ABSTRACT

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"THE HELP I GET, MAKES IT WORK": EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SUPPORT ON WOMEN WHO WORK IN THE SEX INDUSTRY (204PP.)

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This study's aim is to better understand how women who work in the sex industry navigate their multifaceted lives. To accomplish this, 29 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with cis-women who had worked in the sex industry within the past 5 years. This sample contained a significant number of moms (65.5%), which enabled a better understanding of the different needs and challenges that moms and non-moms in the study faced. The interviews addressed the overarching research question of how women who work in the sex industry navigate *both* their work *and* private lives. All of the participants noted that support from others, even when minimal or lacking sincerity, had a positive impact on them. This research identified multiple forms of support within the narratives that helped the women navigate their lives. Support themes that emerged from the narratives included conditional support, casual support, steady support, and caregiving. These support themes varied in consistency and strength, with casual support providing the least support and caregiving providing the most support for the women. Additionally, while the source of the support was identified as important, with partners, friends, and close family often providing steady support and caregiving, it was not consistent as many women chose not to disclose their status as a sex worker. Lastly, the narratives identified three caregiving subthemes, understanding, caregiving by proxy, and stigma management, that helped the women navigate their lives. This research increases our understanding of how women in the sex industry navigate their lives and the impact that various types of support have on them.

“THE HELP I GET, MAKES IT WORK”: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SUPPORT ON WOMEN WHO WORK IN THE SEX INDUSTRY

A dissertation submitted

to Kent State University in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the

degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my children Isabel & Christopher, my husband Bryan, my mom Betty Ann, family, and friends for all of their support during this dissertation. Your support has been invaluable during this process. I appreciate the time, care, and grace you have given me over these past years that has helped me complete this program and reach my goal.

Next, I would like to thank my advisor, Tiffany Taylor, for her unending patience, support, and encouragement during this dissertation and my time at Kent. I would also like to thank my committee for their support and invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank my colleagues, my professors, and the support staff in my department for all of their care and consideration over the past seven years.

Finally, I would like to thank the sex workers and the sex work community for their help and support on this project. Thank you to the many sex work support organizations that shared my flyer and contact information with their communities. I would like to especially thank COYOTE Rhode Island, SWOP Pittsburgh, SWOP Chicago, and Cleveland Sex Workers Association for taking the time to get to know me and this project. Lastly, I would like to thank the amazing women that shared their time, knowledge, and experiences with me for this project. I could not have done this without them and their contributions.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

In the United States the stigma and illegality of sex work has shifted dramatically in the past 50 year (Benoit and Mellor 2023; Cao, Lu, and Mei 2017; Lou 2020; Weitzer 2010a). Since the 1970s there has been a shift in the visibility of various forms of sex work. The move to the mainstream of movies like *Behind the Green Door* and the legalization of prostitution in parts of Navada are evidence of this shift (Albert 2001; Goldman 2012). More recently, due in part to the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in people trying online sex work and being open about one's sex worker identity via online social media platforms as a form of destigmatization and sex positivity (Benoit and Mellor 2023; Cao, Lu, and Mei 2017; Lou 2020). Adding to this are the changes to legal policies in some large cities to decriminalize prostitution (Benoit and Mellor 2023; Lou 2020). These changes represent the shift in how sex work is viewed in society and the stigma attached to it. However, while the stigma has been reduced, and certain forms of sex work are legal or decriminalized, stigma is still present and impacts the lives of those who work in the sex industry.

While the stigma and legality of sex work can negatively impact the worker's lives, the flexible schedule and high pay make this work attractive to some. Past research has noted that the high income and flexible work schedule has made this work attractive to women as it is one of the few high paid and (seemingly) low skilled jobs available to them (Albert 2001; Chapkis 1997; Flavin 2009; Hoang 2010; Jones 2020).

Early literature on sex workers has focused on women's participation in this stigmatized profession, often focusing on street-level prostitution (Albert 2001; Barton 2002, 2006; Price-

Glynn 2010; Sanders, O'Neil, and Pritchard 2009; Weitzer 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). This fed into the narrative that sex work is inherently exploitative and sex workers are abused women who sell sex to fund their drug habit (Chapkis 1997). More recent scholars have widened the scope of inquiry and examine various form of sex work and more deeply examining the motivations and lives of those who work in the industry.

Sex work as paid work is one of the more recent avenues of research. It looks at sex work as another form of paid work, requiring emotion management like service workers routinely use with their customers. Emotions are managed through regulating and altering emotional states. When this regulation is part of one's paid work, it is called emotional labor. When done, unpaid, as part of one's personal life, it is called emotion work. Managing emotional states is done internally and externally. Internally, emotional regulation is done using reorientation, such as reframing negative criticism as helpful advice. Externally, the modification in the emotional mental states of others comes from the verbal and non-verbal behaviors we direct toward them. Through positive interactions and social cues, individuals can change the emotional state and, through that, other's behaviors (Hochschild 1979). Thus, engaging in positive external emotional management can positively impact other’s lives.

Jones’ (2020) interviews with cam models framed the emotional labor used to signal authenticity and maintain a good relationship with their clients on camming sites as vital to their ability to generate a steady income. Haong (2010) explores this further, noting the different types of prostitution required different forms of emotional labor as only the regular clients who wanted the Girlfriend Experience (GFE) required the women in her study to create and maintain good relationships with clients.

While emotional labor (paid emotion management) and emotion work (unpaid emotion management) are viewed as the "separate spheres" of work and family, these spheres often blur together, with paid work affecting family life and family life affecting paid work. This blurring is frequently referred to as "spillover." Spillover generally refers to a negative or positive impact from one area of life on a different area of life. Though it receives little scholarly attention, one such place that this spillover occurs is among sex workers, specifically sex workers who are also mothers.

While the definition of parenting has evolved, it is strongly influenced by the gender of the parent. In the United States, the expectations placed on mothers are high, as is the stigma attached to not meeting them. According to the Pew Research Center, 77% of Americans viewed being an involved parent as a stressor for women in the United States (Parker, Horowitz, and Stepler 2017). Mothers are expected to be a child's primary caregiver, even when employed outside the home, despite few structural supports (Arendell 1999; Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). Researchers note that all forms of mothering require some amount of emotion work (the *unpaid* emotional management of oneself and others) but what it looks like varies across society (Arendell 1999; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1979, 1996). Several theoretical perspectives describe approaches to mothering and how mothers balance childcare responsibilities with their professional lives.

One of the most influential perspectives, called intensive mothering, involves the expectations and practices needed to be labeled a "good" mom. Intensive mothering centers around the assumptions that mothers are natural caregivers who should put their children's needs first and find motherhood an intrinsically satisfying experience. Over time, intensive parenting has grown to include the enrichment of children through education, activities, and additional

involvement by mothers (Arendell 1999; Biernat 2007; Correll et al. 2007; Hays 1996; Liss, Schiffrin, Mackintosh, Miles-McLean and Erchull 2013; Taylor 2011). This intensive focus on children requires mothers to use emotional, temporal, and monetary resources to meet these expectations. While parenting expectations vary by social statuses, intensive mothering has become a hegemonic standard by which all mothers are judged by society and the state (Arendell 1999; Crittenden 2010; Flavin 2009). The intensive mothering expectations assume access to the middle-class's economic and social capital. Expectations include parents (usually mothers) finding work that is well-paying and has reduced or flexible hours that enable their focus on a child's development (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild and Machung 2003). The structural realities such as lower incomes for women, increased single-parenthood, and the lack of flexible work schedules makes this goal unattainable for many mothers (Albert, 2001; Crittenden 2010; Flavin 2009; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jones 2020). Even if mothers do not have access to the socioeconomic resources necessary for this type of parenting, those who do not adhere to intensive expectations are penalized by the larger society for not meeting the standard.

There is evidence that some women use alternative or informal labor markets to bridge the gap between the expectations of mothering and the financial realities of the traditional labor market (Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). Some of these jobs fall into traditionally feminine pursuits, such as childcare or cleaning (see Ehrenreich 2001). While these jobs offer the ability to work from home or flexible hours that can facilitate mothering, they often are low paying and lack occupational prestige needed to attain middle-class status and the social capital of intensive mothering (Ehrenreich 2001; Flavin 2009).

The strain of mothering expectations coupled with the lack of social supports for mothers who work, and the scarcity of well-paying flexible work opportunities leads some mothers to

cope by engaging in stigmatized occupations, such as sex work. While stigmatized by society, these jobs can enable people to make a living wage on a schedule that works for them without formal educational requirements. Even legal sex work, like stripping, carries a stigma that can potentially become an additional source of strain for mothers. Managing the stigma from sex work is a complex process that requires the worker to engage in emotion work to address the knowledge, expectations, and attitudes within their personal relationships. Managing personal relationships is even more important for mothers who often rely on intimates within their social networks for social, emotional, and tangible support, like childcare (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2003; Hays 1996; Flavin 2009; Hochschild and Machung 2003).

Adding to the strain from increased emotion work is the emotional labor, the *paid* emotional management of oneself and others, required for sex workers to be financially stable and prosperous in their work (Albert 2001; Barton 2007; Hoang 2010; Deshotels and Forsyth 2006). Paid work that requires large amounts of emotional labor can harm - referred to as spillover - a person's ability to engage in emotion work (unpaid emotion management) within their personal lives (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Pugliesi 1999). Sex work requires a great deal of emotional labor, and mothering requires a great deal of emotion work. This intersection is exacerbated by the stigma associated with being a sex worker and the likely stigma of sex worker mothers being labeled "bad" mothers. This intersection is a focus of my dissertation research.

For mothers who are employed as sex workers, engaging in emotional labor at work could reduce the emotional energy available to do the emotion work needed to ease the stigma of their job, maintain supportive personal relationships, and facilitate parenting (Grant 2014; Hoang 2010; Jones 2020). The reduced ability to access social support or meet mothering expectations can negatively impact perceptions of their parental self-efficacy as well as mental and physical

health outcomes (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2003; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Manchung 2003; Liss et al. 2013).

The past literature on sex workers has focused on women's participation in various forms of sex work, however, it rarely looks at sex workers lives from a holistic perspective. Past research has concentrated on their work and the wider issues within the industry itself, with little in-depth discussion of their non-work lives aside from past difficulties (Albert 2001; Chapkis 1997; Hoang 2010; Jones 2020; Ross 2009). The purpose of my dissertation is to better understand how women who work in the sex industry navigate their multifaceted lives. Thus, the overarching research question that this study addresses is how women who work in the sex industry navigate *both* their work *and* private lives.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I focus on the pertinent literature on sex work, stigma, emotional labor, and mothering that frame this study's overarching research question, how do women who work in the sex industry navigate their work and private lives I begin with an overview of sex work in the United States and its ambiguous place in American society where the legality varies widely by location and specifics of the work itself. Next, I discuss the role of stigma associated with sex work and how factors such as location within the whorearchy (hierarchy of sex workers and sex work), legality, visibility, client contact, agency, and income impact the amount of stigma associated with the types of work within the sex industry. I then discuss literature on the emotional labor involved in sex work, and the varying levels of emotion management that other scholars found that individuals engage in based on the type of sex work they were involved in. I then shift to discussing mothering.

Next, I move into a discussion of mothering, starting with a review of the existing mothering ideologies, before moving on to the direct and indirect emotion work required in mothering. I then discuss the concept of spillover and the reciprocal relationship between work and home, and the impact this has for those engaging in high amounts of emotion management in their work and personal lives. Finally, I discuss the importance of social networks that supply individuals with tangible and intangible forms of social support and caregiving.

Sex Work in the United States

The National Taskforce on Prostitution estimates approximately 1% of women in the United States have engaged in sex work in their lifetime. The Uniform Crime Reports for 2017 note that 61% of prostitution arrests are females (United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018).[1] Scholars and sex work advocates question these numbers as they generally capture only illegal forms of sex work, specifically illegal prostitution (Albert 2001; Barton 2002, 2006; Price-Glynn 2010; Sanders, O'Neil, and Pritchard 2009; Weitzer 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).[2] Legal sex work (like exotic dancing, cam modeling, and phone sex) is more challenging to gather accurate information on as workers often identify as entertainers or independent contractors in employment data (Albert 2001; Sanders, et al. 2009; Weitzer 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

The legal status of sex work in the United States has changed over time. During the 1800s, prostitution and women who engaged in sex work were pariahs within their communities who engaged in immoral but not illegal behavior. While some de facto regulation of prostitution started in the 1700s, the first formalized regulation occurred during the Civil War (Lowry 2012). It was not until the 20th century that prostitution became illegal in the United States. Such regulation and sanctioning serve to publicly assign stigma to the women selling sex, but not to the men who paid them (Garfinkel 1956; Grant 2014; Goffman 1958; Ross 2009; Weitzer 2011).

The legality of sex work in the United States today is sometimes discussed as a dichotomy, contrasting prostitution with legal work like exotic dancing (Albert 2001; Jones 2020; Sanders et al. 2009; Weitzer 2011). Simultaneously, there is a general assumption that women who engage in legal sex work or work viewed as sex work adjacent (e.g., masseuse) also engage in illegal sex work on the side. This assumption was reinforced recently by law enforcement and media's discussion of the women of Asian descent who were the victims of a

spree murderer in Atlanta, Georgia, in March of 2021 (Brumback and Wang 2021; Chapell, Romo, Diaz 2021). These women worked in businesses that their murderer allegedly viewed as fronts for illegal sex work. Based on the suspect's perception and racialized stereotypes, the police and media gave these women the stigmatized label of *potential prostitute*. With sex work, the stigma stems from the violation of sexual mores and control over women's bodies, which decreases the victims perceived value to society as a "good" woman. The concentrated stigma from the violation of sexual mores, illegal work, and other denigrated statuses (e.g., race and class) results in the labeling of victims as partially complicit in their murder. Victim blaming seems to occur most frequently when the victim has a low social status, and the offender has a higher social status, as was the case in Atlanta, where the offender is a white male. The stigmatized label was conferred on the victims by the offender who killed them and vocalized the offender's assumption of the victim's participation in sex work by the police and the media (Brumback and Wang 2021; Chapell, Romo, Diaz 2021).

Adding complexity and ambiguity to the legal status of sex work in the United States is the permittance of brothel prostitution in a few counties in Nevada. These legal brothels, operating since the 1970s, and the substantive tax revenue they generate, have decreased the stigma of prostitution within those counties (Albert 2001; Goldman 2012). However, elsewhere in the United States, legal sex work's presumed relationship with illegal prostitution increases the associated stigma, becoming more intense when layered with other stigmatizing factors.

Stigma

Stigma is defined as the disapproval of a person based on social characteristics that differentiate them from society's dominant norms rooted in hegemonic masculinity. This concept places male white cis-gender heterosexuality and middle-class status as the norm within society

(Coontz 2016) and all other statuses as inherently deviant based on their *othered* status (Goffman 1963; Schur 1984). While some stigmatized statuses are easily visible, like race, others like sexual orientation are less visible. Stigma differs in strength based on how they diverge from societal norms.

The stigma associated with sex work is higher than other stigmatized professions (e.g., gravediggers, garbage collectors, or exterminators) (Chapkis 1997; Grant 2014). Sex work involves monetizing intimate emotional and physical acts performed for those with little previous relationship (Barton 2002; Chapkis 1997; Grant 2014). When women engage in emotive and sexual acts, there is the expectation that it is in the context of marriage or a long-term romantic relationship. Sex work violates these expectations as the job involves emotional and sexual expression outside these narrow boundaries (Bernard et al. 2003; Grant 2014). Further, as this work is predominantly viewed as performed by women, it is labeled as low status. This lower-status label and stigma associated with work are linked dominantly to women in these occupations rather than heterosexual males doing the same job. Sexual prowess and expression by cis-gender heterosexual men is an accepted part of the hegemonic masculine performance, while female sexual prowess and expressions are viewed as inherently deviant (Bernard et al. 2003; Chapkis 1997; Grant 2014; Ross 2009). Mothers who engage in sex work can face additional sanctions as the stigma of the work can influence the social support available from their partners, families, and community at large, which could then impact their ability to meet the mothering expectations (Albert 2001; Bernard et al. 2003; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Deshotels and Forsyth 2006; Hoang 2010; Ma et al. 2019).

Whorearchy

Sex work consists of various occupations within a hierarchy rooted in moral judgments regarding the legality, visibility, client contact, income, and agency of the work (Sanders 2013; Sanders et al. 2009; Weitzer 2010a; Weitzer 2011). The sex work community refers to the hierarchy within sex work as the whorearchy, and even has garnered its own hashtag used across social media platforms. Each of the sex work variables impacts an occupation's status within the hierarchy and the stigma associated with that form of sex work (Read 2013; Sanders et al. 2009). The status of professions within the hierarchy correlates to the stigma attached to it, creating a system where some workers have more stigma and others less (see Appendix A). Status and the stigma are used by some sex workers to positively frame their work in contrast to those lower on the hierarchy (e.g., escorting for an agency is "better" than street walking).

Changing social norms impact the sex work hierarchy, changing it over time. New forms of work enter its ranks. Other occupations can become the focus of policing or social policy, increasing their associated stigma. Streetwalking has routinely been among the lowest within the hierarchy. Streetwalking is illegal, exposed to public view, involves high-contact, low-income, and minimal agency, and thus carries the highest stigma. This increased level of stigma is illustrated by the relatively high arrest rate of streetwalkers and the low-level response from the same policing agencies when sex workers are murdered, injured, or go missing (Grant 2014; Sanders et al. 2009; Weitzer 2010a).

Legality

Other forms of illegal sex work like independent escorting fall arguably higher within the hierarchy because it is performed off-street, generates a higher income, and has more agency than street-based prostitution. For example, escorts are less likely to be targeted by police and society as a public nuisance or *visible* social ill (Weitzer 2011). Illegal sex work increases

stigma, but the other variables, such as income and visibility, can significantly impact the placement within the hierarchy. Lastly, as with other occupations, stratification by race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and time in profession affects the position within the hierarchy and the stigma assigned.[3] It is likely that the stigma that researchers frequently find in legal brothels, strip clubs, and peep shows, where workers of color are tokenized and discriminated against, is present in illegal sex work (Albert 2001; Funari and Query 2000; Price-Glynn 2010).

Legal sex work falls higher than illegal sex work within the hierarchy and carries a lower stigma. The legality surrounding sex work, like stripping, varies significantly due to local and state codes (Barton 2002, 2006; Brents and Sanders 2010; Price-Glynn 2010; Ross 2009; Weitzer 2010a).[4] The variability of local criminal codes and the independent contractor status of most *sexual performers* put the onus on the worker to regulate their behavior and that of the client, lest they are charged with a crime. While the legal risk is arguably more salient in strip clubs, online cam models can also be impacted. Jones (2020) points out that variations in the law are more expansive in online sex work than brick-and-mortar locations like clubs. This legal ambiguity increases the potential for unintended illegal behavior, adding to the stigma associated with legal sex work (Weitzer 2010, 2011). Researchers also discuss how legal forms of sex work are often labeled a gateway to engaging in illegal forms of sex work by anti-sex work groups (Chapkis 1997; Grant 2014; Weitzer 2010a, 2011). The gateway can make workers who perform physically closer to clients (like strippers who engage in the private table or lap dances and out-calls) subject to higher stigma and a lower placement within the hierarchy. Here, the physical contact with customers and the privacy of these encounters is viewed as more likely to result in illegal behavior (Lewis 2006; Frank and Carnes 2010; Price-Glynn 2010).

Lastly, tokenization and discrimination are frequently experienced by sex workers who do not adhere to the hegemonic ideal for women (cis-straight-white-thin, etc.) in the legal sex industry. These performers are more likely not to be hired, fired or fined, or receive fewer hours than their white-cis colleagues (Albert 2001; Funari and Query 2000; Price-Glynn 2010; Ross 2009). Online environments are not immune from this and can be seen to engage in more pervasive tokenization and discrimination than individual clubs, as web platforms like Pornhub.com and OnlyFans.com categorize performers by race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and body type. Categorization does not merely make content easier to find but perpetuates discrimination. As Jones (2020) notes, websites actively promote white cis-gender content by highlighting white female performers at the top of the page.

