work industry, the research made use of open-ended, non-directive interview questions around the topic of exiting sex work. The aim of these questions was to facilitate an environment of sharing, and was not aimed at checking participants' experiences against pre-formulated ideas.

By interviewing participants in a group and encouraging interactions between group members, the focus group interview facilitates much more than merely access to the participant's opinions. It enabled research to go farther by allowing participants to both challenge and qualify, as well as develop and extend what others are saying (Willig, 2001).

The sample of this research will be composed of a preexisting group of women who share not only a desire to exit sex work, but are also similar in their current life circumstances, namely in being Black women of low socio-economic status. Moreover, the

women were familiar with one another from being involved in the self-help intervention organized by the NGO. Thus, although the interviews addressed a sensitive subject matter, and posed potentially intimate questions about participants' experiences, the homogenous and preexisting nature of the groups, neutralized some of the effects of the sensitive nature of the subject matter (Willig, 2001). Additionally, the focus group method empowered participants through the validation of one another's experiences.

Focus groups have become a significant method of collecting data for feminist research over the past decade. Various advantages of using this methodology within the feminist paradigm have been identified. First, the setting was naturalistic and not artificially designed. This implies a 'natural' communication process between participants and the facilitators, including arguing, joking, disagreeing and challenging one another (Wilkinson, 1999).

Second, focus groups are in and of themselves social contexts. This prevents the pitfall of decontextualization and creates a context for meaning-making. The purpose of focus groups is to gain insights and data through group interaction, which would not be accessible without the group dynamics. This interaction among group participants encouraged the change from individual experiences towards a "collective sense-making" , which allows the researchers to observe the identities created through this interaction, as well as the construction of meaning (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 228).

Third, the use of focus groups avoids exploitation by shifting power from the researchers to the participants. The reduction of the researchers' power may be attributed to the number of participants in the group outweighing the facilitators present. This increased power of the participants is ideal within the feminist paradigm, as feminist research aims to empower marginalized groups, such as sex workers. The open-ended nature of focus groups allows participants to explore themes they find relevant, as well as express their feelings around the topic of conversation (Wilkinson, 1999).

Fourth, it has been suggested that the focus group method is useful in action research and encouraging social change. This research on sex workers may be classified as action research, in that it aims to directly affect and change women's lives. Furthermore, "in order to implement a nonhierarchical egalitarian research process, to ensure that research serves the interests of the oppressed, [and] to develop political awareness...interviews...must be shifted towards group discussion" (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 234). This creates a collective identity for the women and helps them conquer the social isolation from their families and communities.

Data Analysis

Feminist research does not indicate its preference of one method of data analysis over another. The methodology of collecting data, as well as the appropriate method of data analysis, is left up to the researcher (Rabiee, 2004).

Thematic analysis involves the identification of patterns, similarities or themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is widely used within psychology, however, there is no explicit agreement on how to conduct such an analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Rabiee, 2004).

Barriers to exiting sex work presented themselves as themes in the interviews, which made thematic analysis conducive as a method of understanding and interpreting the data. The process of analysis began with transcription of the interviews, which was followed by the researchers immersing and familiarizing themselves with the data, by listening to the tapes, reading the transcripts and observational notes, and immersing themselves in feminist theory (Rabiee, 2004; Terreblanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Overarching thematic categories were identified in the transcripts, and similarities between the two interviews were examined. Themes were then highlighted, cross-referenced and placed into the broader categories.

The data was first analyzed individually, after which the researchers discussed and assimilated their findings.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting research with human individuals requires a range of ethical considerations to be taken into account in every step of data collection and analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In the development of the interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the participants, these ethical issues are crucial (Eide & Kahn, 2008). These considerations were explored and the approval of an ethics committee was obtained before starting our research and data collection.

Informed Consent and Incentive

To show our gratitude and to provide an incentive for the involvement of the participants, we provided a lunch for the women on the day we conducted the focus groups. This lunch provided a relaxed atmosphere to enjoy each other's company outside the researcher-participant relationship and provided a smooth transition into the initial step in our research study.

Informed consent is the initial step towards ensuring an ethical study. This consent was obtained from the participants themselves before conducting the focus group. All participants were provided with a detailed sheet outlining the study. These details were read

out to them and explained if any aspect thereof was uncertain. Stressed in this explanation was the participant's agency to withdraw from the focus group at any point in time and that their participation was voluntary. Moreover, if they did decide to withdraw from the study, they would not be subject to any negative consequences from the organization. Furthermore, they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering (Smith et al., 2009). Once receiving the signatures of the participants, the focus group began.

Debriefing

Debriefing participants upon completion of the focus group is essential in the ethical procedure. The debriefing process involves closing up the group discussion and allowing participants to ask any further questions they may have. As the group of participants consisted of a vulnerable population, debriefing was seen as particularly imperative. In the event of negative or traumatic reactions during the focus group, the participant would have been referred to a counselor or a relevant person depending on the problem. In line with this concern, a registered counselor was present during the focus groups to intervene, should such problems arise. The debriefing session with the participants was completed once we were positive all participants were well and comfortable leaving the focus group.

Debriefing between facilitators entails contrasting and comparing the impressions of the focus group. The group and process undertaken was analyzed and an overall sense of the focus group interviews was recorded. Both forms of debriefing occurred immediately after conducting the focus groups.

Harm Versus Benefit

There were no immediate risks to the participants of this study. While the topic is sensitive, these women were prepared and voluntarily attended these focus groups. Further harms on the part of the participants may have included the potential of re-experiencing past trauma. As mentioned above, there was a counselor available should any such problems have arisen. The benefit of conducting this research outweighs the potential harms towards the participants. They are being heard and will be informed of their contribution towards informing policy to take to parliament, to create the change they want and need.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants were informed that the information received during the focus group would be kept confidential. Only the researchers, our supervisor and *Embrace Dignity* will have access to the raw data. The identity of the women is kept anonymous, with pseudonyms replacing their real names in writing up this research. The participants were informed that should any concerns regarding their wellbeing arise during the focus groups, for instance

physical abuse, their confidentiality might be broken. Before taking any necessary steps, this issue would have been discussed with the participant before taking action. Furthermore, confidentiality would not have been broken unless required by law (Siegel, 1979). If there was a possibility of information being revealed that could incriminate a participant, the facilitators intended to make her aware of this possibility and the resulting breach of confidentiality should she have revealed her secret (Cowburn, 2005).

Analysis and Discussion

The thematic analysis undertaken here is acknowledged as being a subjective interpretation of the transcribed interviews. It is coloured by the researchers' understandings of exit from sex work as a cyclical process, which is mediated by a number of individual, relational, structural and societal barriers. This understanding was used to guide the identification of themes in the analysis to facilitate for greater coherence.

Various themes were common to discussions in both focus group interviews. The following themes appeared in the texts and were identified as mediating the process of exiting sex work: past trauma; motherhood; partnerships; economic necessity; employment; social support; and gossip. An overarching theme that seems to pervade all categories of barriers was a tendency towards escapism as a protective mechanism for coping with the unbearable, chaotic and oppressed nature of their lives. Moreover, the themes that arose out of the analysis exemplify the significance of gender-based oppression in the women's lives, by contributing to barriers to exit from sex work. In the following section, each theme will be discussed individually, and the relevance of gender-based oppression in contributing to the emergence of these barriers will be explored.

Individual Factors

Individual factors such as mental health issues and healing from past trauma have been identified in existing literature as highly significant in facilitating successful exit (Hedin & Månsson, 2004; McClanahan, McClelland, Abram & Teplin, 1999; Saphira & Herbert, 2004). The most prominent individual factor emerging from the transcripts was past trauma.

Past Trauma

Narratives of past trauma from childhood and early adulthood were very common. When asked about their entry into sex work, most women spoke about abusive fathers and stepfathers. Superficially, the theme of past trauma seems pertinent only to entry processes, however past research indicates that factors leading into sex work and particularly childhood abuse, are significant barriers to exiting (Hedin & Månsson, 2004; McClanahan, McClelland, Abram & Teplin, 1999; Saphira & Herbert, 2004). This was identified as a significant barrier.

Susan: (translating for Maret) ...her father which she thought was her real was not her biological father, he was abusive and every now and then tell her you are not my child. And then she ran away to Cape Town....she was raped.

Such 'escapes' are common to many of the narratives the women told. Women were often forced to run away from their childhood homes by contextual factors like abuse. Parental abuse from fathers and stepfathers was often the first instance of gender-based oppression in the lives of these women. Abuse was rarely experienced at the hands of female relatives. Moreover, this abuse and the subsequent need to escape removed the women from their social support systems, as well as robbing them of other potential resources, such as relative financial stability and educational opportunities, the lack of which significantly contributed their initial entry into sex work. Furthermore, these other resources and their importance as barriers to exiting sex work also arose as significant themes in the focus groups, which will be discussed later.

Relational Factors

The lack of social support is one of the most significant relational factors that pose a barrier to exit (Hedin & Månsson, 2004). Social support is often initially lost when the women are forced to escape abusive childhood homes. Moreover, the women then begin to rely on partnerships of various kinds, which often disintegrate, leaving women with children and even more isolated. This reinforces sex work as the only option for survival in the absence of relational support, and in the presence of the pressures and demands of motherhood.

Social support

Positive social support from family and the community as a whole facilitates the exiting process (Hedin & Mansson, 2004). The women in this study reported experiencing a complete lack of social support from their families and communities.

Maret: ...no one can help me, what is going to help me is to go back on the streets.

Kate: Nobody was loving or supporting [me] in any way…Those people [I] thought it was family but it is not, and now [I have] to rely on other people.

The above quote also illustrates the manner in which family as social support was lost due to the breaking of ties, which was a result of the necessary escape from an abusive environment. The women are completely lacking a support system, on which they can rely both emotionally and financially for support in times of need. In the absence of a support system outside of sex work, the women are forced to rely on each other for support. The women did not report having any friendships outside of the sex work trade. Moreover, entry into sex work was often precipitated by friends involved in the industry.