Visibility

Increased access to the internet makes some off-street sex work more visible as call-girls and businesses that once relied on vague print or word of mouth advertisement have gone digital. Websites like defunct backpage.com offer free advertising, but few barriers between the worker and public view. Easy access to online advertisements increased visibility to law enforcement and the public, increasing the stigma and lowering the position within the hierarchy. Higher status workers, like high-class escorts, also moved online but reduced their visibility and its associated stigma. Escorts did this by using secure websites, not posting pictures of their face, neutralizing their background, and running background checks on potential clients (Lewis 2006; Jones 2020). Increasing the amount of gatekeeping online helped increase their safety and anonymity while decreasing the visible stigma associated with their work.

Other forms of sex work, most notably pornography, have moved online. Free websites like Pornhub.com allow access to pornography for 90% of adults in the United States with

internet access (Anderson, Perrin, Jiang, and Kumar 2019). The free and low-cost access to and the prolific creation of pornographic content has created a micro-hierarchy within the porn industry. Performers like Jenna Jameson or Sasha Grey that are established and well paid through well-known brands and careful management, hold a high status even with increased visibility (Berg 2021; Milne 2005). Lesser-known performers are stratified below based on various factors. The most prominent is race, but it also includes physical attractiveness, sex acts they will perform, the number and type of partners they will engage in, and how often they have appeared in films (Berg 2021; Milne 2005). Further, the popularization of amateur porn increased the status difference between paid performers and amateurs. The money, professional recognition, and corporate backing associated with professional performers place them higher than their amateur counterparts.

While some websites have abundant free content, pay-based sites like OnlyFans.com can serve as nominal gatekeepers that reduce public visibility while increasing agency and income, making cam modeling high in status. The gatekeeping for pay-sites routinely includes users' registration to access and purchase tokens via credit card to tip performers. Both allow sites to identify the users to some degree. Gatekeeping can also come in the form of site policies that enable performers to kick out or ban users from their channel if they are abusive or rude. These gatekeeping methods are not always enough, as live content can still be recorded and placed on free sites (Jones 2020). This increased visibility can cause problems within the private lives of the cam models. Unauthorized dissemination of performers' content can expose their stigmatized work to the public. The highest risk to their non-sex work identity comes from exposure to family, friends, colleagues, or bosses, with some women fired from their day jobs (Brook 2021;

Steadman 2020). While the unintended disclosure does not change their placement within the sex work hierarchy, their status within society is reduced due to the stigma.

While the internet has, in some ways, made sex work safer and reduced public visibility, it has also reduced the anonymity of the worker (Jones 2020). Most workers use some strategies, like stage names, to protect their identity. However, technology like Google image search enables individuals to search for other online pictures, which decreases the anonymity of the workers while potentially increasing stigma (Jones 2020). There are exceptions to this as those who become well known in their profession and within pop culture (like Jenna Jameson or Dita Von Teese) have their stigma reduced by their enhanced visibility, allowing them to occupy higher status. It is also important to note that these women engaged in legal sex work, and the stigma associated with illegal work is far more challenging to overcome.

Client Contact

Contact with customers is also a factor that is considered when determining the stigma attached to types of sex work. Contact with clients can take place in different ways, including physical and emotional. While heavily influenced by proximity, physical contact also includes level nudity. The explicit nature of the content performer engages in (e.g., topless dancing on stage carries less stigma than nude lap dancing) (Price-Glynn 2010; Ross 2009; Weitzer 2010a, 2011).

The correlation between emotional contact with clients and stigma is less well defined, as emotional labor is needed for financial success and stability in sex work (Albert 2001; Barton 2007; Hoang 2010). Some sex workers report viewing their peers as more stigmatized when engaging in excessive emotional intimacy with clients (Albert 2001; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Jones 2020; Lewis 2006; Price-Glynn 2010). Engaging in disproportionate

emotional intimacy is stigmatized within their peer groups because it crosses an established boundary in sex work, separating personal and professional interactions. Becoming emotionally involved with a client can reinforce the notion that clients can "save" workers or establish a reciprocal romantic relationship with sex workers if they want to. Expectations for reciprocal (and unpaid) relationships can create a dangerous situation when a sex worker refuses to become more involved (Albert 2001; Barton 2007; Jones 2020; Lewis 2006).

The amount of contact between sex workers and clients is associated with stigma. With clients, high contact, physical or emotional, increases the stigma associated with the work. At the same time, it is unclear if these two forms of client contact operate separately or if they are connected. It is clear that the more a worker bares of themself and the closer they get to the client, the more stigma they are subject to from society and their peers.

Agency

Agency is also an essential part of determining placement in the sex work hierarchy. The ability to make decisions, free of external constraints, is found in higher status forms of sex work. Some dispute this as the concept of agency in sex work itself is controversial within the larger society. Radical feminists and conservatives view the women engaging in sex work as unable to consent and view women as victimized via their work (Chapkis 1997). Thus, radical feminists view women who consent to sex work as existing under a false consciousness. They argue that women, but not men, are compelled to engage in sex work due to past victimization, social disadvantage, and economic need (Chapkis 1997). This ideology descends from the Puritan foundation of early laws and Victorian-era progressivism, which viewed women as innately incapable of bodily consent (McCoy 2010; McLaren 1986). While this ideology dominates discourses of prostitution, it applies to other types of sex work and is the foundation

of social and criminal justice policies and sanctions (Barton 2002, 2006; Boris, Gilmore, Parrenes 2010; Chapkis 1997; Jackson 2016; Sanders et al. 2009).

Liberal feminists argue that agency is possible in sex work because there *is* choice involved. Society does not view socio-structural disadvantage as removing the ability to make life choices. Instead, socio-structural differences widen or constrict the choices available (Chapkis 1997; Grant 2014). Thus, those who chose to engage in sex work choose based on their options. This is how most sex work scholars frame agency in sex work occupations and is how agency is discussed in this dissertation (Albert 2001; Brents and Sanders 2010; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Chapkis 1997; Grant 2014; Jackson 2016; Jones 2020; Weitzer 2011).

Within the hierarchy of sex work, the more agency the worker has to make decisions about their job, the higher their position. In the United States, cam models and professional porn actors have significant agency as they can choose when, where, and with whom they will work (Abbott 2010; Berg 2021; Jones 2020; Milne 2005). They can also set boundaries with their co-workers and viewers to ensure their safety and privacy from the public (Berg 2021; Jones 2020; Milne 2005). As content creators, women working in the porn and cam fields can also exert their agency through control over their creative expression (Abbott 2010; Berg 2021; Jones 2020; Milne 2005). The pornography industry, unlike other forms of legal sex work, has some worker protections like age verification, STI tests, and consent rules (Berg 2021; Milne 2005; Thompson 2007).

Income

Money, in that it is linked to power in our society, can reduce stigma in most social contexts (McNamee and Miller 2009; Mills 2000 [1956]). Consequently, a worker's income is a substantive factor for determining placement in the hierarchy and associated stigma. In general,

the higher the potential income, the lower the stigma that is attached to the work. For example, high-earning independent escorts are less stigmatized than their lower-earning counterparts who work for agencies. Movies like The Girlfriend Experience (2009) and The Escort (2016) glamorize high-paying sex work, portraying the women as intelligent, savvy, and predominantly white. In contrast, media depictions of lower-earning sex workers take the form of cautionary tales or exposés like Netflix's documentary Hot Girls Wanted (2015), MSNBC's Sex Slaves: Vegas Escorts (2015), and HBO's Hookers at the Point (2002). These depictions portray women in those jobs as exploited, uneducated, lacking skills, and predominantly non-white.

Another factor is the initial outlay and reoccurring costs required by the type of work. Higher-end work often requires an increased initial expense. Custom websites, client screening, travel, and other expenses can put work like independent escorting out of reach for some. Even cam modeling on Onlyfans.com (which is free to join) requires stable internet access, a shoot location, lighting, props, a web-enabled device that workers can live-stream and chat on, and a certain amount of tech-savvy to do so. These financial barriers can make it more challenging to engage in less stigmatized forms of sex work.

There is also a micro-hierarchy rooted in money within the occupations, based on worker's earnings, their income stream's steadiness, and (in business organizations) their relationship with the owners/managers. Clubs and agencies, like many sales-focused organizations, keep track of earnings. Some organizations use leader boards posted in the backstage areas to motivate workers (Jones 2020; Lewis 2006). High-earners can receive more privileges from managers or owners and gain additional agency within an organization than their lower-earning co-workers (Albert 2001; Barton 2007; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Lewis 2006; Price-Glynn 2010). Additionally, workers who establish regular well-paying clients

often view themselves as successful and associate high satisfaction and lower stigma with their work (Albert 2001; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Jones 2020).

Workers who are low earners run the risk of being sanctioned and stigmatized. Sanctions can range from reduced work hours, being scheduled for off-hours, fines, suspension, or even being fired (Barton 2007; Funari and Query 2000; Lewis 2006; Price-Glynn 2010). Low earners can also become targets for dissatisfied co-workers or patrons, increasing the work-related stress they experience (Albert 2001). However, low earnings are not always the fault or in the control of the workers. Agencies and clubs tend to give more hours and peak times to women who adhere to the hegemonic standards of beauty. Adherence to the hegemonic standard often means that women who are non-white, not thin, or not femme rarely receive the time or resources to become high earners in an organization (Albert 2001; Funari and Query 2000; Lewis 2006; Price-Glynn 2010). This practice is pervasive even in online environments, as platforms like OnlyFans.com highlight mainly white models at the top of the page, while models of color are less visible (Jones 2020). The reduced visibility makes it more difficult for models to cultivate a following that established them as top earners. While visibility in general increases stigma, the lack of visibility on porn or cam modeling websites decreases performers' ability to earn money and consequently can increase stigma (Albert 2001; Funari and Query 2000; Jones 2020).

Emotional Labor and Sex Work

Sex work, like other service professions, requires emotional labor as part of the job, even if it is to control the worker's external expressions. Engaging in emotional labor in sex work impacts placement within the hierarchy and its associated stigma. How much and what type of emotional labor sex workers expend affects work relationships, income, and job stability (Albert 2001; Gerson 1985; Grant 2014; Hoang 2010; Hochschild 1996; Jones 2020).

The work literature identifies two types of emotional labor expended in sex work: surface- and deep-emotional labor. Surface-emotional labor is job-oriented and performed through controlling external expression and body language (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Hoang 2010). Deep-emotional labor is self and job-oriented, dictating physical self-expression while projecting emotions to alter the emotional state of others and themselves (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Hoang 2010). Deep-emotional labor might entail a cam model engaging in verbal banter with their viewers, instigating the change in emotional states' beginning for themselves and their viewers. As the interaction continues, the model might engage in more direct positive behaviors to engage the viewers further, like eye contact, thanking them individually, engaging in active listening, and asking questions. This series of positive interactions between the model and the viewers creates and sustains the change in emotional states.

The work literature has also established that jobs in the service industry require a high expenditure of emotional labor via interactions with customers and co-workers (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Gerson 1985, Jefferys and Gerson 1996; Hochschild 1983; Hochschild 1996; Pugliesi 1999; Steinberg and Figart 1999). Deep-emotional labor gives customers a positive experience, generating steady return business. Creating a positive experience is accomplished by the employee managing their own emotional responses with customers and co-workers while simultaneously projecting and creating a positive emotional state in others. Deep-emotional labor gives customers good experiences and enables professional relationships with co-workers, providing support at work or dealing with customers (Hochschild 1983).

Brothel workers at the Mustang Ranch reported using emotional labor to create a connection with clients (Albert 2001). Making connections with clientele increased the time and money spent on each visit and the likelihood that clients would return to the same woman again

(Albert 2001).[5] Over time, the women at the Mustang Ranch who were most successful were those who expended high levels of deep-emotional labor. These workers cultivated multiple return clients willing to pay a premium for their time (Albert 2001). Reliable well-paid work made these women more financially successful within the brothel, placing them higher within the micro-hierarchy, getting them better rooms and more privileges (Albert 2001). While this is specific to operations at this brothel, this ability to generate money also garners higher status in other sex industry workplaces giving women more power when requesting hours, time-off, or submitting to workplace rules (Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Barton 2002, 2006; Price-Glynn 2010; Lewis 2006; Ross 2009). Lastly, a high placement within the micro-hierarchy can increase the worker's agency, as it affords them more control over their work environment.

Emotional labor in sex work varies across the sex industry. Lower status workers use more surface-emotional labor than those higher in the hierarchy. Lever and Dolnick (2010) studied on- and off-street prostitutes and found women who engaged in streetwalking used negligible amounts of emotional labor in their transactions, none of it internal. Similarly, Hoang (2010) noted that low-level workers did not attempt to alter their internal emotional states but engaged in surface-emotional labor to control their external expressions during interactions. Their control of outward expressions using surface-emotional labor increases the likelihood of spillover and strain via negative emotional states (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Hoang 2010; Pugliesi 1999; Steinberg and Figart 1999). Since lower-level sex workers rely on volume rather than regular clients, there are no expectations of altering client's emotional states or their own in these interactions.

Higher-status forms of prostitution (e.g., the girlfriend experience GFE and legal brothel work) use more emotional labor (Albert 2001; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Hoang

2010; Jones 2020; Lever and Dolnick 2010). Women working at the Mustang Ranch note that sex can be secondary to the conversational and caring aspects of the interaction for clients (Albert 2001). While these interactions may require less sexual contact, Hoang (2010) points out that clients need more emotional labor to get and keep them in a state where they view the interaction as romantic rather than transactional. Further, Hoang (2010) notes that these are often time-intensive arrangements, taking days or weeks to establish pseudo-relationships where the women engage in extensive emotional labor by showering the men with affection. These longer-term interactions, using deep-emotional labor, are the means that higher status sex workers use to generate a return clientele and steady income stream (Albert 2001; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Hoang 2010; Lever and Dolnick 2010).

Emotional labor is not exclusive to prostitution (Barton 2002, 2006; Price-Glynn 2010; Ross 2009; Weitzer 2010a). Exotic dancing uses differential amounts of emotional labor based on the type of interaction. For instance, stage dancing uses less emotional labor than private dancing, which requires closer contact with the clients (Barton 2002, 2006; Price-Glynn 2010; Ross 2009; Weitzer 2010a). Additionally, performers in some strip clubs are obliged to engage clients in conversation, soliciting drinks and private dances, which can require additional emotional labor due to the increased time and proximity involved (Barton 2002, 2006; Price-Glynn 2010; Ross 2009; Weitzer 2010a). Private dances generate more income than stage dancing, with stage tipping earned a dollar at a time, while private dances have a higher set price. To be financially successful, dancers need to engage in significant amounts of emotional labor with clients (Barton 2002, 2006; Price-Glynn 2010).

Webcam modeling also relies heavily on emotional labor, in some ways more heavily than other forms of sex work, as there is no physical contact involved (Jones 2020). To

compensate for this, cam models engage in high amounts of emotional labor with their clients, projecting more emotional energy than they might in person, as the experience must transcend the remoteness of digital interactions to feel authentic (Jones 2020). The deeper and more transcendent the emotional labor used in chats, live streams, and private sessions, the more realistic the experience feels to the client (Jones 2020). Thus, even engaging in online chats, when the interaction is individualized and personal, can alter the models' emotional states and clients, creating a genuine connection. As Jones (2020) points out, the authenticity of these interactions enables models who are less conventionally attractive to generate a large following and, consequently, more income when viewed as giving an authentic experience.

While other forms of sex work rely on the non-verbal embodiment of sexuality through the physical portrayal of interest, arousal, excitement, or climax to lend authenticity to the interaction, phone sex depends almost exclusively on the worker's verbal exchange and emotional labor. Operators use conversation to verbally construct images for the clients, fulfill fantasies, and establish connections resulting in altered emotional states and satisfied customers (Flowers 1998; Weiss 2011). Like other forms of emotionally labor-intensive sex work, operators can generate more income by keeping clients on the phone for extended periods and establishing a group of regulars (Flowers 1998; Guidroz and Rich 2010; Weiss 2011).

The emotional labor associated with sex work varies based on the type of work and the worker's choice. Engaging in deep-emotional labor has become linked to success in most forms of sex work. Deep-emotional labor alters the emotional state of both the client and the worker. The shifting of internal emotional states can aid workers in framing their work positively, thus reducing the strain they experience. However, the use of deep-emotional labor can be viewed as

stigmatizing. It is another level of intimate interaction that society views as being reserved for non-commercial relationships.

Mothering Ideology

Rooted in heteronormative-white-middle class doctrine, the concept of "good" mothering is a socially constructed set of expectations that society expects mothers to meet (Biernat 2007; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). These expectations include exposure to extra-curricular physical, cultural, and educational activities that facilitate children's future financial and social success (Arendell 1999; Glenn 1994; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003). These expectations assume access to resources that make this type of parenting possible (Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003). The stratified nature of society makes this form of mothering difficult, if not impossible, for parents outside of the middle- and upper-classes to meet (Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003, Taylor 2011). Mothers outside of these classes, while subject to the broader standards held by society, measure their parenting using the specific standards of their community. These practices are rooted in a community's economic realities and social histories (Collins 2006; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003).

Multiple parenting ideologies reflect the differential access to resources and cultural expectations regarding mothering. Frequently, these ideologies are grouped into two categories: child-centered and parent-centered. Child-centered ideologies adhere to an objective standard used by society (Arendell 1999; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003). These include intensive mothering expectations and concerted cultivation. Parent-centered ideologies consist of accomplishment of natural growth, Best I Can, and othermothering (Collins 1994; Crane and Christopher 2018; Glenn 1994; Taylor 2011; Taylor and Bloch 2018).

Child-Centered Approaches

A child-centered approach combines different aspects of child-rearing, such as physical, mental, and emotional development, focusing on education and nurturing cultural and social capital to ensure their child's place in society. Mothers are expected to make their child's attainment of these goals their priority and view it as an intrinsically satisfying experience (Arendell 1999; Biernat 2007; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). These expectations stem from the importance 19th century Victorians placed on childhood, with mothers as the chief architects building children into productive members of society (Zelizer 1994). At this time, mothering began to be viewed as a fundamentally satisfying endeavor, and mothers were expected to be friendly, kind, and self-sacrificing. The Victorian expectations of mothering required middle- and upper-class resources to be achievable (Zelizer 1994).

Over time, the expectations for mothers changed. In the mid-20th century, mothers' roles expanded as the isolated nuclear family became the societal standard (Parsons 1943). Mothers were expected to take on both the socio-emotional care of children while also running the household with little help from others (Parsons 1943). These added tasks are often referred to by singular terms like homemaking. In practice, these tasks encompass many repetitive and unending responsibilities that mothers are expected to perform happily (Hochschild and Machung 2003).

In the late 20th century, middle-class white women began entering the workforce en masse. During this period and into the 21st century, the objective expectations for mothers start to include and positively view work outside the home. Moving into the workforce did little to reduce mothers' workload at home as childcare and housework were still their responsibility (Craig 2006; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003), and there was no

structural change or additional supports for the unpaid work at home. Women's paid work outside of the home was valued as the income from mothers' paid work expanded children's opportunities and became incorporated into intensive mothering expectation's definition of "good" mom behavior.

Within intensive mothering, flexible schedules are essential for mothers as the tasks associated with children's enrichment increasingly require additional time. These tasks included organizing activities and managing children's relationships and social connections with others to help their future success (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003). However, the unpaid labor in the home was of less importance, but still the responsibility of women. Sharon Hays (1996) referred to the high expectations for mothering and the lack of social structural supports to make this form of mothering feasible for working mothers to accomplish, as the Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood.

The expectation for mothers to view mothering as intrinsically fulfilling and internalize it as the significant component of their identity remains dominant (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Lareau 2003). Mothers are expected to prioritize children's enrichment over their careers to be "good" moms. These expectations disadvantage mothers in the workplace as bosses view mothers as less viable applicants or promotion candidates when compared to fathers, childless women, or childless men (Correll et al. 2007). Due to the pressure to put their children first and their lower value and pay in labor markets, mothers frequently are the parent that makes career sacrifices to benefit children (Crittenden 2010; Gerson 1985; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jefferys and Gerson 1996). The ability to find flexible work that pays well often requires higher education and a social network to facilitate these work opportunities (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild and Machung 2003; McNamee and Miller 2009).