> Kelly: …because it was her friends that influenced her that time…They motivated her to go with them to go stand… she told herself she was there to guard them but not to do business… She did not want to do that but the influence was there from her friends.

Furthermore, the presence of individuals still immersed in the trade can significantly influence a return to sex work, even after an initial break has been made.

> Janet: I was having friends in Langa... who were still in this business. So when we sitting down and we talk about this business, in my mind I am now thinking back.

The combination of a lack of positive support and the immediate presence of sources of negative social support is particularly dangerous for the women, who often become completely immersed in sex work as it is their only source of social companionship.

Partnerships

In the absence of other forms of social support, women were also forced to rely on their partners for emotional companionship and financial support. Notably, women were most often able to exit for longer periods of time with the help of a husband or boyfriend who could financially provide for them. This illustrates the patriarchal nature of the society in which they live. Situations with husbands and boyfriends varied widely, but were commonly characterized by a form of exchange whereby their partners provide for them as well as their dependents and expect marital benefits, such as sexual intercourse and domestic work, in return.

> Maret: ...there was this guy who was a client of mine he use to support me every day, and he wanted me to quit and he wanted to marry me. So I said ok fine let me give

myself to this guy. So I gave myself to this guy… He opened a shop for me… here is a spaza shop for you just take care of the shop.

Mary: I tell him you promise to support [my brother], now you do not that he needs money for so, even you do not support me.

This illustrates the manner in which their sexuality is traded for support in their personal lives, not only their professional lives. Moreover, this is exemplary of the patriarchal assumption that women are available sex, which seems to pervade both the public and the private spheres of the women's lives (Cooper, 1989). The mercenarial exchange of sex in the women's private lives illustrates the impact of sex work on them. In light of the way in which sex work transforms from a profession, to a pattern that is evident in the private space exemplifies the fact that sex work is not like any other profession in which services are traded (Overall, 1992). Rather, the public and private sphere merge into one, creating a difficulty in distinguishing where the work day ends, and their home life begins. This is illustrated by the following quote:

Mary: Here there is a bad habit, men are always following you everywhere, if we come out of this door...wherever you go, they want you, you do not know whether they love you or not so you better charge them.

The abuse experienced by the women at the hands of their clients becomes normalized, and thus the patriarchal oppression they are faced with in their work, is drawn into their private domains. This overlap between the public and private spheres makes the women more vulnerable to potential abuse at the hands of their partners. Some of the women also spoke about married 'sugardaddies', to whom they functioned essentially as mistresses. The blurring of boundaries between the public and private, and the normalization of the mercenary exchange of sex, is even more pronounced in these relationships.

Kate: ...because my sugar daddy, he have the wife and five kids, so I have to love him because of money…

The above excerpt highlights the manner in which the exchange of sex is inherently characterized by a power imbalance between the 'buyer' and 'seller', the latter of whom is

forced by circumstance to accept the nature of the agreement. The woman becomes dependent on their 'sugardaddy' and this power inequality precipitates the ability of the 'buyer' to control and abuse the 'seller', if 'buyer' feels 'seller' has not adequately fulfilled her gender role through the provision of sex.

Moreover, both husbands and 'sugardaddies' reinforced the women's dependence on them by objecting to and attempting to prevent the women from seeking employment to support themselves. In instances where women had exited sex work and were in relationships, they often wanted to find alternative employment. However the objection on the part of their husbands, often resulted in abuse and a breakdown of the relationship.

Susan: …so when I told him that I want to go look for a new job he was saying then, no I do not have a wife who can work while I am still alive… So I tell myself I am getting something in the house, there is nothing I do not get… but I am tired of a man now, I have to report where I am going what so ever.

Mary: …there you go, I find the job. That Monday he tell me no you want to go out and fuck around now, I say no, I just want the money to support my brother… he lock all the doors and he don't want me to take the interview in that shop. So I tell myself I am leaving this guy, because he is a shit.

When relationships broke down, this was most often the direct result of the women leaving. The reason for this was the power and control that their partners attempted to exert over them, and the women's rejection of this. Despite the fact that these partnerships provided the women with a level of financial stability, the desire for agency and power in their own lives was stronger than the financial support they received. Once the partnership had disintegrated, the women were forced to return to sex work. The above pattern illustrates the potential of sex work to empower women through the achievement of economic independence; however, autonomy and dignity cannot be gained from 'choices' made in the absence of viable alternatives (Cooper, 1989). Therefore, the gender oppression inherently present in the partnerships indirectly led to the forced return to sex work, by reinforcing the women's financial dependence on an exchange of their sexuality for material gain. The mercenary nature of the partnerships thus perpetuates the exchange of the women's sexuality in her public sphere.

Motherhood

Motherhood was not only seen as a reason for entering sex work, it was also a significant reason for remaining in and returning to the trade. Once partnerships have broken down and social support is not available to them, re-entry into sex work was often fueled by the fact that the women had children relying on them. The lack of social support and the abusive nature of the partnerships in which women were involved, exacerbated the pressures of motherhood.

Adrienne: [I] started by enjoying it, but now [have to] to because [I have] a child.

Susan: If my kids get everything they need and want then I am free, I am doing this job because of my kids. I do not want to be rich I want to afford for my kids.

The ability to support their children was very empowering for the women, in a context in which they perhaps otherwise have very little agency or power. The lack of power and control over their sexualities and finances within previous partnerships left the women disempowered and oppressed. By taking back agency and providing for their children, the women are regaining empowerment. Financial independence results in a sense of autonomy, which the women have been lacking within their partnerships (Cooper, 1989).

Structural Factors

Structural factors such as economic necessity and lack of alternative employment are widely accepted as the key factor, driving entry into sex work, as well as a significant barrier to exiting sex work (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Brown et al., 2006; Gould, 2008; Manopaiboon et al., 2003). Economic necessity and the lack of alternative employment, in conjunction with gender inequality in both educational and job opportunities, contribute to the entrapment of the women in sex work.

Economic necessity

As discussed above, women often reported entering sex work as a result of needing the money to support their children and families. Furthermore, even if a break was made from the industry, women reported having to return to sex work out of financial necessity.

Kate: We are there for the money they think we are there because we love the sex everyday, something puts us there it's the money.

Julia: I don't know how I can stop, if I can get the same salary, as before I can stop, but if I can't get job that will give me R3000 a month it is difficult, it won't be easy to stop because I know what money I can get in this business.

Economic necessity forms the core of what prevents women from leaving sex work. The importance of economic necessity can be seen in the manner in which it pervades various other themes, such as 'partnerships' and 'motherhood', the dynamics of which are inherently tied into this and have been explored above.

Employment

Despite reports by the women that "any job that you can get" will do, they struggled significantly to find alternative employment. They listed a number of their skills as a means to highlight the array of potentially different jobs they could be involved in. These included owning a creche, domestic work, beadwork, teaching and sewing.

Frances: [I] can also do hair… and also bead work.

Therefore, lack of education or employable skills cannot be seen as the only barrier to finding alternative employment. A further barrier to finding alternative employment is the lack of documentation and experience.

Janet: …but the time I wanna stop she is not have an I.D, I leave my job because the boss he wants the I.D, I get the I.D this year in February, that is why I come back to be a prostitute.

Without the appropriate documentation the women's employment opportunities are narrowed significantly, making finding jobs even more difficult. This difficulty in attaining basic personal documentation speaks to the institutionalized class oppression experienced by the women. Moreover, it highlights the extent to which they are marginalized in society. Moreover, the difficulty in finding alternative employment produces a vicious cycle, as the women lack tangible work experience, which further contributes to their difficulties in finding employment.

Tina: And if there is a gap, from 2000 till now, what were you doing…

Mary: They wanted the experience of the job and they also wanted, and references, those are the things they want.

On the other hand, when women had succeeded in finding alternative employment, difficulties with employers seemed to be a key reason for leaving said employment.

Kelly: I will end up fighting this women so let me rather leave this. So I came back again.

Maret: … then I have a problem there, then I decide to quit.
Facilitator: you had a problem with the person who gave you the job?
Maret: with my bosses.

The difficulty in interactions with employers, and the women's subsequent 'escape' from the employment situation, are reminiscent of the lack of power and agency in the private spheres as exemplified by their relationships. As the women are completely disempowered in their private lives by the various forms of gender oppression to which they are subjected, self-employment through sex work is seen as the only means of regaining power. More specifically, in difficulties with their employers, the women are once again subjected to inequality and abuse. In escaping yet another oppressive situation in which the women lack power, re-entry into sex work is the only viable alternative for them to regain autonomy and dignity.

Lily: ... it is not my dreams to work at Kauai [fast food chain]… that is why I said my own business will make me quit for good.

Moreover, the women spoke of having and fulfilling their dreams. The contradiction between dream fulfillment on one hand, and the women reporting that any job would do on the other, alludes to their awareness of the desperate nature of their situation. The hope created by the presence of dreams allows a sense of escapism for the women, from their unbearable situation and oppression.

Societal Factors

The marginalization from 'mainstream' society the women experience in their communities, due to the stigma of being sex workers, is evidenced by the continuous gossip

they are subjected to on a daily basis (Baker, Wilson & Winebarger, 2004; Brown et al., 2006; Sanders, 2007). Although the purchase of sex defines both man and woman equally, it condemns only the woman (Overall, 1992). The 'whore' stigma is reserved for women.

Gossip

As discussed above, the women feel they are excluded and isolated from their immediate families and social support systems. This is extended to their communities alienating them through stigmatization, evidenced by the gossip and name-calling that the women are subjected to. The women mention their neighbours and community gossiping about them. Various degrees of gossip exist within their communities. Some takes the form of whispering behind their backs and spreading stories about the women.