Access to such opportunities is not generally available outside of the economically privileged, making the flexible time and financial resources needed to engage in intensive mothering nearly impossible for economically marginalized mothers (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild and Machung 2003; McNamee and Miller 2009).

Like intensive mothering, Lareau (2003) defines concerted cultivation as the middle-class practice of parents taking on an active role in promoting activities and opportunities for their children (Lareau 2003). Concerted cultivation and intensive mothering both include prioritizing children's enrichment and the need for mothers to have flexible work schedules that make enrichment possible (Lareau 2002, 2003). While fathers take on more childcare and household tasks in a concerted cultivation approach, mothers still maintain the primary responsibility to plan, schedule, and manage their children's extra-curricular activities. (Lareau 2003). In concerted cultivation approaches, class is the primary determinate of parenting style while other statuses (like race) are discussed as insignificant (Lareau 2003). These two child-centered ideologies place the responsibility for a child's care, enrichment, and achievement squarely on mothers' shoulders.

Parent-Centered Approaches

Parent-centered approaches value children but also contextualize the needs of working mothers. These ideologies often exist as part of a subjective community standard for mothering and are based on cultural expectations. These approaches expect children to be obedient and self-sufficient (Ehrensaft 2001). Further, most of these approaches view the socio-structural realities of economic and marital status as salient, impacting the ability to provide for children and amount of parental stress (Crane and Christopher 2018; Medwinter and Burton 2018; Turgeon 2018).

Natural growth perspectives, like concerted cultivation, views social class as the primary determinate of parenting style. The natural growth approach adheres to the general expectation that mothers are primary-care givers. Still, they are not required to micro-manage their children as intensely as concerted cultivation and intensive mothering expectation parenting approaches. Thus, it is rare for children to engage in activities outside of school or their kin networks. This reduction in outside activities, the expectation of self-sufficiency, and strong kin networks enables mothers to engage in paid work without additional pressures on their time (Lareau 2003).

Best I Can mothering is another parent-centered approach. Mothers seek to move away from others' scrutiny and adopt the idea that mothers parent in the best way they can base on their individual circumstances (Stack and Burton 1994). The role of extended family and fictive kin is a part of Best I Can mothering as it employs a community approach to child-rearing (Collins 1990, 1994; Stack and Burton 1994). Unlike natural growth, this approach reflects the differential structural, social, and emotional resources that mothers have access to and base their parenting choices on (Stack and Burton 1994).

Othermothering sees a mother's ability to achieve financial stability and sustain a kinship-based social support network as a necessary component of mothering (Collins 1990, 1994; Stack and Burton 1994). This approach stems from the unique histories of the communities that enact them. Slavery in the United States was instrumental to the rise of this approach as enslaved mothers were rarely allowed to stay with their infants and young children during work times (Collins 1990, 1994). Children were put in the care of other slaves, viewed as part of an extended kin network (Collins 1990, 1994). The forced sale of children or parents to other slave owners reinforced this practice as family units were separated and child-rearing delegated to the group

(Collins 1990, 1994). The act of mothering was still viewed as valuable but was no longer enacted only by biological parents, leading to a broader definition of family among those communities (Collins 1990, 1994).

Post-emancipation, the need for many formerly enslaved mothers to work to help support their family, and the embedded nature of this type of child-rearing resulted in othermothering's prominence in communities of color that continue into the 21st century (Collins 1990, 1994). Kinship and othermothering enabled mothers who must seek employment to rely on their social network for childcare. Low wages and inflexible hours make paying for outside childcare unrealistic (Collins 1990, 1994). Thus, the community approach to parenting facilitates mother's employment and parenting. Further, this subjective standard that these mothers hold themselves to can increase feelings of agency and serve as a source of resistance against the dominant society (Collins 1990).

Intensive mothering expectations have become so pervasive that it has become the expectation that society holds *all* mothers too (Crittenden 2010; Flavin 2009). "Good" mothering is not judged by the subjective standard of the community but by the objective definition of the state, increasing the likelihood of negative judgments for mothers of color and poor mothers (Turgeon 2018; Flavin 2009). Investigations by the state can be highly stigmatizing even when parents are not negligent or abusive. In an inquiry, social services may contact neighbors, employers, and family exposing the parents to stigma. Judgments regarding meeting the "good" mom goal can become salient based on the situation and mothers' realistic access to support, whether social, emotional, or financial, which are necessary for meeting the objective standard of mothering.

Emotion Work in Mothering

Mothering requires emotion work. This unpaid emotional management is used in this context to foster bonds between mothers and children, maintain social networks, and sustain their wellbeing (Hays 1996; Hochschild 1979, 1983). Individuals often engage in emotion work with others and themselves as a part of everyday interactions. Hochschild (1979) expanded on Goffman's (1961) idea of impression management, where direct acting (the verbal and non-verbal cues expressed in an interaction) is used to project the actor's feelings to the audience. Hochschild (1979) notes that direct acting (also referred to as surface acting/emotion management) only impacts the audience but does not change the internal emotional state of the actor. The concept of deep acting (or deep emotion management) extends Goffman by focusing on the internal changes that actors make to their emotional states (Hochschild 1979).

By managing emotions through evoking or suppressing feelings, the actor can experience or try to experience the "correct" emotions for the situation they encounter (Hochschild 1979). These internal changes in emotions are then manifested in the verbal and non-verbal actions of the actor, displaying the correct emotions to their audience. This process of emotion management enables mothers to change their internal emotional states, empowering them to view the stresses and challenges that come with child-rearing as positive interactions. In turn, mothers externally project the qualities needed, like caring and patience, to teach children correct behavior, interact with others, and regulate their own emotions (Hochschild 1979).

We learn appropriate emotions and their responses throughout our lives as we encounter or view new situations (Hochschild 1979). Some skills are explicitly taught, such as telling children that “big boys don't cry”. Other skills are taught implicitly through modeling and mimicry of others. Children absorb feeling rules by watching their mother's behaviors and reactions to situations and interactions with others. These skills, taught to us while young are

necessary for maintaining personal relationships and navigating society (Hochschild 1979). Maintaining personal relationships is vital so mothers can access support from their social network and meet expectations. The mothering ideologies discussed earlier require different amounts of emotion work from mothers.

The child-centered approaches, intensive mothering expectation, and concerted cultivation require large amounts of emotion work by mothers directed at children. Indirectly, the supervision, planning, and management of the experiences and education of children add to mothers' emotion work (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Manchung 2003; Taylor 2011). Directly, it is expected for mothers to verbally engage with their children frequently on a deeper level (Lareau 2003). In-depth verbal interaction can take the form of asking individual opinions or thoughts about situations or events they experienced (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003). Engaging in this verbal interaction teaches children that their thoughts are valued and how to engage or self-advocate with others; both are skills needed for future middle-class success (Lareau 2003).

Parent-centered approaches depend on social networks to facilitate child-rearing more than child-centered approaches (Lareau 2003). The emotion work used in parent-centered approaches maintains personal relationships with partners, family, and kin. By controlling how they interact with their network, mothers can alter the emotional states of others, making it more likely that they will view them and their mothering positively and be available for help if needed (Hochschild 1979). Emotion work with one's social network takes place over an extended period and, like with the socialization of children, requires repetition and reinforcement through the continued actions by the mother (Hochschild 1979, 1983). As with most relationships, if there is

a reduction or cessation in emotion work or the introduction of stigma can negatively alter access to social supports (Crittenden 2003; Hays 1996; Flavin 2009).

Transforming parents' internal emotional states can foster positive feelings connected to children, childcare tasks, personal relationships, and about themselves as parents. This internal change can help mothers cope, reduce anxiety, and positively view their parenting. Additionally, the internal reorientation and external actions change the feelings that mothers identify with their children and others. Reorientation can help mothers find satisfaction in mothering while fulfilling the "good" mom expectations.

Emotion work requires energy to perform and is needed in different amounts depending on gendered norms. The work mothers engage in to raise children, foster social networks, and do emotion work takes a great deal of time and energy (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2003; Hays 1996; Flavin 2009; Hochschild and Machung 2003). As the objective expectations for mothers have increased, so has the amount of emotion work expected of them. Recently, this has begun to include the mental load of delegating tasks that ensure family functioning (Henderson, et al. 2016; Shirani, et al. 2012). These expectations are in addition to the emotional labor that mothers must perform in paid work (Gerson 1985; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jefferys and Gerson 1996).

Where Mothering and Paid Work Collide

The expectation for emotional labor in service jobs, which are often populated by women, can result in less energy to engage in emotion work in their personal lives (Gerson 1985; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jefferys and Gerson 1996). To combat this, mothers often give up what little leisure time they have and try to find a balance between work and home (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild and Machung 2003). Finding balance has

become increasingly complex, leading to an increased risk of spillover negatively impacting mothers. When negative and moving from work to home, spillover can manifest via overuse of emotional labor at work, resulting in an inability to do emotion work at home (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jefferys and Gerson 1996; Pugliesi 1999). This increase in spillover is dangerous for mothers as emotion work is instrumental in parenting and maintaining social support. Jobs requiring large amounts of emotional labor can increase spillover and adversely impact parenting. When a stigmatized profession, like sex work, is added to this, it is unclear how mothers navigate the complexities between emotional labor with clients and the emotion work they do in their private lives. Below, I focus on "spillover", but later will address the connections between emotions, spillover, mothering, and sex work.

Spillover is the impact one area of life, such as paid work, has on another, such as family (Coltrane 2000). As middle-class mothers entered the workforce in the late 20th century, spillover increasingly became a focus for many scholars. It is important to note that the impact of spillover can be negative or positive, and most spillover research has focused on mothers' participation in the workforce (Gerson 1985; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Hochschild 1996; Jefferys and Gerson 1996). Mothers who joined the workforce were initially highly stigmatized. There was a perception that working women were taking jobs from men, abandoning their husbands, and damaging their children (Crittenden 2001; Hochschild 1996; Jefferys and Gerson 1996). The stigma associated with working mothers has reduced but is still present, as many other mothers (and I) can attest.

The positive spillover from work can come from the satisfaction and positive self-image that mothers receive from doing paid work (Hochschild 1996). Even work that is not well-paid or

high-status can help mothers create and maintain an identity separate from *mom* or *wife*. This independent and positive self-image can also help mothers within the home as positive spillover increases resiliency when dealing with difficulties within the home (Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1996). Work can also provide an outlet for mothers to vent their frustrations and cultivate relationships outside of their family, expanding their social support network (Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1996; Jefferys and Gerson 1996).

Negative spillover is felt both at work and home and can vary with the amount of tangible support a person receives. Mothers are more likely to experience these forms of spillover since they remain responsible for the overwhelming majority of caregiving work for children (Crittenden 2003; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). While fathers may have taken on somewhat more childcare in the past 20 years, they still do very little housework (Craig et al. 2006; Crittenden 2010, Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). Further, distance from extended family or the inability (financial and physical) for extended family members to tangibly support mothers who are balancing work and family can increase the potential for negative spillover (Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003).

Relatively few workplaces have family-friendly policies that lessen the burdens of parenting. Those with such policies often have workplace norms discouraging workers from using these benefits (Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jefferies and Gerson 1996). In the United States, there are no government incentives or mandates for companies to change their policies, as there have been in other "developed" countries (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jefferies and Gerson 1996).

Other forms of tangible support would facilitate work and family balance for mothers, such as access to affordable daycare programs. Substantive structural barriers, and domestic

inequity, go continually un-addressed by businesses and government (Crittenden 2010; Hochschild 1996; Jefferies and Gerson 1996). These unaddressed issues can result in negative spillover between work and family. Additionally, the negative spillover impact can reduce a mother's ability to engage in emotion work. As noted earlier, all forms of mothering require some amount of emotion work and support from others (Hays 1996). Mothers need to engage in emotion work to maintain relationships with partners, family, and broader social networks to facilitate their mothering. If they do not have the emotional energy for this emotion work, it can reduce their ability to access social support or meet mothering expectations (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2003; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Manchung 2003).

The cultural contradiction of mothering that Hays noted in the mid-1990s still dominates mothering thirty years later. The high expectations of mothering, and the risk of not meeting them, are still steep. Even more so for mothers whose identities (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) are stigmatized within society (Hays 1996; Flavin 2009; Taylor 2011). Sex work adds another layer to this as the work can have good pay, flexible time, and increased agency, facilitating mothering. However, the stigma associated with engaging in paid sexualized labor coupled with the potential for negative spillover can reduce their ability to engage in emotion work with their children, partners, family, and social network. Emotion work with these groups is vital as the maintenance of social supports for mothers enables them to meet mothering expectations and achieve the "good" mom status (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2003; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Manchung 2003; Liss et al. 2013).

The added stigma associated with sex work might result in mothers who are sex workers having to engage in more emotion work to maintain access to their necessary social support (Grant 2014). Negative work-to-home spillover could make this more difficult for the sex worker

mother and destabilize their access to social supports, placing them at a higher risk of being labeled a "bad" mom. In this next section, I focus on literature on social networks, social support, and caregiving and their impact on the ability to engage in emotional management and navigate everyday life.

Social Networks, Social Support, and Caregiving

Durkheim's (1871, 1951) work *Suicide* illustrated the importance of attachment to a social network, and the impact it can have on life outcomes. Other scholars built on this work, noting that intimate relationships – partners, family, or peers- have higher amounts of attachment and are important sources of support in individual's social network (Hirschi 1969; Laub and Sampson 1993). Also, scholars in sociology and health fields recognize that attachment to social networks impacts health in many ways, including perceived and actual social support, access to resources, social influence, social engagement, and - unsurprisingly for those of us who live in the post Covid-19 world – person-to-person contacts (Berkman & Glass 2000). Sociologists also acknowledge that these same factors can impact an individual's path throughout their life course.

In the short term, one's attachments to social networks can ease navigation of their social world, allowing them to access information and opportunities (McNamee & Miller 2009; Mills 2000 [1956]). While in the long term, one's attachment to their social network can impact their life course trajectories (Durkheim 1871, 1951; McNamee & Miller 2009; Mills 2000 [1956]; Laub and Sampson 1993). Further, family is noted as an individual's first social network, that individuals hold a deep attachment to (Durkheim 1871, 1951; Hirschi 1969; McNamee & Miller 2009; Mills 2000 [1956]). Therefore, it is unsurprising that caregiving, as a form of support from

one's social network, is frequently provided by family members, which when one is young is usually the mother.

Caregiving, also known as carework, is frequently discussed by family and work scholars as a form of assistance or support that helps with the development, health, or well-being of others (England 1992; Duffy 2005; Dwyer 2013). Historically, this work has been unpaid and performed by women in the home. These women were usually family members or part of the family's kinship or social network (England 1992; Dwyer 2013; Spitze & Logan 1989).

When enacted by mothers, caregiving is valued by society as it helps children grow and develop into "good" citizens (Hays 1996; Hochschild & Machung 2003; Lareau 2003). However, as I discussed in the mothering section, it takes a large amount of emotional, mental, and physical energy for moms to meet these expectations. Mothers have observed, particularly in respect of their own parenting, the benefit of receiving caregiving from others as it enables them to navigate their varied and at times overloaded responsibilities with greater ease and less stress (Gerson 1985; Gerson and Jacobs 2010; Hochschild & Machung, 2003; Lareau 2003). Thus, mothers are aware that to receive support for themselves and their children, they must engage in emotion work with those in their social network (Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild & Machung 2003; Gerson 1985; Gerson and Jacobs 2010; Lareau 2003; Spitze & Logan 1989).

Even within the parental relationship, mothers engage in emotion work directed at fathers, so they can access the father's caregiving and direct it toward children or child-related tasks. In Lareau's (2003) book on mothering she discusses mothers who engage in concerted cultivation (a form of intensive mothering that meets the hegemonic mothering expectation) are the ones who carry the mental load within the parental relationship and delegate caregiving tasks to their husbands. Hochschild's work in *The Second Shift* finds women enacting similar

behaviors, often with the explanation that they do the mental work required to delegate so that they could *reliably* get their partners to do specific child or home related tasks (Lareau 2003; Hochschild and Machung 2003). These studies illustrated the emotion management that is involved in women accessing support and caregiving.

While lauded within the purview of being a Domestic Angel or a "good" mom, caregiving is devalued by the wider society when performed for pay (Crittenden 2010; England 1992; Hochschild & Machung 2003). Zeilzer (2005) posits that the devaluation is a result of society viewing love (i.e., caring for someone) and money as antagonistic and should remain separate so society does not conflate love with money. Other scholars note that the relational skills used in caregiving, which require engaging in emotion management, is viewed by society as a gendered task that is inherently feminine – and therefore less valuable (Dwyer 2013; England 1992; England et al 2002; Steinberg & Figart 1999).

Caregiving, as a form of *paid* work, was initially discussed by public health and medical sociology scholars. It was often defined as physical tasks like helping someone dress, mental tasks including keeping track of doctor's appointments and medications, or emotional tasks like companionship (England 1992; Erickson & Stacey 2013; Erickson & Grove 2008; Stacey 2011). This scholarship also established the value and positive outcomes associated with paid caregiving, as well as the substantial emotional labor caregiving requires (Erickson & Stacey 2013; Erickson & Grove 2008; Stacey 2011).

Over the past 30 years, caregiving has been increasingly recognized in other paid employment such as teaching and nannying (Bunyan 2020; England 1992; England & Folbre 1999; Steinberg & Figart 1999; Westphal, Kalinowski, Hoferichter, & Vock 2022). As paid caregiving has been recognized within the waged labor market, so has the relational skills (i.e.,

emotional labor) that make this work so demanding (Bunyan 2020; Dwyer 2013; England 1992; Hochschild 1983; Westphal et al. 2022). Because caregiving has become more widely recognized in paid and unpaid work, its definition has expanded beyond the medicalized model or family studies. Caregiving now encapsulates the mental, physical, and emotional tasks that attend to another's needs or well-being. This dissertation project embraces the wider definition of caregiving as it helps understand and observe these varied behaviors within relationships and interactions.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter frames and contextualizes the overarching research question, how do women who work in the sex industry navigate their work and private lives. It has discussed the precarious and controversial place that sex work and those who work in it have within American society. It also delves into the emotion management that those who work in the sex industry must engage in to navigate their personal and professional lives. It then delves into the societal ideologies, expectations, and consequences of mothering. This includes the vast amount of emotion work that women are expected to engage in not only with their children, but with others within their wider social network so that they can have access to tangible and intangible forms of social support that they need to parent. Lastly, this chapter has emphasized the interconnected and interrelated nature of sex work, stigma, emotion management, mothering, and social support when it comes to people's ability to successfully navigate their lives.

In the next chapter I discuss the methodological approach I used in this study along with a detailed discussion sampling and recruitment of interviewees from a highly stigmatized population. I review the sample's characteristics in detail, noting the differences between the overall sample, the moms, and the non-moms. I then discuss the variety of jobs in the sex

industry that the women in this study reported having. Finally, I review the interview guide and discuss my positionality.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Data Collection

This research examined how sex workers navigate life and work in the context of their stigmatized profession. I was also interested in the role of emotion support on how these women balance work. I used qualitative methods to examine this topic inductively. My research did not test hypotheses but instead focused on conclusions and generalizations drawn from the analysis of the interviews with my respondents (Glaser and Strauss 2000; Charmaz 2006). This research, like all qualitative research, seeks to better understand the processes and deeper meanings that these women experience via the research question, how do women who work in the sex industry navigate their work and private lives (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006).

Sampling Strategy and Recruitment

The population for this research is cis-gendered women who resided, at the time of the interview, in the United States, who were over the age of 18, and who engaged in sex work (see below for specific forms) within five years of their interview. Sex work includes legal brothel prostitution, webcam models, phone sex operators, text/chat room performers, exotic dancers, escorts, peep show performers, dominatrix, and those engaging in professional pornography. This list encompasses many different types of sex work involvement as this project sought to connect with a more diverse sample of sex workers than has been collected in past studies and reflect the more inclusive definition of sex work that is currently used among the population and their support organizations.