> Susan: maybe someone saw you there in the road and then they go and tell everyone in location.

Other forms of gossip are more extreme, and are characterized by blatant name-calling, swearing and insulting remarks.

> Susan: So other people make us feel very hurt, when I walk in the street I think to myself that I am useless, why are people always swearing us, prostitutes, they must come and ask us why we are here, what we are doing here, what make us to stand here.

The varying degrees of gossip contribute to an alienated and stigmatized existence for the women within their communities. Moreover, it exemplifies the control over women through the dynamic of the 'whore' stigma, which is used to condemn women and reinforce their oppression (Overall, 1992). This leads to isolation and a lack of social support, which has been noted to be significant in exiting sex work (Hedin & Månsson, 2004).

The above discussion of individual themes identified in the focus group interviews highlights how the lack of power and agency form an overarching theme in the women's lives. The women are completely disempowered and disenfranchised by the gender oppression, which permeates all aspects of their lives. This is evidenced by the gendered nature of the main barriers to exit that were identified in the analysis – namely, past trauma, motherhood, partnerships, social support, economic necessity, employment and gossip. The

discussion of these themes illustrated examples of oppression that are specific to women. This is evidence for the argument made by Mohanty (2003) concerning the significance of gender as the most important form of oppression, especially in the global south. Notably, although the women experience other oppressions such as those of class and race, gender oppression seems to permeate all aspects of their existence, and has been crucial in leading to their initial entry into sex work, as well subsequent instances of re-entry.

Therefore it seems that process of exit from sex work in a township context in South Africa, cannot be understood independently of the highly patriarchal nature of the society. The process of exit in South African townships is thus different from the process of exit in developed Western countries, not because of the impact of high levels of trauma, but because of the extremely disempowered and marginalized nature of these women's position in South African society. The gender oppression experienced by these women is qualitatively different to that experienced by women in the West, as it contributes to the oppressions of class and race experienced by these women. The resultant context of deprivation and lack of opportunity in the township context mean that prostitution is even less likely to occur as the result of a process of choice than it is in the West.

Moreover, research on sex work conducted in developed Western countries which explores the individual, relational, social and structural factors in isolation from the consideration of the importance of patriarchal values in society, is insufficient in the South African context. The excessive focus in extant literature on models and barriers to exiting sex work, necessarily assumes that women have the power to exit sex work. As is evidenced by this research, this approach is inappropriate in the South African context, as it does not take into account the substantial obstacles faced by women in institutionalized gender oppression. The women in this study repeatedly expressed their desire to exit sex work, and yet were unable to do so. This is evidence that in the context of patriarchal society, these women do not hold the power required to exit, despite their concerted efforts to do so. Moreover, the assumption that women have the power to exit sex work is based on the underlying perception of entry into sex work as free choice. The results of this research clearly illustrate that entry into sex work was not a function of choice, as choosing the lesser of two evils is no choice at all.

Not only does this kind of approach fail to produce a sufficient understanding of the process of exit in low SES contexts, but by assuming that women have the power to exit sex work, it risks disintegrating into a pattern of victim blaming. The message given to the women is that they should be able to exit, and that the fault for their failure to do so lies

within them. Such victim blaming leaves the women even more disempowered, and further reinforces their entrapment in sex work.

Moreover, the current intervention in which the women are involved also has the potential to further disempower them. By focusing on micro-level issues such as identity, conflict and communication, the intervention implicitly assumes that the most significant obstacle facing the women is their lack of identity and self-management. The above discussion of themes from the focus group interviews illustrates however, that the most significant barrier to exiting is the institutionalized gender oppression and the consequent lack of power to which the women are subjected. This disempowerment pervades all aspects of the women's existence, and sex work becomes the only viable way for them to regain some modicum of economic independence, autonomy and dignity.

Power Relations and Reflexivity

The relationship between the researcher and participants must be constantly considered. As the researchers, we come from a middle class, white and educated background, which influences not only our behaviour towards the participants but also the questions asked by the research, as well as the way in which the answers to these questions are interpreted (Parker, 2005; Rabiee, 2004). It is, however, argued that the qualitative paradigm reduces the power inequalities between the researcher and the participants, as disclosure and authenticity is encouraged in this environment (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009).

One of the most significant ways in which our identity impacted the research and became salient was during the focus group interviews. The power inequalities between the researchers and participants with the Khayelitsha group were reduced, by the establishment of rapport through personal disclosure before the focus group interview. This bridged the power gap between the researchers and participants by somewhat blurring this boundary. Our experience with the Langa group differed significantly from our experiences with the Khayelitsha group, due to the frustration and anger directed towards us by the women. This sharply defined the boundary between the researchers and participants, and emphasized the power imbalance. We felt this through the participants blaming and attacking us, for not giving them money and not providing lunch for their children too. This highlighted our 'white middle class-ness', in contrast to their evident poverty-stricken situation, and spoke to the significance of the undeniable differences between our situation and theirs. Their anger and accusations further created a sense of disempowerment for us, thereby reducing the equal power relations necessary in the focus group setting. This disempowerment stemmed from

the fact that we lost control over the direction of the research. While we initially saw this loss of control as being detrimental for the outcome of our research, the increased empowerment this led the women to have in the focus group process, benefited the results of this research seen from the feminist perspective our analysis was based in.