The original sample for this research was adult cis-gender women who were mothers who also engage in sex work. The research focuses on cis-gendered women as the expectations regarding mothering will have been more heavily socialized into them since childhood (Arendell 1999; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). The study expanded the sample population to include cis-gendered women who are *not* mothers in November of 2021 for both practical and theoretical reasons. First, it was difficult to recruit participants during a global pandemic, especially within a stigmatized population who has felt researchers misrepresent them (Jones 2020; Sprague 2016). Secondly, expanding the sample to include "non-moms" offers a point of triangulation so that we can better understand if particular experiences are unique to mothers who work in the sex industry (Natow 2019).

Participants under the age of 18 were not permitted, as those under 18 cannot legally engage in sex work in the United States. Finally, this project focused on women who have worked in the legal sex work industry within the past five years. I set five years as the outside number as it is important that respondents could recall the experiences surrounding their work and those in their personal lives that may dim or become conflated over time.

In this study, I used convenience sampling to recruit from online environments frequented by those who work in the sex industry (Cresswell & Cresswell 2014). The first recruitment post went up on January 1, 2021, and study information posts were uploaded approximately every two weeks between July and May 2022. The flyer (see Appendix C) was posted on SAAFE, Reddit, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. I uploaded a study post to the various websites and enabled them to be shared across platforms. Sites with multiple established sex work threads, like Reddit, allowed me access to a diverse range of those in the industry (Lofland et al. 2006; Sprague 2016). I chose these specific websites as they are used by women

in the sex industry to advertise and maintain/establish client relationships and communicate with other sex workers about work- including warnings about potential clients (see Jones 2020). Posts were enabled to be shared with others via the website. Participants clicked on a link within the post, or when images were uploaded, as they were on Instagram, links to the study website were in the description.

I also used snowball sampling to recruit through referrals, as both Cresswell and Cresswell (2022) and Lofland et al. (2006) discuss the importance of using participant's existing social networks as a point of entry to connect with other members of populations that are challenging to recruit from due to stigma. This was done through sharing the study post and direct referrals from past respondents. Additionally, all study participants were asked to share information about the study with their networks. Lastly, during the time I was actively engaged in interviews (January 2021- December 2022), and once the public health mandate allowed people to meet in person, I volunteered with two local sex work activism/community groups. These groups and other sex work advocacy groups I connected with via online spaces disseminated information about the study to sex workers in their network as well as other sex work organizations across the United States. My volunteer work and communication with sex work advocacy organizations served as an entrée into the physical and digital communities as an ally who does research – rather than solely as a researcher. Sprague (2016) discusses using this technique to better connect and become a part of the community that you are working with, and other researchers (see Jones 2020 and Ray 2017) have successfully employed this technique to more deeply connect and explore the populations with whom they work.

The study's website, www.swmstudy.com, (see Appendix C) contained information about the project, my institutional e-mail address, and a link to schedule an interview using

YouCanBookMe.com, a secure online scheduling platform. Both the post and the website specified that the study is looking to interview women who are over the age of 18, that reside in the United States, and have been engaged in legal sex work within the past five years. If potential participants e-mailed me with questions, I promptly replied to them and included a link to the YouCanBook.com scheduling website in the reply e-mail.

Interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams and were recorded and saved on Kent State University's secure server. Video interviews were used unless technical issues or direct request of the participant prevented video use. If technical issues occurred or the participant did not use video, the interview was conducted using only the interviewer's video or audio for the interviewer and the participant. Verbal informed consent (see Appendix B) was obtained from all participants prior to the interview's commencement. When technological interruptions occurred, or interviews had to resume later, consent was again explained and obtained from the participant before the interview resumed. When participants failed to appear for their scheduled interview, they were contacted via e-mail and given the option of rescheduling or opting out of the interview (see Appendix D).

Post-interview all audio and video recordings were saved to Kent State's University's secure server before the audio files were uploaded to Otter.Ai for transcription. The transcription function of Microsoft Teams was used during the interviews, however due to issues with the platform the transcripts were unusable. After the initial transcription using Otter.Ai, I corrected the transcripts manually. No other individuals were given access to the audio files due to the sensitive nature of the research and the privacy of the participants.

Description of the Sample

The overall sample consisted of 29 adult cisgender women who were either “Moms” (N=19) or “Non-Moms” (N=10) (see Table 1 for demographic data). The women were in their early 20s to early 50s. Some participants chose not to disclose their exact age and instead referred to their age by the decade, such as 20s or 30s. Most of the participants in the overall sample were in their 20s (N=18; 62.10%), including eleven of the Moms (57.89%) and seven of the Non-Moms (70%).

The majority of the overall sample self-identified as white (N=18; 62.10%), a third of the sample self-identified as Black (N=9; 31.03%), and two participants self-identified as multiple/mixed race (N=2; 6.90%); Filipino/Mexican American and Indigenous/White. The participant who self-identified as Indigenous/White noted that she passes as white in social settings. The Non-Mom participants were all white (N=10; 100%), while the Mom group was more diverse, with 8 participants (42.11%) identifying as white, nine as Black (47.37%), and two participants reporting they were multiple/mixed racial (detail in Table 1).

Education ranged among participants from High School and GED to the completion of master’s degrees. In the overall sample, many of the participants identified having their highest level of education being High School (N=12; 41.38%). An additional 12 participants reported completing their bachelor’s or master’s degrees (41.38%). The remaining five participants reported that they were currently enrolled in college or had completed some college course work (N=5; 17.24%). These numbers shift when looking at the Mom and Non-Mom groups separately. Among the Moms 11 of the 19 reported attending or graduating from high school or getting their GED (57.89%). While seven out of the ten women in the Non-Mom group reported completing their BA or MA (70%).

Table 1. Sample Demographics

	Overall (N=29)		Moms (N=19)		Non-Moms (N=10)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age*	29		19		10	
20s	18	62.07%	11	57.89%	7	70%
30s	7	24.14%	4	21.05%	3	30%
40s	3	10.34%	3	15.79%		
50s	1	3.45%	1	5.26%		
Race						
White	18	62.10%	8	42.11%	10	100%
Black	9	31.03%	9	47.67%		
Indigenous/White	1	3.45%	1	5.26%		
Filipino/Mexican American	1	3.45%	1	5.26%		
Education						
HS/GED	12	41.38%	11	57.89%	1	10%
Attend College	5	17.24%	3	15.79%	2	20%
BA/MA	12	41.38%	5	26.32%	7	70%
Relationship**						
Committed	12	41.38%	8	42.11%	4	40%
Dating	8	27.59%	5	26.32%	3	30%
Divorced	4	13.79%	8	42.11%	0	
Single/Not Dating	11	37.93%	4	21.05%	3	30%
Moms	19	65.52%				

*Participants did not always disclose specific age or number of years in the industry
**Relationships were not exclusive groups, as participants reported multiple relationships (i.e., divorced and currently dating)

Twelve of the participants in the overall sample reported that they are currently in committed relationships with partners (41.38%). This proportion remains consistent among the nineteen women in the Mom group (N=8; 42.11%) and the ten Non-Moms (N=4; 40%) group as well. A little over a third of the overall sample reported being currently single/not dating (N=11; 37.93). Additionally, eight of the participants (27.59%) reported obtaining a divorce at some point in their lives.

Most of the participants in this sample self-identified as Moms (N=19; 65.52%) and in total had thirty-four children, ranging from preschool aged to adulthood. Moms in the study had between 1 - 3 children, with just over half of the Moms (N=10, 52.63%) having 1 child, five Moms (26.32%) reported having 2 children, and four Moms (21.05%) reported having 3 children. Most of the Moms (N=16) reported having children who had not yet entered high school (N=23, 67.65%). Further, most of the Moms (N=28; 96.55%) resided with at least one of their children while the children were minors. Four of the six children who do not reside with their moms are adults who lived independently. The other two children are elementary aged and have been placed with relatives by their mothers long-term or permanently.

Table 2. Reported Work in the Industry

	OVERALL		**MOMS**		**NON-MOMS**	
Reported Job*	Primary	Other Work	Primary	Other Work	Primary	Other Work
Cam modeling	2	9	2	5		4
Domination		1		1		
Escorting/outcall	5	5	5	5		
Exotic dancing	18	1	11	1	8	
Femme domination		2		1		1
Financial domination	1				1	
Online content	1	1		2	1	
Massage				1		
Phone sex		1		1		
Pornography	1	4	1			
Selling clothing	1		1			
Sex texting	1	1		1		
Sugaring		1				1
Writing/fiction		1		1		

*One of the women reported having two primary areas (cam modeling and pornography), and other women reported having multiple jobs within the industry

Participants in this study often engaged in multiple forms of sex work. In the table below (see Table 2), I report the primary work that participants engaged in, as well as any other sex work. The majority of the women in the sample reported their primary occupation in the sex industry as exotic dancer (N=18; 62.07%), and this was consistent across the Moms (N=11; 57.89%) and Non-Mom (N=8; 80%) groups. Relatively few of the women reported working as an escort (N=5; 17.24%) or a cam model (N=2, 6.90%) as their primary occupation. However, escorting (N=5) and cam modeling (N=9) were routinely reported as a former primary occupation/current side job.

Interview Guide

Based on the existing sex work, mothering, and stigma literature, I anticipated that sex workers used multiple strategies to cope with the stress of balancing work and their personal responsibilities. The fear of being labeled a "bad" mom or person in general, or due to their sex worker status, can be viewed as an additional strain for the women in the study, compelling them to cope by using stigma management strategies. These interviews provided evidence for and elucidating these processes. During the interview process and the shift away from only interviewing mothers, I abductively revised the interview guide based on interview data and the existing theories (Timmermans and Tavory 2012).

The interview guide (see Appendix A) used in this project covers the work and home lives of sex workers. It was broken into two sections: questions about work and questions about family and others. By grouping and sequencing the questions, I intended to create an organic transition between the topics and build rapport with the participants (Lofland et al. 2006; Sprague 2016). Building rapport with the interviewee early on made them comfortable with the interview process and facilitated open and frank responses to the questions. As Lofland et al.

(2006) and Sprague (2016) discuss, the building of good rapport became even more important when we moved to more sensitive questions later in the interview, which in turn led to interviewees feeling safe sharing their experiences with me. Further, I designed the questions to facilitate a participant-driven interview to allow topics and experiences to emerge inductively (Charmaz 2006; Gerson and Damaske 2021).

The first question, “Tell me a little about yourself?”, was intentionally vague and enabled the respondents to tell me anything about themselves that they wanted to share. This allowed interviewees to drive the conversation and frequently resulted in them talking about various aspects of their lives, often leading directly into a discussion of their personal or work lives (Gerson and Damaske 2021). We then moved on to discuss their daily or weekly routine, which enabled the women to relay a detailed account of their experiences. This allowed the women to narrate what their schedules were on a daily or weekly basis, which offered a lot of insight into the responsibilities that they were balancing and the interactions that they often engaged in. If more detail was needed, I asked a follow-up question for them to describe a "typical" workday for them. So, the respondent can discuss the minutia of the everyday tasks they associate with their work.

After talking about daily life, the next section focuses on children, families, and women’s social networks. The prompt, "Tell me about your family," was intended to transition from discussing their daily life to their family and other relationships in their personal life. The term family here is intentionally general, enabling them to label individuals in their lives whom they view as family or otherwise crucial in their lives. Again, in line with Gerson and Damaske’s (2021) practice, this question gives respondents space to open up about their larger life situation: how they were raised, when and with whom they had children, sexual orientation, marital status,

residential security, community status, etc. Like with the second section, this question is intended to give respondents control by having them direct the path of the conversation.

We then focused on work, and participants were asked to discuss how they became involved in sex work and how they describe/view their work. This was intended to give the respondent the space to begin talking about their work history and how they view or feel about their work. In addition to building rapport and letting the respondent "direct" the conversation. These questions capture an overview of their work history, how they primarily view their work, and the various forms of labor/skills they associate with work. Several other studies discuss the importance of grooming habits and marketing and self-promotion that sex workers engage in, particularly within the legal sex work industries.

I then ask about establishing and maintaining relationships with clients. Previous studies note that the most financially successful sex workers often engage in this form of labor to cultivate return clientele, which gives them a guaranteed income source to rely on (Albert 2001; Barton 2002, 2006; Hoang 2010; Jones 2020). The literature also discusses the importance of engaging in deep emotional labor. Workers engage in this to create an authentic experience for the client, which increases the likelihood of return clientele and a stable income (Jones 2020). Deep emotional labor is also viewed as essential for the worker themselves as a positive internal emotional state makes them more likely to view their job positively (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Hoang 2010).

In contrast, Brotheridge and Grandy (2002), Hoang (2010), and Lever and Dolnick (2010) note that surface emotional labor can be detrimental to individual workers' view of their work. Further, previous literature notes that sex workers who engage in surface-emotional labor are less likely to have return clients (Deshotels and Forsyth 2006; Hoang 2010; Lever and

Dolnick 2010). Also, the work can be emotionally draining as sex workers project their energy onto others' emotional states or use it to control their facial expressions but do not positively alter their internal emotional states (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002; Hoang 2010). Thus, making them less likely to associate a positive emotional state with their work. Additional emotional energy use is also highly associated with spillover, which can harm worker's ability to do emotion work within the sphere of their personal life. My final question in this section addresses how their work makes them feel. I used this question to learn more about how they view it in the larger context of their lives.

I then followed the discussion of work by asking how they balance work and their private life. One of the recurring things noted in the research on parents working as sex workers is the flexible scheduling and money that enabled them to "be there" for their children while creating a finically stable situation for them (See Albert 2002, Jones 2020; Price-Glynn 2010; Rosen and Venkatesh 2008). Prompts for this question are intended to explore how sex work impacted their life choices and for the mothers - how being a parent impacts their view of the sex industry. While providing insight into how the respondents view themselves, these questions are also intended to identify places where stigma or strain can impact the respondents.

The next question asked the respondent to recount how and with whom they discuss their work. The stigma management literature (Goffman 1963; Grant 2014; Thompson, Harrad, and Burks 2003) notes the importance of revealing and hiding behavior and how that impacts the stigma and support experienced by individuals. Engaging in revealing behaviors, particularly with those close to them like partners or parents, could mean that the respondent could potentially need to engage in additional emotion work to maintain the relationships with others. Conversely, hiding behaviors can also be viewed as requiring extra emotion work, to maintain a

façade for others to maintain those relationships. The emotion work these mothers engage in allows them access to social support by those around them and a more extensive social network to turn to for help—both factor into how these mothers can parent their children.

I then asked a few focused questions about demographics as not all respondents remarked upon their age, race, or other details in their narratives. These occasionally prompted additional information about their work, relationship status, or living arrangements. It also served as a space for them to clarify things they touched upon earlier in the interview. Finally, I asked what else they thought I should know that I did not ask about or what we talked about but want to add. This question is intended to give the respondents a place to discuss things relevant to their experiences but that I did not cover in my questions (Lofland et al. 2006; Sprague 2016). This question also empowers respondents to return to an area already covered in the interview, but they wanted to discuss further. Joey Sprague (2016) notes that this empowerment is essential in critical feminist and intersectional research. It gives the respondent a level of control over what is discussed and creates a dynamic where *they* are the authority on their experiences and that their experiences are valued (Sprague 2016).

Coding and Analysis

Interviews were recorded and the audio files of interviews were transcribed using OTTER.ai and then reviewed for accuracy before being uploaded to NVivo for coding and analysis. During the interviews, I took limited field notes, akin to Emerson et al.'s (1995) concept of "jottings", and Lofland et al.'s (2006) "sparse notes" to make note of key sentences, words, or notions stated by the respondent. These notes were handwritten in a series of designated notebooks and were expanded upon for additional detail after each interview.

I concurrently collected and analyzed interview data throughout the term of this study. Thus, I simultaneously interviewed, transcribed, coded, and wrote analytic memos about the data, looking for developing themes from the interviews. I engaged initial coding and identified a series of broader themes that emerged from the interviews (Charmaz 2006, 2014; Lofland et al. 2006; Saldaña and Omasta 2016). I included my field notes (taken during and after each interview, more detail above) and memos in the initial coding where I identified, defined, and discussed concepts that emerged from the data (Charmaz 2001, 2006). Next, I engaged in open coding which involved line-by-line coding of the transcribed interviews using the initially developed themes. Open coding enabled me to remain grounded in the data while developing themes that emerged from the interviews (Charmaz 2001, 2006). Lastly, I wrote analytic memos to continually locate where *I* was within the research so that my impressions and positionality were acknowledged and recognized (Glazer and Strauss 2000; Lofland et al. 2006; Sprague 2016).

The second phase of coding was more focused and was done using NVivo 12.0 qualitative software. NVivo enables focused coding and better organization of the information to make it more accessible (Charmaz 2001, 2006). I reviewed the initial themes that were generated during the first phase, merging those that were conceptually similar into thematic categories (Charmaz 2014; Saldaña and Omasta 2016). The focused coding facilitated an in-depth discussion of the themes and generalizations drawn from the data (Charmaz 2006; Lofland et al. 2006). I then compared the themes to the existing literature on sex work, stigma, emotion management, and mothering literature to understand how the findings of this study contribute to the wider understanding of how women in the sex industry navigate their lives.

Positionality

As my research examines stigma, I would be remiss not to fully acknowledge that the population in this study is marginalized and stigmatized by the larger society. I understand that this is a source of bias that I continually need to recognize and revisit throughout the research process (Collins 2019; Sprague 2016). At the same time, I acknowledge any personal and professional biases that can influence how I interpret my research and interact with my subjects (Sprague 2016). To that end, while I share some traits with the respondents in this research, I do not share their status as a sex worker. While sex work is a profession that I am interested in from an academic and workers' rights standpoint, I have not engaged in sex work. While I was actively collecting data, I volunteered with two sex work organizations in my wider geographic area. Both groups are viewed as relatively new, as they had been around for less than five years when I joined. I joined these groups in late 2021/early 2022 when they began meeting in person after public health guidelines permitted gatherings. My intent was to become more engaged in the harm reduction and decriminalization activism in my area, which I accomplished. I was transparent when I joined these groups, letting those involved and present know that I was there because I am an ally who is interested in activism, but that I am also a sociology doctoral candidate who was currently conducting interviews for my dissertation.

I made sure to openly and honestly answer questions that were posed to me by those in the group, and actively worked for one of the organizations helping write grants, work events, co-run support groups, and with harm reduction efforts. While I did not actively recruit from these organizations, they shared my flyer/information across their social media platforms, occasionally noting my status as an ally. The post they shared was then shared and reposted by

other sex work organizations across the United States, which likely facilitated additional interviews.

I also worked with another organization, outside of my more local area, that was instrumental in getting this study shared across the United States. The group's leader reached out to me after seeing my flyer posted on social media. She and I talked over e-mail, and she asked me questions about the study, what I wanted to accomplish, and myself in general. We established a rapport, and as a result, she included this study's information in her Spring 2021 newsletter that went to group members. Given this organization has national recognition among sex work organizations, the inclusion in their newsletter likely also helped me get additional interviews. I acknowledge that while I am not employed in the same paid work as those in this research, my involvement with these organizations resulted in being labeled an ally within the sex work community. This likely had a powerful impact on the number and depth of interviews that I received for this project.

I do share a fundamental trait with many of the respondents. I am a mother – more specifically, a mother who works and is subject to the same hegemonic expectations by society at large. My race, marital status, education, and social class often shield me from public judgments about my mothering. However, my status as a parent to neuro-atypical children with multiple health issues carries a stigma as there is an assumption that I, as their mother, am responsible for their conditions. The stigma is persistent but not always consistent across groups within society. The harshest social sanctions come from those closest to me, those with the power to label me as a "bad" mom, to my social network, whom I rely on for support. While the stigma I have is more minor than workers in the sex industry, I still recognize it as potentially an area of commonality with my subjects. At the same time, it is something that I continually revisited so that it did not

unduly impact my interpretation of the data. To accomplish this, I wrote reflexive memos throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing of this dissertation (Sprague 2016).

Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed the methodological approach I used in this project to address the overarching research question, how do women who work in the sex industry navigate their work and personal lives. I discussed the sampling and recruitment process used to recruit interviewees from the highly stigmatized sex worker population. I then reviewed the characteristics of the sample and discussed the differences between the sample as a whole and the moms and non-moms subgroups. I also discussed the multiple jobs that the women in the sex industry reported holding while working in the sex industry. Lastly, I reviewed the interview guide and my positionality within this research process.

In the next chapter I discuss the key participants in this study. These women are representative of overall sample and their narratives routinely appear in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. I begin with the key Moms, before moving on to discuss the key Non-Moms.

CHAPTER 4. KEY PARTICIPANTS

This chapter contains a series of biographies of the women who participated in this research. The information is compiled from their responses to questions and remarks during their interviews. The women in this chapter were selected as they represent the two groups (mom and non-mom) as well as the broader sample, are routinely quoted in the results chapters, and their narratives are reflective of the support women in this study received from others. These brief histories enable readers to see the women's lives holistically and provide context to the quotes in the following chapters.

I have selected seven mothers from the sample: Sophie, Genesis, Tori, Ivy, Zoe, Stella, and Katy. These moms reflect the variation in the mom group. These moms have engaged in various types of work in the sex industry, ranging from phone sex and online work to escorting, the same as the broader mom group. These moms' ages range from early 20s through 40s, and their education varies from high school/GED to bachelor's degrees and graduate work. Further, race similarly varies as the moms below identify as mixed race, Black, or white. Among the nine moms who identified as Black, seven of the interviews were shorter (~46 minutes) than the average mom interview (~62 minutes). Stella and Kathy are examples of these shorter interviews, where consistent experiences and behaviors were observed between them and the wider samples, there was less overall information which resulted in shorter entries when compared to the other moms. Finally, familial class status varies from low- to upper-middle-

class, as parental work histories range from business owners to cleaners, reflecting the mom group.

Family configuration varies similarly for these women as it does for the wider mom group. Children's ages range from infancy to their early-20s, and similar numbers of moms report having partners/co-parents versus not. The number and maturity of children are significant because care needs and supervision expectations vary greatly based on the age and number of children. Further, the presence or absence of partners and co-parents can provide support directed at moms engaging in childrearing and support directed toward the children so that moms can engage in paid work.

I have also included biographies for seven non-moms (Freya, Isla, Hannah, Laura, Quinn, Sadie, & Diana) who are routinely quoted in the results chapters and reflect the non-mom participants. These women are representative of the non-moms in the sample across many areas. These women range in age from their 20s to their 30s, and all identify as white. The women primarily worked as exotic dancers but have also engaged in other types of sex work in the industry. Further, these women reflect the varied nature of the non-mom group in their educational attainment, ranging from high school/GED to bachelor's degrees/graduate work, and their family of origin's class status, which varied from middle-working to upper-middle class. Thus, these seven women are holistically representative of the non-mom group. OBJ

This chapter aims to enable a deeper understanding of the participants by providing biographical backgrounds for seven women from the two groups (mom and non-mom). These biographies illustrate the differences and similarities between the groups and give context to the women's narratives.

Moms

Sophie

Sophie is a 40-year-old white woman who lives with her spouse and two of her three children in a Mid-Atlantic city. She works as a writer and escort and has worked in the sex industry for over five years. Sophie is also involved in local and national sex work activism and advocacy.

Before entering the sex industry, Sophie was pursuing her Ph.D. While in grad school, she decided to separate from her first husband. She discusses her first marriage as one-sided, with her husband refusing to take on emotional or tangible labor related to children, home, and marriage. Sophie noted that his refusal to take on any parental responsibility ended their marriage. She also discussed that once she left the marriage, she identified some of his behaviors as emotionally and mentally abusive.

To make the separation less disruptive for her children, Sophie left the family home with only her personal possessions. She joked that when she moved into her new apartment, she didn't have a wastepaper basket, much less beds or bedding for herself or her kids. Sophie noted that while her department at the time was supportive, she was starting over on a graduate student stipend, which was difficult. Then, her mom came to live with her so Sophie could pursue her divorce while working on her degree. During this time, she met her current spouse, who was also pursuing a Ph.D.

Sophie's new partner was working as a cam model when they met. Camming was her partner's side hustle while pursuing their Ph.D. Sophie became interested in camming through conversations about their partner's work and dissertation (also on camming). Sophie indicated to her partner that she wanted to try camming with them. However, they were very resistant in the beginning. Sophie's partner was worried about its potential negative impact on her child custody

case, future career in the academy, and general stigmatized status. As a couple, the two of them discussed Sophie joining them on cam for a while before her partner stepped back and let Sophie make the decision (once informed of all of the pros and cons) whether she wanted to pursue it. She ultimately decided to join them on camera.

While Sophie didn't dislike working as a cam model, she recounted that it was not a great fit for her as she did not enjoy the "...stand up and twirl around...for tokens..." aspect of the work. After a few months, while interviewing participants for their dissertation, Sophie's partner talked with a cam model who also worked as a phone sex operator. This woman shared many of the same dislikes of camming that Sophie did, so she decided to try out phone sex instead. In this field, Sophie found a better fit that enabled her to use her skills and talents as a writer and creator. This work led to Sophie finding her work in the sex industry more fulfilling and satisfying. Around this time, Sophie decided to leave her Ph.D. program and pursue sex work and writing as her full-time career.

Pursuing sex work has had its advantages and disadvantages for Sophie. During our discussion, Sophie noted her close relationship with her mother was damaged when her work was explicitly disclosed. Upon discovering that Sophie was working as a cam model, her mother became upset with her, packing up and leaving the home they shared with her two children. This loss was devastating to Sophie on multiple levels as she felt that her mom didn't try to understand why she chose to work in the industry and that her mother removed the tangible and emotional support that Sophie and her children had come to rely on during the divorce.

Unlike many women in the study who were wary of disclosing to family and were careful with what they talked about, Sophie believed her mother already knew she was camming. This assumption was due to Sophie's partner's open work as a cam model, and the couple had talked

about their work and Sophie's involvement in the session in her presence. While they were able to repair the bond and rebuild their relationship, the hurt from the rift was still palpable when she and Sophie talked. Further, after leaving the home they shared, Sophie's mom relocated to the other side of the country, so while she can provide emotional support for Sophie and her family, she cannot offer other forms of support like childcare that would help Sophie and her partner navigate parenting and work responsibilities.

While they did not cut her and her partner off from the family, Sophie's in-laws did engage in shaming and other stigmatizing behaviors. Sophie recounted being at a family function and overhearing the older relatives talking poorly about her and her spouse in the presence of her children. It was also significant that while her in-laws live nearby, they do not frequently visit or offer support. Not even when their child, Sophie's partner, was undergoing chemo treatments.

While Sophie struggled with her relationship with her mom and her partner's side of the family, her involvement in the sex work community connected her with people who would become her family of choice. Sophie's chosen family is very important to her and supports her and her immediate family. This chosen family stepped up and helped Sophie and her family when her partner underwent cancer treatments. They helped care for their children, including Sophie's special needs son, and kept the household running so that Sophie could be there to support her partner during their treatments.

Sophie plans to stay in the industry for the foreseeable future. She currently divides her time between her family, her regular clients, writing, and sex work activism and advocacy. Sophie does not regret leaving her graduate studies, as her work in the sex industry and the writing that she has been able to publish fulfills many of the same goals she had for her work in the academy.

Genesis

Genesis is a 35-year-old single mom who identifies as white and Native American. She lives on the West Coast and works primarily as a dancer and jewelry maker. Genesis has three children, ages 12, 13, and 15, who live in a mobile home she owns. At least two of her children are neuro-divergent, and all of them have struggled with Covid lockdowns and online schooling, which was still partially in place at the time of the interview (hybrid schooling). As a mother, Genesis focuses on her children's needs and gives them space and support to figure out who they are.

Genesis has a good relationship with her father and one of her siblings but is not close with her biological mother. She is No-Contact with her former stepmother and her two other siblings. Genesis is close with one of her friend's parents and views them as her surrogate parents. This couple has taken on the grandparent role for their three children. It is her father and brother, along with her chosen family and community, that she feels that she can rely on. At the time of the interview, however, Genesis was planning to move in ~6 months to the South to live with her biological father once he retires. She discussed this move as beneficial for her children and father, as she could "be there" for him as he aged, and her children would have a positive male influence in their lives. Genesis plans to continue to work in the sex industry.

Genesis discussed being interested in SW from an early age (teens). She modeled for a while after turning 18, trying to become a Suicide Girl. In the early 2000s, when Genesis was modeling, the Suicide Girl website specialized in models with a punk-alternative look posing semi-clothed or nude. While maintaining her interest in SW, she had to find “straight jobs” to support herself.

Genesis was in an abusive relationship when her two older children were toddlers. She fled and went to stay with her brother but was effectively homeless with no job and with children to care for. She decided to try dancing because it allowed her to make good money while she could still be home with her young children.

Genesis went for an interview with a nearby club and talked with the owner. He asked her if she was a mom, and she replied she was. He then asked her to lift her shirt to see her stomach. She complied and was hired on the spot. Genesis said this was a small family-run club where the owners cared about the women who worked there and tried to foster a sense of family. She identifies this as her "home club," where she felt most comfortable working. The owners made sure there was food for the dancers to eat, provided rides home if needed, and let Genesis sleep when it was slow because she cared for her children during the day. When the club owners and her fellow dancers found out she was effectively homeless and had fled an abusive relationship, they gave her and her children material items (kid's clothes, toys, towels, etc.) to help them rebuild their lives.

One of Genesis' most poignant memories about working at this club was the owners throwing a big Christmas party for the employees and their families. They shut the club down, bought presents for the kids, and made food so they could all have a good Christmas. This party was important to Genesis, not only because it showed her how much her bosses cared about her and her family – but also because this meant that her children could have a Christmas surrounded by friends.

While not all the clubs Genesis worked at treated her and her coworkers with the same level of care as her 'home' club, she noted that most clubs treated her well. Genesis prefers to work at the blue-collar/working-class clubs as she feels these spaces suit her better. She self-

identifies as working class and feels she can better relate and talk with those customers. The few times Genesis tried working at clubs that attracted white middle-class clients, she felt out of place as she did not meet their expectations as she was "too alternative" with colorful hair and tattoos. Also, she felt men at the middle-class clubs were less respectful towards her, often acting entitled to her time and body.

The friends' Genesis made while dancing and in the online sex work community are important to her. She tries to "pay it forward" when supporting other workers – both in person and online- *because* of the support received from the community when she needed it. Genesis knows how much harder starting over would have been if not for the support she received from the sex workers.

Helping others and being authentic to herself as an artist and mother are important to Genesis as she moves forward with her life. She finds a lot of enjoyment in her dancing as an art form and alternates between jewelry making and dancing based on her health. Genesis wants her children to find the same enjoyment in their work someday that she finds in hers.

Tori

Tori is a white 22-year-old single mother who describes herself as a “baby stripper” (someone new to the industry). She spends her days caring for her 3-year-old daughter and works a few nights a week at a club in a nearby city. As a mom, Tori ascribes to an attachment parenting style with her daughter and is committed to gentle parenting. Tori is the primary caregiver to her 3-year-old daughter and spends most of her time interacting with her daughter and engaging in active educational play. During our interview, Tori's daughter was with her, and at various points, we paused so that Tori could address her daughter's questions or fulfill her

requests. Tori's speech style when talking with her daughter adheres to the attachment/gentle parenting style she reported using.

Tori works when her daughter sleeps. Because of this, Tori is routinely tired because she does not get enough rest during the day because she cares for her daughter. There are few affordable daycares in Tori's area, most of which are full. Tori's daughter is on a waiting list for a local HeadStart program, but she is unsure if she will use the program because of the distance from their home and the morning drop-off time. The distance and drop-off time would interfere with what little sleep Tori gets between her return home from work and when her daughter wakes up.

Tori relies on her father and a few extended family members to care for her daughter while she works. She has chosen not to disclose her work in the sex industry to them as Tori fears they would cut off contact with her and no longer watch her daughter when she works. Tori and her daughter also live in a house her father owns, so disclosure could also put their housing at risk. Tori has told her family members that she works as a bartender at a bar in the same city as the club, but she is intentionally vague about the name or any specifics so that they cannot check her story.

Tori has told two people close to her about her work in the industry and has received two vastly different responses. Initially, Tori disclosed this to her mother when asking for help with childcare. While Tori's mother was unhappy about Tori's work in the industry, she did not initially express that she had a problem. Instead, when Tori needed help, usually childcare, her mother would agree to watch her daughter and then cancel right before Tori had to go to work. Tori felt that her mother’s repeated offer of childcare and last-minute cancellation was her mother’s deliberate attempt to sabotage her employment. This intentional sabotaging and later

derisive talk about her work led to a rift in Tori's relationship with her mother. Tori believes her mother's religious beliefs and wanting things to look correct to those in her social circle and church contributed to this treatment. Tori's mother's treatment of her also contributed to Tori's decision not to disclose her work to other family members. Her fear of and anxiety about her father and other family members finding out was frequently on her mind, and because of this, she tried to keep her work and home life as separate as possible.

Tori also disclosed to one of her friends from high school/former flame who she is "talking to "/casually dating. He is about her age and has proven supportive and non-judgmental about her work. While we were talking, Tori mentioned that she was going to pick up a practice pole that her friend was helping her set up at his home. This alternative location gave Tori a practice space separate from the home she shares with her father and where her extended family watches her daughter. This relationship also has aided in her healing from her previous relationship, as her current amore is letting Tori set the terms of the relationship in terms of closeness, intimacy, and contact. This support is essential to Tori as her previous relationship (with her daughter's father) was emotionally and physically abusive and controlling, destroying her self-esteem and sense of self.

Tori talks about dancing as a job where she makes a steady livable income and has flexible hours that enable her to be with and care for her daughter the way she wants. She also talks about her work as a dancer helping her rebuild her sense of self and feminine power that her previous relationship took from her. Additionally, Tori discussed her work as helping her cultivate and practice soft skills that help her interact with clients and others outside the club. Tori believes these soft skills have helped her build her confidence and help her learn to interact with various types of people.

Tori does not plan to stay in the industry long-term. She plans to save money from her earnings over the next five years. Tori plans to invest that money into rental properties that she can use to support herself and her daughter in the long term. She is interested in explicitly renting to women with young children who need housing. For Tori, this is a form of paying it forward, as she is aware that without her father's help, she and her daughter would have been homeless when she left her abusive partner.

Ivy

Ivy is a 36-year-old mother who identifies as Filipino and Mexican American. She and her husband currently live in the southwest with her two stepsons. Ivy's biological son is in his 20s and lives on his own. She is very close with many members of her family of origin, especially her father and aunt, who she relocated to the southwest so that she could care for them. She will text to check in/show love to her extended family members, like her half-sisters who live on the west coast, so they know she is "there" if they need her.

Relationships with family are complicated, and while Ivy is very close to many members of her family of origin, she is estranged from others. She has five siblings, two from her mother and three from her father. One of Ivy's siblings outed her sex worker status to her family. Ivy's family, although not pleased, were mainly understanding. But the disclosure severely harmed her relationship with that sibling. Ivy credits her father's emphasis on the importance of family and education as a primary reason she completed high school after becoming a teen mom.

Ivy is currently the primary caregiver for her two school-aged stepsons, who grappled with online schooling because of the pandemic. Education is very important to Ivy; she spends most of her day supervising and helping her stepsons navigate online learning. Fortunately for Ivy, Covid-19 shutdowns were not her first foray into online learning as her son was involved in

a sport that traditionally made it difficult to attend school. Ivy arranged for her son to attend online classes so that he could graduate.

Ivy intentionally treats her stepsons as her children. The boys' mother is not active in their lives, and for Ivy and her husband, love makes a family. In our conversations, she routinely refers to her stepsons as my boys and her biological son in his 20s as her oldest. She and her husband have worked to create a family unit, and Ivy's oldest has happily taken on the role of older brother to his two younger siblings.

Ivy entered the sex industry in the mid-2000s when she was working as a masseuse. At the time, she was a single mother trying to find well-paying work that allowed her to be with her son. Later she began working as an escort and hiring a babysitter to travel with her and her son when she had out-of-town bookings. Ivy went into the most detail regarding harm reduction and safety strategies. These strategies concerned her safety when meeting clients and her son's safety & social services involvement. For example, when traveling with her son and babysitter out of town, Ivy booked separate hotels to create physical space. She gave the sitter her debit card, pin, and contact information for a family member should Ivy not return or check in. Fortunately, Ivy never had a problem when working, but she could work more efficiently, knowing that her son was safe.

Ivy's husband and father know she currently works in the sex industry. However, she has not disclosed it to her younger siblings or children. Her husband supports her choice to engage in sex work. Ivy notes that her husband supports her and the kids at this point in her life, but she likes her job and regulars. Her husband understands that, and aside from safety concerns, he supports her decision to continue to work. Ivy's father is less supportive of her work. While they frequently talk and interact positively, her father routinely asks when she will stop doing sex

work and "get right with god." Ivy chalks this up to his love for her and strong religious belief, but the shift in her vocal tone indicates that the comment still hurts.

Currently, Ivy sees regular clients who schedule time with her. She only books evening appointments because she cares for her stepsons and monitors their online daily schooling. Ivy is not sure if she will ever stop meeting her clients. She has known many of them for years and views many of them as friends she cares about. It was these clients that, while she had very little money, bought her and her son Christmas and birthday presents or helped when things were tight financially. Ivy's relationship with her regulars has grown beyond the transactional relationship routinely ascribed to sex work.

Zoe

Zoe is a 29-year-old white mother who works as a dancer in the Southeast. She holds a bachelor's in religion and is a trained yoga instructor and birth doula but chooses to dance because she can work fewer hours and still afford to send her son to private school. Zoe is divorced from her husband, but they co-parent and share physical custody of their son, who is in elementary school.

Zoe and her son live a few hours away from her parents. Despite the distance, she is very close with her parents, who play an active role in her son's life. This involvement includes taking her son during school holidays. Zoe's parents are not happy that she has chosen to work in the sex industry, but they have accepted her work as it enables her to give her son a good life.

Zoe initially entered the sex industry because she and her family struggled financially. While working as a birth doula, Zoe met a photographer who was a house mom at a local club. As they left the hospital after the birth, Zoe discovered her car had been hit and would need to be repaired. Zoe recounted that she was viably distressed as money was very tight, and her work as

a doula barely supported her family before the urgent car repair. The photographer suggested that she try dancing at the club she worked at, as Zoe could make enough to repair her car quickly. Dancing seemed a good option for Zoe, and she took the photographer up on her offer. Zoe made enough money to get her car repaired that evening and decided to continue dancing as it helped keep her family financially stable.

At the time, Zoe's husband supported her work in the industry as it enabled him to work less. Their relationship ended as it became untenable for Zoe as it was abusive, and her partner lived solely off her income. Zoe moved back to the Southeast to be closer to her family, and eventually, her former husband moved closer to their son. They were able to develop a co-parenting relationship, but her former spouse hadn't paid child support since the separation, even when Zoe was taking care of their son alone. Zoe decided not to pursue child support from her ex-husband, but instead came to an agreement where her son's father cares for him over the weekends. This enables her son to have his dad in his life Zoe with childcare while she is working.

Zoe prioritizes caring for her son and setting him up for a promising future. She feels that private school is the best choice for her son as the public schools in their area are not good. Zoe had first-hand experience with the school as, for a short time after she moved to that area, she tutored/subbed in the school district. Zoe plans to keep dancing for the time being as it allows her to be home with her son and send him to a good private school.

Stella

Stella is a Black 23-year-old single mother who lives with her daughter, mom, and sister. Stella lived apart from her mother and sister and worked in the sex industry before her pregnancy. Stella knew she would need help raising her child when she became pregnant, so she

decided to move home. Before moving home, she revealed her status as a sex worker to her mother and sister. Although they were not happy about her choice of work, they did come to accept it.

Stella has continued to work in the sex industry and currently makes video content, dances, and escorts through a company in her area. Her work in the industry is the primary source of income for her household, which is Stella's primary motivation for continuing her work. Stella's mother works as a cleaner to help with family expenses, but her wage is about 15-20% of the household income.

Stella works full-time and relies on her mother and sister for childcare. She feels that she is fortunate that her mother and sister support her even though they do not like her work in the industry. Stella wants to be a "good" mom and performs this by prioritizing her daughter's needs above her wants and getting help from her mom and sister so that she can support the family financially.

Katy

Katy is a Black single mother in her twenties. She and her sister were orphaned, and Katy entered the sex industry to support herself and her younger sister. Through her work in the industry Katy was able to care for and provide for her sister through high school and until she found a steady (non-sex work) job. While Katy and her sister are hesitant to talk about her work in the sex industry with others, they are open about it when talking to each other as it was their means of support for their family after their parent's death.

Katy was introduced to the sex industry by a friend she worked with at another job. Aside from the money, Katy says she likes her work because it is fun, and she can work when she is able. Currently, she works as a dancer and creates video content.

Katy lives with her two daughters, 3- and 6- years old, and is no longer with their father. When she works, Katy relies on a nanny to care for her daughters when they are not in school (preschool and elementary school). When her nanny is unavailable, Katy's sister will care for her nieces so that Katy can work. Katy describes her sister as a "good" aunt who loves to spend time with her nieces.

Most of Katy's friends are also in the sex industry. She feels it is easier to make friends at work because they share the same job and won't judge each other. Katy sometimes worries about other people, like her nanny, finding out about her work in the industry because she does not want herself or her daughters to deal with the stigma.

Non-Moms

Freya

Freya is a white, queer, 33-year-old college graduate who works as a dancer. She is finishing her master's degree in the hard sciences and lives with her long-term partner in a medium-sized city in the Midwest. Freya works a few hours away from where she lives to decrease the chance of her running into someone from her university. She is acutely aware that being associated with the sex industry would negatively impact her ability to build a career in the academy as she works in a male-dominated field.

Freya chose to enter the sex industry as it offered her the flexibility that she needed to complete her degree while also cultivating soft skills and working in an environment that is a good fit. Fit was essential to Freya as she had Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and struggled in traditional white-collar workspaces. The busy atmosphere of clubs, physical activity, and varied routine work with Freya's ADHD and become an asset when working in

these spaces. Further, Freya and her partner traveled to multiple clubs to find the best space and atmosphere for her.

Freya's partner is one of the few people outside of the sex industry that knows about her work as a dancer. Freya's parents are very conservative and religious, so she feels uncomfortable telling them about her work. While her partner's parents are more open and accepting of Freya and her partner, she worries that they would judge her for working in the industry. She notes that even her close friends, who espouse liberal ideologies, make negative judgments about her choice of work. The only group she feels comfortable disclosing to is other sex workers and sex work allies she meets through work or thought activist organizations.

Isla

Isla is a white 24-year-old college graduate living in the eastern United States. She began waitressing in clubs in college to make extra money. Within a few weeks, Isla decided to start dancing as she could make more money. She later moved to a larger- upscale club in a city a few hours away because she could make more money while working fewer days at the upscale club.

Initially, Isla disclosed her work to a few of her close friends and later to a boyfriend because she felt they would understand and not judge her choices. Her friends were supportive, but her boyfriend, initially okay with her work in the industry (at the time OnlyFans), changed his mind, even becoming derisive after they broke up. Isla also cultivated many friendships with women who she worked with. She maintains these friendships using social media, often giving and receiving support from her friends via these digital interactions.

Isla worked as a dancer for about two years before she stopped because her parents found out. Her father and stepmother threatened to disown Isla and cut off access to her younger half-sisters. Isla was unhappy about leaving sex work but stopped dancing because she was close to

her sisters. While Isla's father and stepmother have not disowned her, they treat her differently than they did before finding out about her dancing. Isla chose to disclose to the older of her two younger sisters. Her sister has become a vital source of support for her and has helped Isla process the sadness she feels at having to leave a job she enjoyed.

Isla tried OnlyFans for a few months after she left dancing but did not feel it was a good fit for her. Currently, Isla works in an office job that utilizes her degree. She has chosen not to disclose her past work in the sex industry. Isla worries about negative judgments from her coworkers and bosses if her dancing becomes common knowledge. At the same time, Isla notes that she would not hide or lie about her work in the industry if a coworker she was friends with asked her about it. She maintains that she is not ashamed of her career as a dancer, but at the same time, she is very aware that others could and would judge her negatively because of it.

Hannah

Hannah is a 23-year-old white law student who lives in the southern United States. She began dancing when she was in college to make extra money. Hannah has worked for the past four years as a dancer. She primarily works weekends to focus on school during the week.

Hannah was open about her work with her college friends, who were supportive most of the time. She had a boyfriend during college who was initially okay with her dancing but changed his mind and tried to "save her" from sex work. When she entered law school Hannah was no longer as open about her work as a dancer with her classmates. She remarked that she would tell them if they asked, but she does not feel close enough to anyone to disclose her work. Further, she knows that working as a dancer could negatively impact her future career, so she is more selective when discussing work.

While very close to her mother and sisters, Hannah won't tell her family about her work in the industry because she believes they will react badly. Hannah's family is helping pay for her education and some of her living expenses. She believes her family would cut her off emotionally and financially if they knew about her work. Further, because of the close-knit nature of the family, she feels unable to confide in any of her siblings, as the information will get out.

Hannah does plan to eventually tell her family *after* she stops dancing and has a steady job as a lawyer. She believes that her family won't be as disapproving of her work if it is something she did in the past because they can chalk it up to her being 'young and crazy.'

Laura

Laura is a white woman in her early 20s who lives in the Midwest. She moved a few hours away from her home city to attend college. Her mom could not afford to contribute to her education, so Laura has supported herself since graduating high school. Laura began dancing in local strip clubs to support herself and pay for college. She preferred dancing to other work as it paid well and had the flexibility she needed for school. Further, Laura finds that she is sexualized no matter where she works, whether in the club or retail setting. For her, the main difference is she doesn't have to put up with customers harassing her at work because if they step out of line, she can have security remove them and, more importantly, *have those decisions backed by the management*.

Laura was raised by a single mom who worked full-time while raising Laura with help from her extended family. Laura is close with her extended family, but they disagree with her decision to do sex work. She and her mom avoid the topic of her work, as Laura is independently

supporting herself and paying for college. Aside from not discussing work, Laura reports being close to her mom.

Laura works with a sex work organization that she helped organize. She is interested in advocacy, decriminalization, and harm reduction work in the sex work community while providing a space for support for others. Laura knows that at some point, she will stop dancing and possibly move into the straight economy after she completes her education. However, she does not see herself leaving the community or the close-knit group of friends, sex workers, and allies she works with through the local organization.

Quinn

Quinn is a white 31-year-old dancer working in the Northeastern US. She has performed at several upscale and middle-class clubs since she was nineteen and is active in her local sex work community. Quinn comes from an upper-middle-class family where her verbally volatile father had high expectations and equally high consequences for not adhering to his ideal. She noted that the abuse she experienced and rebellion during her teens damaged her ties with her family of origin. She notes that while her mother and siblings tried to understand and help her at times, it was not until her parents divorced that she felt supported in her recovery journey by her family.

The detachment from her family of origin led Quinn to develop close relationships with her friends and coworkers, some of whom became part of her family of choice. Quinn felt understood, accepted, and supported by her chosen family. She credits their support, rather than her family or origins, for helping her during her recovery journey and beyond.

Quinn also noted that being an out and proud sex worker has, in some ways, complicated their recovery journey, as many of the programs and counselors viewed her work as contributing

to, or part of, her addiction to heroin. Further, addiction programs centered around conservative Christian beliefs conflicted with her personal beliefs. Quinn noted that these programs would shame her for her addiction and work in the sex industry, which reduced the program's effectiveness. Once she found a program aligned with her outlook, Quinn was successful. Since then, Quinn has begun helping others with their recovery journey, which she finds very fulfilling. Romanic relationships are not something Quinn is currently interested in pursuing because of her work in the industry. Quinn engaged in monogamous relationships with her partners and expressed that she feels uncomfortable engaging in the deep emotional labor and physical closeness that is a part of her work as a dancer. Therefore, Quinn is currently intentionally single. She talked about feeling like she might be ready for a change in her life, including leaving the industry and being open to romantic relationships. However, Quinn noted that she would still engage with her local and the broader sex work communities that she has become a part of during her time as a dancer.

Recently, Quinn graduated with her bachelor's degree in the social sciences and is considering graduate school at some point. Quinn is politically and socially active in her local recovery and sex work communities. She is open about her recovery journey and how her work in the sex industry has impacted it.

Sadie

Sadie is a young white woman in her late 20s who resides on the west coast. She has her bachelor's degree and was working on her graduate degree when she decided to begin working as a dancer. While Sadie enjoyed her field of study and her work as a graduate assistant, the low pay and long hours, coupled with the exploitative nature of academia, led to burnout and the mental and physical issues that come with it.

Sadie decided to try dancing while a graduate student to make money to support herself and found that she enjoyed the work. The human connection and support she provides to her customers gives her a sense that she is helping others, which she finds intrinsically satisfying. Sadie also has made several friends in the industry who she has become close with, which support her as a dancer and a person. Further, Sadie appreciates that dancing enables her to support herself independently while maintaining a work-life balance, saving money for her future, and taking time off to travel or visit her family when she wants. Sadie is aware that her work as a dancer likely has an expiration date. She is considering returning to complete her graduate work after she retires.

Sadie is very close with her family of origin. She comes from an upper-middle-class family. Her parents are still married and maintain a close relationship with Sadie and her siblings. While her family was initially weary of her choice to leave grad school to work as a dancer, the positive impact it had on her physical and mental health helped them understand that, for Sadie, this was the right choice.

While her parents and siblings are somewhat accepting of her dancing and have worked to understand why she chose it, they do not talk about her job. Sadie talks to her family of origin routinely and visits them often. Her work is not an area that they discuss. Thus, while Sadie's family worked to understand her choice, they did not view her work as a career. Instead, they view it as a temporary job she will eventually leave.

While Sadie's family understands but does not generally discuss her work, her close friends and boyfriends openly support her and her work. Many of Sadie's friends are sex workers and rely on each other for information, advice, and motivation. Sadie also receives support from her boyfriend. She doesn't talk extensively about her work in the sex industry with him, but she

knows that the topic is not off limits as it is with her family of origin. Sadie also noted that finding a romantic partner was difficult. She wanted a partner who supported her work in the industry but was weary of men who were *too interested* in her job as a dancer. Sadie said that the guys who were overly interested in her work fetishized her rather than focused on her as a person.

Sadie has no plans to leave exotic dancing anytime soon as she enjoys this job's autonomy. The flexibility and income enable her to maintain a healthy work-life balance while saving for her future. For Sadie, the freedom and the intrinsic satisfaction she gets from building human connections with customers is why she plans to stay in the industry for the foreseeable future.

Diana

Diana is a 26-year-old dancer from the Midwest who lives on the west coast. She has worked as a dancer for four years and is taking college classes to earn a professional degree. Diana's work as a dancer enables her to be self-supporting, pay for her schooling, and send money to her family of origin to help them live more comfortably.

Family is important to Diana, although she does not view herself as very close with her mother and father. Diana was adopted and raised by her parents in the Midwest. They provided her and her special needs siblings with a middle-class upbringing. However, due to injury and age, Diana's parents can no longer earn enough to support themselves and their special needs children at the same level as they did when she was younger. Because of this, Diana routinely sends money to her parents, who believe she works in the legal cannabis industry in her state.

Diana graduated high school but struggled with academics due to learning disabilities that essentially went untreated and were not accommodated by the school district. She also indicated

in our conversation that her sibling's special needs status meant that her learning disabilities were forgotten or ignored by her parents. The lack of support resulted in Diana struggling throughout school and believing she was not smart enough to pursue a well-paying or steady career.

After graduating, Diana worked several low-wage, low-skill jobs in the legal cannabis industry in the western United States. She also sold cannabis to help make ends meet when her other jobs did not. It was while working as a cannabis processor that Diana met a coworker who was working as a dancer. Diana was surprised that her alt-punk-looking coworker could work as a dancer as she did not fit the thin and blond ideal of a stripper. This encounter gave Diana the confidence to audition at a local club where she was hired.

During the shutdown of her club due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Diana started dating a regular. She admits she was not in love with him, but they got along well, and she wanted companionship. Over time, however, Diana noted that he would make derogatory comments about her working as a dancer and would become negative when she started back at work. She then broke off her relationship with him and has since decided not to date customers from the club.

Diana is currently in a committed relationship with her boyfriend. He was the friend of a dancer friend's boyfriend with whom she was set up on a double date. While her dancer-friend's relationship did not work out, Diana and her partner are still happily together. When she first met him, Diana did not immediately disclose her status as a dancer to her boyfriend. However, when they started to date seriously, she told him about her work as a dancer. Her boyfriend was surprised and dismayed but expressed that he cared for her deeply and wanted to continue the relationship. Diana emphatically noted that since finding out about her work as a dancer, her

boyfriend does not talk negatively about it and does not pressure her to stop, as he does not feel he has the right to tell her what to do with her body.

While Diana's boyfriend does not directly support her work in the sex industry, he does support her in multiple ways that enable her to balance work, schooling, and their relationship. An example of this is his helping Diana with her studies. He helped her organize her schedule so she had ample time to study. Her boyfriend helps her study, proofreads her papers, and gives her tips that have helped her navigate college classes. While Diana still struggles with issues related to her learning disabilities, she is confident she can finish her program successfully because of her boyfriend's support.

Diana's boyfriend also shows his support by helping her with everyday tasks like picking up groceries, doing meal prep, and going to the gym. While these tasks may seem mundane, they enable Diana to maximize her study time, get enough sleep, eat healthily, and stay physically fit. The latter three are important for her ability to profitably dance, engage with customers at work, and reduce her risk of injury. While Diana mainly focused on her partner's support with school-related tasks during our discussion. It was evident when talking to her about her everyday life and schedule that her partner provides tangible forms of support that help her balance her life.

Diana is currently pursuing a professional degree at a nearby college. She intends to continue to dance until she has completed her education and licensure for her career. However, Diana plans to transition to full-time work in her professional field once she can secure employment. As the starting salary for her profession is above $50k in her area, Diana plans to leave the sex industry as she will be able to support herself and also help support her parents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presents biographical information from key participants to provide context and background on the women and their individual histories. The mom and non-moms discussed above and quoted throughout the results chapters represent the sample. These short biographical sketches provide a holistic understanding of the sample women who participated in this study. Further, it illustrates the importance of personal and professional relationships in facilitating women's ability to navigate their lives outside of work.

Women in this study noted that care and support from others helped them navigate their lives. Support for women without children focused on the individual, not their family. Whereas most of the moms in the sample routinely discussed support being directed at their immediate family unit rather than to them individually. For the moms in this study, this family directed support enabled them to balance mothering and other aspects of their lives in multiple ways, such as housing, transportation, children's education, and childcare. Significantly for most moms, the knowledge that their children were safe, loved, and cared for gave them the mental and emotional space to work efficiently. In the next chapter, I will discuss the types of relationships that were sources of support and caregiving for the women in this study.

CHAPTER 5. SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND CAREGIVING

In the following chapter, I discuss the sources of support women in this study received. This support helped them navigate their work and personal lives. While many women in this study talked about both the support *and* stigma they experienced, in this dissertation, I focus on the ways they felt they were supported. In this chapter, I highlight the *sources* of support women recounted in their narratives. While in the next two chapters, I focus on the *types* of support the women received. In what follows, I discuss how all the women reported having someone in their lives that supported them. However, the woman's relationship with that individual influenced the type and strength of support she received. For example, individuals with more intimate relationships (partners, family, and close friends) frequently engage in some form of caregiving with women. In contrast, work-related relationships provided different levels of support because of the nature of the relationships.

It is important to note that the individuals supporting the women were not mutually exclusive groups within their social network. Many of the women in this study discussed becoming close friends, family of choice, or dating others who work in the industry. These relationships were based on shared interests and the stigma of their work. Serenity, Tori, Freya, Sadie, and Isla all remarked on their ability to talk openly with their fellow sex workers – in a way that they cannot or choose not to be open with non-sex worker intimates. Further, while these relationships overlap, the compounded support they provide makes them vitally important to most women in this study. I begin by discussing more intimate sources of support such as

partners, families, and friends. Then I focus on work relationships that women in this study found supportive.

Partners, Families, and Friends

Partners

Many respondents (N=20, 69%) reported being *currently* married, engaged, residing with a partner, *or* dating. Women in romantic relationships reported receiving consistent and deep support from their partners. This support took the form of helping hide their work from others, adopting positive sex work narratives (e.g., sex work is work), and having a confidant to talk to without judgment. Support from partners often extended to others in the women's lives, usually their children, in the form of childcare, schedule management, care, and consideration shown to individuals important to the women.

All the women talked about romantic relationships in some context. However, some women, like Zoe and Quinn, emphasized their choice not to maintain a romantic partner while working in the industry as they didn't feel they had the mental or emotional space to do both. Zoe and Quinn maintained casual relationships (friends with benefits) that satisfied their physical needs but did not require them to maintain a romantic relationship. Zoe's reasoning focused on insufficient time or emotional bandwidth to juggle mothering, work, and a partner.

> I have some friends of benefits, but I'm really not available to date. I just don't have time. [And] because I'm really protective of my son, and who I let around him. …Every now and then I try to see someone it's just really hard. I only get maybe like three or four nights a month that I have off from everything. So yeah, it's really hard to date. (Zoe, mom, dancer)

Quinn, who did not have children, said that she would feel uncomfortable working in the industry if she had a romantic partner because of the sexual nature of her work. Quinn noted that if she was in a romantic relationship, she believed she would have difficulty engaging with

customers because she would feel disloyal to her partner. Additionally, when we talked, Quinn noted that aside from work, she is actively working on her sobriety and is engaged with the recovery community and sex work activism.

> I want a relationship and I don't think that I could be in a fully committed, loving, healthy relationship and go to the strip club and let some guy like, you know, put his hands over like my tits and my butt because it's like we're essentially hooking up just without actual sex. So, I'm planning on quitting sex work entirely in two months, actually. Mostly for that reason, but I'm just ready to move on. I want to get into a long-term relationship, but I don't think that it is possible for me while I'm doing sex work. (Quinn, non-mom, dancer)

These commitments, along with rebuilding her relationship with her mother and maintaining friendships, leave little energy for romantic relationships. For these women, engaging in romantic relationships was not the priority in their lives.

While a few women avoided romantic partners, most of the women (N=22, 76%) interviewed discussed their *current and past* relationships in some way. Further, they noted what partner support looked like within these relationships and how this support made them feel. From their narratives, it is apparent that support from partners comes in many forms. Among the twenty women who currently have partners, eighteen of them were discussed as being at least minimally supportive of their partner's work in the sex industry, with many of the partners being strongly supportive.

An example of strong support can be seen in the relationship dynamics of many of the women including Sophie, Sadie, Flo, Freya, Naomi, and Nova. Sophie was introduced to the sex industry by her partner. Their partner was hesitant to do so, not because they were unsupportive of Sophie as a sex worker, but because they were trying support Sophie as a mom. At that time Sophie was a single mom in the middle of a divorce and their partner was worried that the stigma associated with sex work might negatively impact her ability to retain custody. Once in the

industry, Sophie's partner supported her while she tried to find a type of sex work that she enjoyed.

Within their marriage, Sophie and her partner worked to create an equal partnership, with Sophie's partner taking work that has a flexible schedule so that they can create a schedule that works for the whole family, rather than just one parent while everyone else has to make compromises. This means trading off household and childcare responsibilities so that they both have equal time to devote to their work, the family, and themselves. While Sophie's partner does not take on a parental role with her children from her first marriage, they do serve as another support person that her older two children feel that they can rely on. Currently, Sophie is writing a book in addition to her work in the sex industry. Her partner is allocating more of his time to household and childcare tasks so that Sophie can have the time and mental space to write. This includes taking on childcare and the housework so that Sophie can attend functions like writing retreats and seminars without having to worry about the mechanics of keeping their home and family functional while they are away.