Significance and Limitations

The results of this research will be relayed to the organization, *Embrace Dignity*, whereafter they will be used to inform policy at a parliamentary level, regarding the interventions and resources required for exit from sex work.

The theoretical framework of any piece of research inevitably constrains the findings of the research. Notably, the greatest potential weakness of the chosen methodology is its assumption of experience as the basis of knowledge. Such assumptions have been commonly criticized for their acceptance of experience as factual, rather than as constructed through discourse and politics (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002).

A limitation of the methodology of this research was the use of the focus group method. Contradictory to what was initially believed to increase disclosure from the participants, due to the empowering nature of numbers for vulnerable populations, the participants disclosed more personal information about their experiences as sex workers in one-on-one conversations with researchers.

The most significant limitation of the research was the initial assumption that labeling 'sex work' as such would detract from the negative connotations, and thus experience, of prostitution. Our own discomfort in accepting that prostitution as institutionalized oppression and as symptomatic of the broader system of the patriarchal oppression of women, was instrumental in our decision to use the term 'sex work'. Moreover, this discomfort significantly influenced the focus of the research in the data collection phase, by emphasizing the importance of micro-level factors in preventing exit. This focus prevented empowerment of the women through the validation of their experience as *prostitution*. As discussed initially, the use of the term 'sex work' implies that this is a legitimate and non-harmful form of income generation, akin to any other, where personal services are exchanged for material gain. Notably however, the women in our study referred to themselves as 'prostitutes' and not 'sex workers' or 'sisters' as was initially suggested by the NGO. Therefore, the insistence on the terminology of 'sex work' prevented the validation of their abuse, and effectively facilitated the understanding that intervention on a micro-level can make a difference. In retrospect, acceptance of their self-claimed status as prostitutes would have been helpful in highlighting and validating the gender oppression they are experiencing.

Conclusion

The results of this research highlight the importance of patriarchal values in society and their effects on women's experiences of sex work. The institutionalized gender oppression prevalent in society means that in the public sphere women are afforded fewer opportunities for economic independence and autonomy, and that these oppressions are reinforced by the women's experiences of gender oppression in the private sphere. This gender oppression can take many forms and pervades all domains of the women's lives. Moreover, it leaves the women devoid of the power to make choices concerning their professions freely. The extent to which women are trapped in sex work, as a result of contextual pressures, should be acknowledged. Therefore, future research and interventions for facilitating exit from sex work should focus on efforts at consciousness-raising and education of women on gender oppression and the wider societal forces that influence their lives. This would avoid the victim-blaming inherent to approaches that focus on the individual and her choices and identity (Norsworthy & Kuankaew, 2008). Such approaches make the implicit assumption that women involved in prostitution have chosen out of free will to do so. What logically follows from this assumption is the belief that they also hold the power to exit prostitution. This research shows that in the context of a South African township, this assumption is false. Moreover, holding on to this false assumption, impedes any attempts at facilitating exit by ignoring the nature of prostitution as abuse and as the result of the widely accepted institutionalized gender oppression in our society.

References

Akman, D., Toner, B., Stuckless, N., Ali, A., Emmot, S. & Downie, F. (2001). Feminist issues in research methodology: The development of a cognitive scale. *Feminism & Psychology 11*, 209 – 227.

Baker, L. M., Dalla, R. L., & Williamson, C. (2010). Exiting prostitution: An integrated model. *Violence Against Women, 16*, 579-600.

Baker, L. M., Wilson, F. L., & Winebarger, A. L. (2004). An exploratory study of the health problems, stigmatization, life satisfaction and literacy skills of urban, street-level sex-workers. *Women & Health, 39*, 83-96.

Belle, D. (1990). Poverty and women's mental health. *American Psychologist, 45*, 385-389.

Benoit, C., & Millar, A. (2001). *Dispelling myths and understanding realities: Working conditions, health status, and exiting experiences of sex workers.* Retrieved April 2, 2011, from www.peers.bc.ca/pubs.html.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3,* 77-101.

Brinkman, S. (2008). Changing psychologies in the transition from industrial society to consumer society. *History of the Human Sciences, 21,* 85-110.

Brown, J., Higgitt, N., Miller, C., & Wingert, S. (2006). Challenges faced by women working in the inner city sex trade. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research, 15,* 36-53.

Campbell, R. & Schram, P. J. (1995). Feminist research methods: A content analysis of psychology and social science textbooks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 19,* 85-106.

Carey, P. D., Stein, D. J., Zungu-Dirwayi, N., & Seedat, S. (2003). Trauma and posttraumatic stress in urban Xhosa primary care population: Prevalence, comorbidity and service use patterns. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 191,* 230-236.