Additionally, even when partners were not necessarily supportive of sex work, all twenty women in *current* relationships discussed their partners providing support in their lives. For example, Diana talked about how her boyfriend has expressed discomfort with her work as a dancer. However, her boyfriend will not ask her to leave her job because she says he does not feel he has the right to tell her what to do with her body. Diana does not view her boyfriend as supportive of her work. However, throughout our conversation, she repeatedly gives examples of how he supports her as a person. These include everyday activities like him picking up groceries, making dinner, and eat healthy meals together. They also go to the gym together to keep fit and healthy, which Diana noted has helped her reduce the likelihood of getting injured.

Additionally, Diana's boyfriend helps her organize her schedule so that she stays on top of her classes, which she identifies as the most significant way he supports her. Diana has learning challenges and struggles throughout K-12 years, which for a long time made her believe that she was not intelligent and would be unable to have a career. She chose to enroll in a local college but continued to struggle to keep up with coursework. Her boyfriend saw her struggling and helped her create a schedule to give her dedicated time to study, taught Diana study skills, and did all he could to support her in getting her education.

So, while Diana's partner does not directly support her work as a dancer, he supports the other aspects of her life, inadvertently supporting her work. Additionally, thirteen of the twenty women with *current* partners (65%) explicitly discussed pursuing relationships with partners supporting their work in the industry. The ability to choose supportive partners is a likely reason they receive consistent support. This selection becomes more pronounced when looking at the support women got from relationships they did not choose, such as family of origin.

Family of Origin

Women in this study also received support from their family of origin (the family one is born into or raised with), enabling them to navigate their lives more easily. As with partners, support differed based on the closeness of the relationship, and familial relationships varied widely. About half of the women (N=16, 55%) reported having a supportive relationship with someone in their family of origin consisting of parents, siblings, and occasionally extended family like grandparents. Eighteen participants reported having at least one sibling, and about half of those with siblings (N=10, 56%) identified these relationships as sources of support. Sadie, a west coast dancer in her twenties, has a very close relationship with her parents and siblings.

> I'm close to my family. We spent a lot of time together. My mom and dad. I have five siblings. And they pretty much all live in the [same] area. Yeah, [I] probably spend like two months out of the year with them, two or three [months]. (Sadie, non-mom, dancer)

Because of their close relationship, Sadie disclosed to her family about her work in the industry shortly after becoming a dancer.

> Ultimately, my family prioritizes having a good relationship with me over at this point in my life, over their judgment about the things that I'm doing. And to their credit, they are big believers in results. So, [they] are kind of just like, all right, "Has anything like changed about her life?", "Did she start using drugs or something?", "Did she lose a ton of weight?, Is she unhealthy?, Like is she living in squalor?" And when it became clear that none of those things were happening or were likely to happen- and in fact, the opposite was happening – [her family was] like, what are you really going to do? (Sadie, non-mom, dancer)

Quinn noted that it took them time to understand why she chose to leave grad school to dance. They did not treat her differently. Further, they were open to listening to her. When she explained that as a grad student, she was continuously burnt out and barely making ends meet but that as a dancer, she could financially support herself while also taking care of her mental and physical health and spending quality time with them, they understood and accepted her choices. However, while Sadie's family knows about her work and is supportive, her work in the industry or sex work, in general, is rarely discussed.

Close relationships with family of origin were vital for many of the mothers in this study (N=12, 63%), as family members provided childcare or other forms of tangible support to the moms in this study. Having a close relationship with their family of origin did not automatically mean that the woman felt able and willing to disclose her status as a sex worker to them. Some women worried that their families of origin would no longer help them.

Tori is a single mom in her twenties who works as a dancer in the country's southeast. She noted that she is very close with her father and their extended family of origin that lives nearby. They supported Tori when she left her abusive former partner. Her father allowed Tori

and her pre-school-aged daughter to move into one of his two homes as he lives in each part-time due to work. While she had a space to live, there were few options for work due to the pandemic and Tori's role as a full-time mom. She initially tried working online (femme dom and camming) as she could work from home, but it was difficult for her to find time and space to work as she and her daughter shared a bedroom, and she could only work when her daughter was asleep. Tori's father agreed to watch his granddaughter on the nights he is there, and other members of their extended family helped with childcare, enabling Tori to find and retain her current job as a dancer. Tori has chosen not to disclose her work because she worries that it would reduce the support she gets from her family.

> My dad, on the other hand, he doesn't even know what I do for work…He comes from a conservative mindset, very Republican, very into Donald Trump. But for him to be like conservative mindset, he's very open and accepting to the fact that he *thinks* [verbal emphasis from Tori] I'm a bartender. He doesn't know [about dancing]. But he's not mad that I'm half naked [working at a bar]. Yeah, he doesn't make me feel guilty about it or use religion to make me feel like a s-l-u-t [Tori spelled this out because her daughter was present] or anything. (Tori, mom, dancer)

When she and I discuss this further, safety/anonymity coupled with the religious and conservative beliefs of her family of origin are reasons she doesn't think older family members would accept or support her work as a dancer.

> One thing that really makes me 50-50 on staying in this industry is safety... Especially if you've got an OnlyFans and somebody found your OnlyFans or your family member found your OnlyFans, it could like really put you at risk [for] alienation [with] your family. If the younger people in my family [knew], I feel like they wouldn't mind. But like the older [family members] like my aunt and uncle, they asked me what I do, and I froze, I was like, "I work at a bar." (Tori, mom, dancer)

Losing support from family members would reduce her access to childcare.

> The only people I can like have as a babysitter is [neighbor's daughter], my cousin on the weekends if she can, and then my dad, otherwise I can't work. (Tori, mom, dancer)

Tori feels she has a close and loving relationship with her father and extended family of origin. Still, she is not willing to risk losing her daughter's home and support system to disclose her status as a dancer to them.

Like Tori, Katy also relies on family to help her. Katy however does not worry about them finding out about her work in the sex industry as her sister knows about her work. Katy and her sister were orphaned when Katy was a young adult. After the death of their parents, their extended family did not give them much help, so Katy took on the responsibility for raising her younger sister. To provide for them Katy worked in the sex industry, which she did not hide from her sister who was in her teens. After Katy's partner left her and her two children she relied on her sister, who had finished school and lived separately, to help with childcare. According to Katie her sister takes an active role in her children's everyday lives:

> She's always there for my kids. She helps me prepare dinner for them. Sometimes more when I am at work. And she- she, she's just- she's just around. (Katy, mom, dancer)

Being around and consistently available to help Katy and her children provides Katy with a sense of security based on the knowledge that she has someone who she can rely on. Lastly, unlike Tori, Katy's sister's acceptance of her work in the sex industry means that her access to childcare and other forms of support is not threatened should her identity be disclosed.

Most of the women (N=18, 62%) in the study had poor relationships or were estranged from some members of their family of origin. This does not mean that these women had poor relationships with everyone in their family of origin. Sixteen of these eighteen women reported receiving support from someone in their family of origin. Zoe is an example of this.

Zoe, a single mother, and dancer reported being very close with her mom and dad. They know about her work as a dancer, are somewhat supportive, and are both actively involved in their grandson's life.

> My family is awesome. They are. They weren't originally supportive of what I do now. But I think they've come around, just because *they understand*. There's nothing else I can really do that I can go make the same amount of money, just working only to like three nights a week. So, I think that we have a better relationship now than we ever have had. And I'm going back to visit them for the holidays. I'm excited for that. They're part of my son's life. (Zoe, mom, dancer)

However, Zoe does not have a good relationship with her brother, who is openly disapproving and antagonistic about her work.

> My brother's not supportive at all. He's [hesitant and anxious pause], we actually have a really fucked up relationship right now. We've gotten in a lot of fights at family gatherings. Mostly because he has a really high paying job. He's overworked but he lives in [Big City] and is a top engineer, and makes six figures, and is does really well. And I think he [pause and sigh] I think if anything, he's just disappointed because he thinks that, I was given all the same kind of opportunity [that he was]. Which in a way I was, but at the same time I struggle with depression and anxiety and it's really hard for me to commit to doing work that I don't feel some kind of passion or love for. Hence why I majored in religious studies and became an artist and a birth doula and yoga instructor. Like all [of] these things were not conventional like career choices. And I just feel like I've had a lot of trauma earlier on in my life that led me to realize that money isn't everything, and that I didn't want to sacrifice my soul to work and a soulless job. I could never see myself being a lawyer or something but that's just personal to me. I don't believe I really am kind of an anarchist and I have different political views. And I think the system is really corrupt and fucked up. And I don't want to work as an agent for the system. And so, this [sex work], to me, one of the best ways I've found that I can kind of say, "Fuck you" to the patriarchy, but still get paid to do what I love. So, I don't know. I don't have a good relationship, he doesn't understand that. And I think he's just young and kind of ignorant to the greater picture of it [all]. (Zoe, mom, dancer)

Zoe does not see her brother as a source of support in her or her son's life and instead views him as a potential source of stress when they interact at family gatherings.

Friends & Family of Choice

All the women in the study noted having friendships and receiving some form of support from these relationships. However, the support varied based on the closeness of the friendship. Nine of the women (31%) reported a close relationship with people they identify as immediate friends/family of choice. Becca, a dancer from the Midwest in her 30s, views her close friends as

part of her family. Currently she and her best friend, who she describes as her brother, live together and offer each other support.

> My best friend from high school, who I call my brother, is staying with me right now. And I think we definitely provide each other with emotional support. He's going through a divorce in his life. And I think we both give each other emotional support. I wish I honestly [had] a little more free time to give him more emotional support. But it's nice to have him here to share that morsel of support… (Becca, non-mom, dancer)

Becca also is very close to dancers she sees as part of her chosen family. Choosing to celebrate holidays and birthdays with them. When I first met Becca, she had made a specialty allergy safe birthday cake for Laura and their friends to share before going out for Laura's birthday. It was meaningful for Becca, Laura, and their friends to celebrate together as chosen family, as many noted their work in the sex industry has been met with varying levels of disapproval by their family of origin, causing strain within those relationships.

For example, while Becca feels that she has a good relationship with her father, after a malicious ex-partner disclosed her status as a sex worker to him, he stopped speaking to her. Becca and her father have worked to rebuild their relationship and routinely talk to each other, but neither talks about her being a dancer, as he prefers to ignore it. For Becca, her family of choice accepts and actively supports her and her work in the industry.

Among the nine women who identified as having a family of choice, four of them (44%) *also* disclosed past difficulties with their family of origin. While some of these issues had been resolved or were in the process of resolving, the women had already cultivated their family of choice in response to the original problems with their family of origin.

Quinn, a dancer in her twenties who resides in the northeast, comes from an upper-middle-class family where she experienced and witnessed explosively aggressive verbal and sexual abuse from her father. She struggled with drug addiction during her early twenties,

becoming estranged from her family of origin. To capture this context, I quote Quinn at length in what follows:

> I became addicted to heroin when I was like, 23 started trying to get sober when I was 25. Then my parents divorced, my father moved to [Big City] and my mom was more there for me as I was trying to get sober. [She would] bringing me to like treatment centers and sober houses and stuff like that. And then my relationship with my brother and sister was not good at all, and [when] I got into recovery, it got a lot better. But [that] type of recovery [program] that was just very, old school and just kind of very shaming and [that] this is all my fault - I've ruined my family's life. And so I should just everything I can to make it up to them. But I didn't stay [in that program, because] that's not my story. That's not the actual truth, so I didn't stay sober.
>
> When I got sober this time, I kind of was like, "Fuck my family", a little bit. Like, I'm there, you know? Yeah, I did cause tons of harm as an IV drug user, but… [Quinn trails off] … Five months into being sober, I started getting like nightmares and dreams about my father, which brought me to the conclusion that he was sexually abusive. So, then I cut things off with him entirely, and then that drove me even further from my mom and my brother and sister because they didn't feel that way. They just didn't want to look at that.
>
> My family didn't really want to acknowledge the truth of that [the sexual abuse], even though my parents did get divorced eventually. That's been like a big strain on my relationship with my mom, my brother and sister. And it's been really hurtful to me to not be heard and to kind of be like, "Oh, well, like I've I endured all this like abuse from him. When I was younger, and kind of like thought that it was me and so now it's like, as it turns out, it is him he has like serious issues" and just not heard, and my boundaries *really* not being respected. I didn't talk to my mom for a year… But my mom and I have been going to therapy together and working on things. So, our relationship has gotten a lot better, and not just in like the past couple of months, actually. So, [now] I talk to my mom regularly. (Quinn, non-mom, dancer)

The level of estrangement changed during Quinn's recovery process. However, Quinn notes that it was not until her mother and father divorced that she received any support from her mother, and even then, it was not always healthy or helpful. For Quinn and her mother, it took a longer time coupled with therapy to reconnect and start to build a healthy relationship.

Additionally, and because of the estrangement from her family, Quinn relied on her close friends' support as she went through recovery. When asked if she identified these close friends as family, Quinn replied affirmatively.

> [When] I was not talking to my mom, that's how I felt for sure. My friends were my family. I wouldn't have been able to literally get by [without them]. I wouldn't have stayed sober without my friends. …My friends- most of them are in recovery… [For me] recovery is top form [priority] of my whole life, and it's a lifestyle that I'm a part of. So, we kind of connect a lot in that way. And a lot of it is about supporting one another and being altruistic and kind of trying to help each other as much as we can. (Quinn, non-mom, dancer)

Quinn goes on to give an example of the support that she was able to get from members of her family of choice she was living with, when she had a fight with her family of origin.

> I was just like, super upset and after like fighting with my mom and my brother. And they [Family of choice] were just listen[ed] to me and let me like cry and hugged me. They share their own struggles with family and stuff like that. (Quinn, non-mom, dancer)

For Quinn, it is the people who stood by her side and that met during her recovery journey that she views as closest to her. Quinn feels that, unlike her family of origin, her chosen family was there for her when she struggled with addiction, dealt with past experiences of sexual abuse and actively supported her through her recovery journey. Like Quinn, the women in the study who talked about their family of choice noted receiving emotional and tangible support and a sense that they were understood and accepted.

The women who had supportive relationships with members of their family of origin still valued the support and understanding they received from close friends. While the women did not refer to these individuals as family of choice, in practice, they received comparable support from them. Like partners and family – the women in the study discuss the caregiving they receive from their family of choice and close friends as necessary within the relationships, but also material to help them navigate the larger world. Among family of choice and close friends, caregiving manifested as consistent emotional and tangible support. The consistency of the caregiving among this group is akin to that of current partners, as close friends/family of choice were all sources of support.

At Work

Work was another space where women received discussed receiving support. Most of the women (N=19, 66%) reported working at clubs, where they would have interactions with other workers and management. However, all the women interacted with clients at some level. Women in the study mainly discussed three types of work relationships where they received support. These relationships ran the gambit from surface-level working relationships to close relationships. Of the nineteen women who worked in clubs, nine of them identified co-workers as close friends or as part of their family of choice.

In contrast only one of the women, Genesis, viewed the management of a club as close friends. Even Genesis reported that this small family owned and operated club was unique among the numerous clubs she had worked at over the years, as the owner-managers routinely treated her and the other dancers as family, rather than employees. Lastly, four of the women in the entire sample discussed viewing their clients as friends or family of choice. However, when these were discussed, the four women relayed that the relationships evolved from work-related interaction into close friendships or familial ties that exist outside of the work context. In the following sections, I discuss co-workers, managers, "house moms", clients, and the sex worker community. All these sources of support were tied to work connections.

Co-Workers

At their most basic, the relationships that women formed at work were essential for navigating the complexities of the workplace and meeting the external obligations in their lives. Co-workers (including bartenders, DJs, etc.) often were discussed in the narratives as a source of support. Most of the support, however, was provided within the confines of their shared workspace. Positive working relationships in clubs were discussed as necessary for making good

money, having a pleasant working environment, having schedule flexibility, and creating a safe workplace. Establishing and maintaining a positive working space and relationships involved communication between dancers and other staff about profitable or problematic clients, club policies, and local laws.

Many of the women (N=21, 72%) in the study cultivated genuine friendships with others working in the industry, even if they did not work in clubs. Most of the women regarded other sex workers as co-workers based on their shared stigmatized identity and similar experience This is unsurprising as eighteen of the twenty-nine women reported engaging in multiple forms of sex work during their careers, widening their network within the industry. These relationships were cultivated in-person and online through the women's professional and personal networks, and served to create positive working relationships that helped the women make money while avoiding problematic clients and scams. Regardless of whether the work was done in clubs or online, the majority of the women discussed how their work relationships progressed into deeper connections overtime.

Most dancers (N=14, 74%) made friends with their co-workers creating connections that benefited them inside and outside their workplace. Zoe, Laura, and Becca all discussed trying to work with friends at the same club, so that going to work would be more enjoyable. Becca went so far as to switch clubs so that she could work with her friends.

> …One of the reasons that I came to work at [Club 2] is because of my good friends from when I worked at [Club 1], when it had closed down for the pandemic, had come here. And they're like this [is] a fun club to work at. And I'm like, "I miss you guys!" So, that's one of the reasons that I started working [at Club 2]. But like yesterday, I got in early to night shift. And a couple of my friends who are day strippers were still there and a couple other friends were there early for nightshift. And there's no customers and we just spent like, almost two hours teaching each other pole tricks, being silly, and goofing around on the stage. And working on triples tricks together, like we tried to figure out ways for us all to be on the pole and like, attached to each other's bodies in some way. And just really learning and having fun from each other. It is experience that I really love, I love pole

> dancing. So, finding other people that are passionate about it, and passionate about dancing is really fun. (Becca, non-mom, dancer)

Becca goes on to talk about how having friends at work benefits her when she needs a break from customers or just needs to chat.

> …Having friends with the club people that you feel like you want to you know, if you want to escape from talking to a customer for a second and just, you know, hang out and talk to a friend, you can do that there. I feel like, overall 99% of the girls are really, really cool. People are really down to talk, just be friends. (Becca, non-mom, dancer)

For many dancers working with friends was also viewed as being profitable because they had friends that could offer support when they encountered a rude customer or were in a funk.

Outside the clubs, these friendships offered support when navigating everyday life issues. Dancers like Freya, Laura, and Becca – all members of the same-sex work community group- talk to each other and other friends in their community about life issues like schooling, dancing, romantic relationships, and family expectations. Becca, while she is quick to note that not all club friendships exist outside of their shared workplace, many of her do.

> …A lot of those relationships don't extend outside of the club. But a lot of them do. Like Laura, and I. I don't think you've met some of our other members who are workers at our club, but a lot of the relationships or people that I've been, you know, I know their kids and I go to family gatherings and I have them over for holidays and that kind of thing. (Becca, non-mom, dancer)

For Becca and Laura these relationships offer more than the support of a colleague, but that of a close friend or family of choice. During my interactions with Becca and Laura it became clear that their relationship, and the relationship with other dancers that they work with, have taken on familial characteristics. With Becca occasionally referring to herself as the 'Mom' for the group.

Like many jobs, the women who worked in clubs described an '*us vs. them'* mentality that they shared with other dancers. The '*them*' often comprised management, clients, family of origin, or non-sex workers. This mentality fostered a sense of belonging and solidarity among the women, mitigating some of the stigmas they experienced as dancers.