Coombe, C. (2002). HIV/AIDS and trauma among learners: Sexual violence and deprivation in South Africa. In J. G. Maree, & L. Ebersöhn (Eds.), *Lifeskills within the caring professions: A career counseling perspective for the biotechnical age.* Cape Town: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

Cooper, B. (1989). Prostitution: A feminist analysis. *Women's Rights Law Reporter, 11*, 99 – 119.

Cotton, A., Farley, M. & Baron, R. (2002). Attitudes towards prostitution and acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology 32*(9), 1790 – 1796.

Cowburn, M. (2005). Confidentiality and public protection: Ethical dilemmas in qualitative research with adult male sex offenders. *Journal of Sexual Aggression, 11,* 49-63.

Dalla, R. L. (2002). Night moves: A qualitative investigation of street-level sex work. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 26,* 63-73.

Dalla, R. L. (2006). "You can't hustle all your life": An exploratory investigation of the exit process among street-level prostituted women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30,* 276-290.

Dalla, R. L., Xia, Y., & Kennedy, H. (2003). "You just give them what they want and pray they don't kill you": Street-level sex workers reports of victimization, personal resources and coping strategies. *Violence Against Women, 9,* 1367-1394.

Eide, P., & Kahn, D. (2008). Ethical issues in the qualitative researcher-participant relationship. *Nursing Ethics, 15,* 199-207.

Farley, M., Cotton, A., Lynne, J., Zumbeck, S., Spiwak, F., Reyes, M. E., Alvarez, D., & Sezgin, U. (2004). Prostitution and trafficking in nine countries: An update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Trauma Practice, 2,* 33-74.

Farley, M., Baral, I., Kiremire, M., & Ufuk, S. (1998). Prostitution in five countries: Violence and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Feminism and Psychology, 8,* 405-426.

Fuchs-Ebaugh, H. R. (1988). *Becoming an ex: The process of role exit.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gould, C. (2008). *Selling sex in Cape Town: Sex work and human trafficking in a South African city.* Cape Town: Institute for Security Studies.

Hedin, U., & Månsson, S. A. (2004). The importance of supportive relationships among women leaving prostitution. *Journal of Trauma Practice, 2,* 223-237.

Hill-Collins, P. (1990). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and th Politics of Empowerment.* London: HarperCollins.

hooks, b. (2005). *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate politics.* London: Pluto.

Kale, R. (1995). New South Africa's mental health. *British Medical Journal, 310,* 1254-1256.

Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier, R., & Pessach, L. (2009). Power relations in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 19,* 279-289.

Manopaiboon, C., Bunnell, R. E., Chaikummao, S., Limpakarnjanarat, K., Supawitkul, S., St.Louis, M. E., & Mastro, T. D. (2003). Leaving sex work: Barriers, facilitating factors and consequences for female sex workers in northern Thailand. *AIDS Care, 15*, 39-52.

McClanahan, S. F., McClelland, G.M., Abram, K.M., & Teplin, L.A. (1999). Pathways in to prostitution among female jail detainees and their implications for mental health services. *Psychiatric services, 50*, 1601-1613.

Månsson, S. A. & Hedin, U. C. (1999). Breaking the Matthew effect - on women leaving prostitution. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 8*, 67-77.

Mattu, K. K. (2007). *An exploration of the emotional regulation strategy of dissociation on women's attempts to exit the sex trade.* (Unpublished Master's). Trinity Western University.

Mohanty, C. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing theory, Practicing Solidarity.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Norsworthy, K. & Khuankaew, O. (2008). A New View from women of Thailand on gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS. *Feminism & Psychology 18*, 527 – 536.

Nuttbrock, L. A., Rosenblum, A., Magura, S., Villano, C., & Wallace J. (2004). Linking female sex workers with substance abuse treatment. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 27,* 233-239.

Oselin, S. S. (2009). Leaving the streets: Transformation of prostitute identity within the prostitution rehabilitation program. *Deviant Behaviour, 30,* 379-406.

Overall, C. (1992). What's wrong with prostitution? Evaluating sex work. *Signs, 17,* 704 – 724.

Ozer, E.J., Best, S.R., Lipsey, T.L. & Weiss, D.S. (2003). Predictors of Posttraumatic stress disorder and symptoms in adults: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin 129*, 52-73.

Parker, I. (2005). *Qualitative psychology. Introducing radical research.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Prochaska, J. O., DiClemente, C. C., & Norcross, J. C. (1992). In search of how people change: Applications to addictive behaviours. *American Psychologist, 47,* 1102-1114.

Rabiee, F. (2004). Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, 63,* 655-660.

Rabinovitch, J. (2004). PEERS. *Journal of Trauma Practice, 2*, 239-253.

Ramazanoğlu, C. & Holland, J. (2002). *Feminist methodology: Challenges and choices.* London: SAGE Publications.

Sanders, T. (2007). Becoming an ex-sex worker: Making transitions out of a deviant career. *Feminist Criminology, 2,* 74-95.

Saphira, M., & Herbert, A. (2004). *Exiting commercial sexual activity.* Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved April 2, 2011, from http://www.ecpat.org.nz/Other/Researches/ExitingCommercialSexualActivity.aspx.

Siegel, M. (1979). Privacy, ethics, and confidentiality. *Professional Psychology, 10,* 249-258.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research.* London: SAGE Publications.

Strega, S., Casey, L., & Rutman, D. (2009). Sex workers addressing treatment. *Women's Health and Urban Life, 8,* 42-53.

Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K., & Painter, D. (2006). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences (2nd ed.).* Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Trulsson, K., & Hedin, U. C. (2004). The role of social support when giving up drug abuse: A female perspective. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 13,* 145-157.

Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus groups in feminist research: Power, interaction, and the co-construction of meaning. *Women's Studies International Forum, 21,* 111-125.

Wilkinson, S. (1999). Focus groups: A feminist method. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 23,* 221-244.

Williams, S. L., Williams, D. R., Stein, D. J., Seedat, S., Jackson, P. B., & Moomal, H. (2007). Multiple traumatic events and psychological distress: The South Africa stress and health study. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 20,* 845-855.

Williamson, C., & Folaron, G. (2003). Understanding the experiences of street level prostitutes. *Qualitative Social Work, 2,* 271-287.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

World Medical Organization. Declaration of Helsinki. (2000). Retrieved 19 May, 2011 from www.who.int/bulletin/archives/79(4)373.pdf.

Appendices

Appendix A
Focus Group Stimulus Questions

1) How long have you worked in the sex work industry?

2) What have your experiences been like?

3) When did you decide you wanted to leave sex work?

4) What made you decide to leave sex work?

    a)   A specific event?

    b)   A realization?

5) Have you tried exiting before?

    a)   When?

    b)   Why?

    c)   For how long?

    d)   What made you reenter?

    e)   How often have you tried exiting?

6) What makes it difficult for you to leave?/What are the challenges you are faced with?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Exploring the Process of 'Exit': Exploring needs in leaving sex work

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us (contact details supplied below) if there is anything that is not clear to you or if you feel you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The purpose of this study is to explore the process of leaving sex work as it is experienced by women currently working in the sex trade industry and who are involved with *Embrace Dignity*. Participation in this research will involve taking part in one focus group session. The focus group session will consist of a 1-2 hour long group interview with 3-5 other women involved in the sex trade industry and currently attending meetings at *Embrace Dignity*. The other people present during interviews will include the investigators (Suvi Hakala and Marike Keller) as well as the research supervisor and counselling psychologist (Dr. Despina Learmonth). During this interview, you will be asked to participate in discussion around the topic of leaving sex work, such as – "When did you first begin working in the sex trade industry?". The group interviews are designed to provide us with information related to the barriers and challenges you find to be most important in helping you leave sex work for good. The questions that will be asked during this discussion will be of a sensitive nature. Your participation in this study does not require you to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The group interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The only people who will have access to this information are the researchers, the research supervisor and the *Embrace Dignity* management team. Any research findings presented in reports will be completely anonymous – there will be no details by which any of the participations in this study can be identified.The research findings will be analysed by the investigators. This research will contribute to their investigators' Honours degrees. The data may also be looked at by the research supervisor, who is a chartered psychologist. Both the investigators and their research supervisor will have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and nothing that could reveal your identity will be disclosed outside of *Embrace Dignity*.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. A decision to withdraw will not affect participation in any other activities at *Embrace Dignity*, nor will it affect your compensation.

The results of this study will be analysed by members of the research team (listed below) and used to learn more about what women experience to be the greatest challenges in leaving sex work. We cannot promise the study will help you personally, but the information we get might help improve the activities and services provided to women who are trying to leave sex work.

Once the study is completed, copies of the study's findings will be available at *Embrace Dignity*. The researchers will also arrange a presentation of the research findings at the *Embrace Dignity* premises once the study is completed.

This study was given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct by the University of Cape Town Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee.

When you have read this information sheet, and if you sign the consent form, you can take the duplicate copy of this information sheet along with the duplicate copy of your signed consent form to keep. If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak with the researchers, who will do their best to answer your questions (see list of contact details below).

If you would like any further information or have any questions please contact:

Suvi Hakala

BSocSci (Hons) programme, Psychology Dept, University of Cape

Town, Level 4 Graduate School of Humanities Building, University

Avenue

E-mail: suvihakala3@gmail.com

Marike Keller

BSocSci (Hons) programme, Psychology Dept, University of Cape

Town, Level 4 Graduate School of Humanities Building, University

Avenue

E-mail: marike.keller@gmail.com

Dr Despina Learmonth

Counselling Psychologist, Room 4.32, Psychology Dept., University of

Cape Town, Level 4 Graduate School of Humanities Building, University

Avenue

E-mail: despina@drlearmonth.com

Thank you very much for taking part in this study.

Declaration of Informed Consent

Exploring the Process of 'Exit': Exploring needs in leaving sex work

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