A majority of the dancers (N=13, 68%) also noted that they actively tried to help or were helped by other dancers at their club. Helping ranged widely from warnings about a customer, recommending dancers to customers they think would be a good fit, offering advice on dealing with life in general (e.g., relationships, parenting, real estate, taxes), rides to work, or childcare solutions. Tori, herself a newer dancer, mentioned that she had taken the time to talk to and help a first-time dancer with her nerves…

> There was a new girl who came into the job last night. And she was talking in the locker room with me, and I could tell she was new because the night manager had walked her up into the locker room. She was just so nervous and shaking, physically her hands were shaking. And I looked at her and I was like, "You are just so beautiful. You're gonna kill it, I can tell you're confident because you're actually in here right now. The confidence it takes to even walk in and just a lot." And she was just like, telling me, "Thank you so much. You're so sweet. Like, I was expecting everyone, every single one of the girls in here to just be mean and like catty." And I told her, "Girl, I was in the same shoes last week, like how you feel right now is how I felt not even a week ago." And so, I kind of - even though I'm not a veteran dancer- I still took her under my wing last night and tried to help her feel comfortable. Because that's what the other girls did for me when I first started out. [Co-worker] took me under her wing and showed me a few pole tricks and was like telling me like, "Don't do this. Don't do this, but definitely do this." (Tori, mom, dancer)

And Tori recounted helping another dancer with a ride to work.

> I [had] just started dancing a week ago, and I made this friend... And she needed a ride because her car had broke down, and she needed a ride to work. And I didn't mind giving her a ride to work because we could ride together [, and] it's good to make friends and all that. And it [also] really helps with the anxiety of going somewhere half naked and dancing. (Tori, mom, dancer)

Tori chose to help her co-workers because other dancers had helped and advised her in the past.

Similarly, Genesis describes the cooperative relationships that she and other dancers developed that were mutually supportive and financially beneficial.

> We look out for each other; we help each other make money... We wouldn't take each other's money and mess [with] each other... Instead, we would be like, "Hey, this guy just came in and, he's ballin'. Come on over and sit with us for a little bit, and he'll give you money." And that would be how we would do that [behave at work]. We would share,

> share that information in the dressing room. We would tell everybody about who's [who]. This guy said this, that guy said that. We tell everybody everything...and the girls don't tell the customers everything about the other girls. And that's really important. The only thing they'll [say] is, “I bet you'd like my friend” (Genesis, mom, dancer)

Ivy, an escort who has worked in the sex industry for over 20 years, also discussed the importance of co-worker support. In the quote below she discusses the help that is routinely available to her and other from coworkers, and how being a mom increases the likelihood that coworkers will offer their support

> You'll notice like in the industry, a lot of women will volunteer. [Saying to her and others she has worked with] "Hey, do you need anything?" There are some who are close and there are some that aren't close. And they are like "hey do you need any help with sitting [childcare]?" or "Did you need anything?" You know, it's very helpful. You know, especially when someone knows that you're a parent, they're more than likely to work with you. (Ivy, mom, escort)

Helping was often reciprocal and discussed as fostering friendships through work. Once friendships were established, dancers reported staying in contact (N=14, 74%) with co-worker friends when they changed clubs or jobs. Further, as women added to their sex work friend network, they frequently connected their friends. In some instances, these connections coalesced into a sex worker community, which then provided additional support to the workers through stigma reduction, support groups, and activism (discussed more in a later section of this chapter).

The support that the women in this study received from co-workers could be conditional (which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter). If the women or others violated norms or took advantage of sex workers, they could and would be ostracized from the group and shut off from support. For example, one of the most frequent violations that negated support was ‘messing’ with someone’s money. These behaviors included: taking clients, staying on stage over time, or badmouthing a dancer to clients or managers. Isla, Becca, Laura, Hannah and Quinn noted that dancers who were seen to cause problems were quicky reprimanded by them or

management. Many of the dancers illustrated what a problem dancer was by using their behavior – or lack of it as the example, as Hannah does below.

> I'm very much a non-problem dancer. I don't get into fights. I don't get super-super drunk. So, I usually don't have a whole lot of problems with management. Usually, it's a "Hi, bye, how are you?" [conversation with managers]. Or, if I'm wearing something that's maybe not completely legal, they'll [say], "Hey, gotta change." But that's about [it], I have a good relationship with my manager. I don't like any of them [managers] to text me [on days off]. I think that's, like, too far. (Hannah, non-mom, dancer)

The dancers said that managers are quick to let problem dancers go because managers did not want the disruptions or conflict to impact profit or become a problem they had to deal with. Most dancers in the study noted that while other dancers overstep sometimes, it was not frequent. Most violations occurred because a newer dancer did not know the rules, and older, more experienced dancers would correct them and teach them the club's rules and expectations.

Managers

Managers were another source of support for dancers who worked in clubs. The dancers commented that most of their managers provided conditional support. The support managers provided was conditional and based on the best or most effortless for them and the club's bottom line. Consequently, dancers in the sample recognize that their ability to get better treatment/more leeway from managers is based on 1) how much money they bring in, 2) their likeability, and 3) the amount of "trouble" they make for the managers. Management styles varied in different clubs, and most of the dancers in the sample reported working at different clubs during their time as dancers.

Being a mother appears to be impactful in some clubs but not others. This needs further research, but this variation may have something to do with the size and/or type of ownership of the club, as women who worked at corporate clubs reported that their workplace lacked flexible working conditions and had consistent rules that managers more rigidly enforced. In contrast,

dancers said that, at mid-range clubs, the flexibility from managers was based on money brought in and perceived compliance/likeability. Dancers working at smaller clubs reported fewer set rules and higher flexibility. In some clubs, dancers who were moms (or students) received more flexibility, as their status (mom, student, or both) rendered them as deserving.

Genesis, for instance, is the only dancer who specifically noted that one club she worked for had owners/managers that engaged in high levels of support with their workers. She recounted them giving moms who needed work a job, feeding people when they worked so they had a meal, throwing a holiday party for the workers and their children, driving workers home if their vehicle was broken-down or they were not safe to drive, etc. Genesis said this club had a family atmosphere among the workers and owners.

> My first club hired me, because they saw that I was a single mom, they asked my audition was literally lift your shirt. Let me see your tummy. And I showed my tummy. And he's like, 'You have kids?' And I was like, 'Yeah'. He's like, 'Come on.' That's how I got hired. And he was always considerate if I needed to go, my kids are sick, my you know, anything like that. He's like, go, go, go, *take care of your babies*. And that was he was really family. (Genesis, mom, dancer)

Genesis felt she was valued as a person, and a mother, and not just someone who made them money. Genesis pointed out that this was not the atmosphere she experienced when working at larger upscale clubs.

House Moms

The exception to money/likeability/status when it came to management, was the support provided by House Moms (who were only in large clubs), whose job was to provide emotional support, advice, and motivation to the dancer. Laura describes the support House Moms provide:

> All they do is sit in the dressing room. They console dancers who are crying, which happens sometimes. They are there for people when they have emotional stuff, they'll do your hair, they'll help you with makeup. They tell you to follow the rules, they tell you to be on time. They do all these other things. They are basically the stripper manager which

> is different than the manager-manager. I'd say the regular manager mostly deals with customers, but like the house mom is basically your manager. They usually deal with your schedule, they usually like tell you what to do, they usually tell you what you can and can't wear they usually have personal relationships with the dancers like usually they're pretty good friends. Especially with people who are in the dressing room a lot, they tried to encourage you to not stay in the in the dressing room so that like you can go make money. But honestly, only really new people need the encouragement or if they're like really depressed all the time or something like that. But basically they make sure you don't feel they make sure you don't fight but they just kind of like sit and chill in an office. They basically just get paid to be there. (Laura, 58:50)

As Laura points out House Moms were not full managers and they were no exactly co-workers - although some were former dancers. They were expected to enforce the club's rules, support the dancers, and ensure personal items were not stolen from the dressing room. Clubs, while they selected/hired House Moms, did not directly employ or pay them to enforce club rules or support dancers. Instead, dancers in clubs with House Moms are expected to tip them at the end of their shift, in the same way, a waiter must tip-out/share their tips with bartenders, hosts, or other restaurant staff.

Of the nine women who discussed having House Moms, eight of them (89%) noted the House Moms women also made money by selling convivence items to the dancers in the dressing room at a slight markup. These items ranged from snacks to clothing and necessities like tampons. Markups were viewed as reasonable, and having the items was appreciated by dancers as they could not go to a store during a shift. However, the end-of-shift tips were House Moms' primary source of income from working at the club.

House moms exist in a gray area within the clubs. The dancers often viewed them as taking on an explicit caregiving role (discussed in detail in Chapter 7) and having a sense of camaraderie with the dancers as Becca discusses below.

> Not all clubs will have one [a House Mom], and they will sometimes only work Friday and Saturday. But basically, their job is to mostly spend their time in the dressing room. They check to make sure you're dressed properly. They give you advice on how to look

> sexier. And they'll do hair and makeup, they'll cut pasties, they'll have band aids and perfume and other feminine products and necessities at a club. And for a lot of girls that might be going through trauma or something in life they can kind of be like the dressing room therapist, the person you can talk to, [and] so forth. At our club, they're often the person who maintains the schedule. So, they [are the] person you talk to about being on your shifts and asking off for time. (Becca, non-mom, dancer)

House Moms also work as quasi-managers to enforce club rules and report violations, making them a possible obstruction as they were viewed as semi-manager dancers who had to stay on good terms with. Further, House Moms could be viewed as another drain/fee that dancers must pay at the club on top of stage fees, especially if they were considered ineffective.

While traveling (temporarily working at another club), Laura encountered a House Mom who made her work more difficult.

> …There are clubs where they have really shitty house moms. I went to dance in another city… for a couple of days. … I was trying to leave, and I [had] asked the manager and he said I can leave. …So, I was trying to leave, and the house mom [said] I can't. [The House mom] was supposed to show me around and all this stuff, when I got started, [but] she didn't do anything that she was supposed to. And then at the end, I was trying to leave and she [said], "Well, you didn't pay me, and you didn't do this, and you didn't come talk to me." And I was like, I already asked him [the manager], and I don't know what your problem was. She just started yelling at me and ruined my night. I refuse to go back there because I hated her so much. Oh my god. Some House moms are pretty trash. Some of them are not that bad, though. Some of them are pretty chilled. Some of them are worth the money, but I think it's better for newer dancers than it is for like experienced ones. …They don't give you a lot of advice… Some of them have danced and some of them have never danced - a lot of them have not in my experience. So, it's not like they're like giving you a ton of tips. They're mostly there for emotional support in my opinion. (Laura, non-mom, dancer)

Laura was annoyed because the club's manager had told her she could leave after making her money for the evening, and the House Mom tried to stop her. The gray area of House Moms as management and support person can cause problems within the club for the dancer.

Clients

Clients were another source of support for the women in this study. Like co-workers and managers, their support varied based on the closeness and context of the relationship. Clients

who most often engaged in consistent, supportive behaviors were ‘regulars’ (i.e., clients who regularly saw a particular woman, usually over an extended period). The support that patrons provided varied and was often based on the needs of the woman. Some of the support was directed toward the workers’ children through gifts. Women reported feeling cared about when clients went out of their way to do something nice. Flo, a dancer in her 30s, noted that a group of regulars at one of the clubs routinely gave extra to her.

> We had a lot of lesbians who used to come down to that [club]. And they would come like once a week, basically. [In] like a group and they just loved me. And they would tip me extra and treat me very nicely and bring me snacks. And [it was] just cool. (Flo, mom, dancer)

Flo appreciated that these women went the extra mile to not only tip well and be nice, but also to bring her things to snack on that she liked.

Gestures also included making a special visit to the club when the woman communicated, they were having a bad day or surprising them with gifts. Isla, another dancer, recalled that she texted one of her regular clients when she was having a bad day at work. Her client came into the club and “made it rain” for Isla, helping her turn her day around.

Gift-giving was meaningful between regulars and the women in this study as it expressed additional appreciation beyond payment for their time and skill. Also, as with most gift-giving, giving a gift specific to the recipient’s preferences and needs indicates the giver’s close relationship with them. For Sophie, gifts from one of her clients helped her focus on her work as a writer, but also included items like perfume that reminded her of positive past experiences or tangible help for her family.

> I have a patron guy in New York, who lives in New York City, who is he's a client of mine, but he's more like a patron… He pays for my writing coach for my book. He's been a fan of my work. When I got the book deal, he asked me how he could support me. And I said, I wanted like a [writing] coach to do this. So, he pays [writing coach] every month…to work with me on my book and go over all my drafts. He also reads them. So,

> our exchange for paying for these is that, he's read drafts of my book. And then he'll do very sweet things. Like when I went to New York, he, in my book I talked about when I was a grad student having gone to Paris, and he bought me these like, perfumes that are the smells from the Louvre…
>
> There's 12 of them [perfumes] for different like smell or Louvre. It's just cool, because he reads my stuff. And then thinks of things to give me that are [special]. He's one that paid for me to go to the writing retreat. And then he said to me for your birthday, I was thinking of maybe sending [Sophie's Partner] some money to have the people come and clean your house, because you've been like, gone. …He's a very, very thoughtful patron who like helps support my projects. (Sophie, mom, escort)

Sophie's client wanted to support her in something that she is passionate about, which demonstrates his understanding of her as a whole person and the closeness of their relationship.

Since regulars are often viewed as a steady source of income for workers, many women work to cultivate these relationships. However, cultivating regulars comes with pitfalls. The women noted that male customers frequently asked for their phone numbers so they could chat outside of the time they spent together (face-to-face and online). Most of the women were aware that these men want them to engage in additional emotional labor via text (e.g., asking how their day is going, what they are doing, and even sending pics or sexy texts). Most of the women in this study, however, were only willing to engage in texting/separate communication if 1) the client would pay for their time, 2) they already viewed themselves as a friend of the client, and 3) they felt that they were cultivating a regular where there would be a "pay off" at some point. For instance, Isla and Hannah, dancers in their early 20s, discussed this as a way to cultivate regulars. Hannah discusses being very strict about texting clients outside of work hours now that she is more experienced because most customers that she exchanged texts with were only interested in getting "freebies" (i.e., free emotional and sexual labor).

> I don't really text super often. I did fall into that trap when I first started dancing, because people will ask for your number. Spend a lot of money on you [and then] ask for your number. And I'm like, "Okay, I'll give you my number." And then [clients] just want to like text you all the time. They're like, "How was your day?" and this, that and the other and I'm like, *this is not what I signed up for*. But [now] I make a very clear boundary.

> You can text me, 1) if you pay me to text you. Or 2) you can ask when I'm in the club. (Hannah, non-mom, dancer)

These “timewasters”, as many of the women called them, could also turn nasty. The men would spew negative comments at the women when they refused to engage with them without compensation (or, in some instances, when they refused to engage in other sexualized labor). Therefore, women could encounter negativity when attempting to cultivate regulars who are a consistent source of support.

Sex Work Community

Relationships in the sex work community are an essential source of support for the women in this study. Sex work community groups can center around mutual support, harm reduction, education, or activism. Some early community groups, like Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) and the Sex Work Outreach Project (SWOP), have grown and now have chapters throughout the US and abroad. These chapters and independent sex work groups routinely share information and resources to help their community. Contact and collaboration have become easier over time as technology has created digital spaces.

Laura and Becca’s friendship with their co-workers and the obstacles they regularly face coalesced and inspired Laura to start a local sex workers’ alliance.

> Now that I'm starting to start my own organization to help people it's been a little harder, because I would also lump that in with work, in some sense. Where - I enjoy doing it, and it makes me feel good, but it does take a lot of time. It is a lot of effort… [Healthcare] is like one of the things like I want our group to work on. I want to start creating plans for healthcare providers and for mental health counselors. Just start talking about how to actually, properly address sex workers and their needs… I eventually want to start making a curriculum for it. And then maybe talk to some major hospital systems [my area]. Like, it's a long-term plan. I'm still trying to get the group started, but that is something, long-term, [that] I'm very interested in. And I would like to maybe start talking to universities about including it in their classes, but I would have to get it set up first… So we'd have to try it. We'd have to, like, get a curriculum, test it with existing doctors, like maybe like, test them on it, and then maybe, like, incorporated into like

> asking universities if they would let me come talk to them and stuff like (Laura, non-mom, dancer)

In the past few years, this group has grown and extended the support they offer to their local sex work community. They currently hold monthly face-to-face meetings where sex workers and allies are welcome. They organize and collaborate with other local groups on awareness events, engage in harm reduction training for their community, discuss decriminalization legislation, and an online sex work support group.

This sense of friendship and community existed outside of clubs, as many of the virtual spaces that sex workers use to build a sense of community. For Naomi and Serenity, these online communities and friendships have been significant to their careers and mental health. Naomi, a mother of two in her mid-twenties, lived in remote areas for most of her career as a content creator, making it difficult for her to connect in person with others in her industry. It was online that she could connect with the community and build relationships that helped her promote and expand her brand.

> About a year, year and a half ago, I rebranded to being a sweet 19-year-old girl in college, who's single, and you know, just loves guys, loves having fun, you know, all that kind of stuff. And I found my income actually significantly went up…. [the sex work community and her collaborators have been] very supportive. Most are shocked, because I do look quite a bit younger than I am… So, it's kind of nice that they've all been supportive [of her as a mother and sex worker]. (Naomi, mom, cam model)

Serenity, a content creator from the Midwest who started doing online sex work during the Covid shutdowns, noted that friends in the online communities were vital to help her figure out what type of sex work she wanted and how to do it more safely.

> I was also introduced to a different side of things when a friend of mine in the industry suggested I do something called Fin Dom, which is a financial dominatrix… [My friend] had suggested that [I try it] and I was hesitant at first because a lot of-- it's kind of like pushy and being a little bit mean, and that's not really my nature. I'm very pleasant and upbeat. So, trying to do that was a struggle at first. But once I got the hang of it, a lot of people came from that side of things as well. Because they just wanted [a] safe space to

> be open with what they wanted to do. And you couldn't really get that outside of this kind of work. (Serenity, non-mom, financial dominatrix)

Both Serenity and Naomi said that talking to friends in the industry about work- the good, the bad, and the annoying- helped with their mental health.

Digital sex work, compared to strip clubs, has few, if any, formal co-workers. In most narratives, the women identify their co-workers as the broader online sex work community. Like in clubs, these women noted that they tried to create and maintain positive working relationships with others in the industry. Cultivating these relationships included giving and receiving surface-level external support through likes, comments, or shares of posted content. These outward expressions can occur in individual chats on servers like Discord or social media sites like TikTok. These online co-worker communities also maintained lists of unsafe and "timewaster" clients who harmed or scammed other workers. Naomi and Serenity felt the online community was important to support and educate sex workers to avoid scams and other issues online workers can encounter.

Serenity noted that the Twitter chats she is a part of are used by online sex workers to warn each other:

> So, we'll have like six group chats of like a bunch of people we know and put it in each one, "Hey, John Smith did this to me. He tried to scam me, was rude to me, was racist. Don't work with him." (Serenity, non-mom, financial dominatrix)

Further, they were both adamant that the acceptance, support, and sense of belonging they experienced from their online co-workers helped their mental health.

> I think if there wasn't any community, I wouldn't have been able to remain in this industry for so long. Because it can be very mentally and emotionally draining, very lonely, particularly if you're doing it from the comfort of your home, I mean, you don't go to an office, you don't talk to people every day. So, it can get very, very isolating. And so having that online community to talk to is really the only way you can survive. (Naomi, mom, cam model)

These digital co-worker communities thus function similarly to in-person co-workers in club settings. Cultivation of the online sex work community has gone far beyond Alexa Albert's (2001) mention of women at the now-defunct Mustang Ranch going online to chat rooms and review sites to advertise and promote themselves. Today social media advertising and engagement is a routine part of sex work, even for those who work in non-digital spaces. Outside of advertising and cultivating a client base, the online sex work community has grown and connected.

The Covid-19 pandemic was also a catalyst for an increase in online sex work community presence. Some community groups moved part or all their group activities online as there were restrictions about meeting in person. There was also an influx of workers who moved online as in-person workplaces closed due to public health restrictions. This influx was not limited to established sex workers but included many new sex workers, like Serenity, who struggled to make ends meet because of the Covid-19 shutdowns.

> So, we [Serenity and her partner] were out of money and out of options. And I was like, hey, you know, I've always wanted to try this. And he's always been very encouraging of it. So, I started an online OnlyFans page. (Serenity, non-mom, financial dominatrix)

Without the financial need Serenity might not have started in the industry, but she is happy that she did because it opened her up to a new community and helped her become more confident and assertive in her everyday life.

Increases in online sex work and the rise in a digital presence for sex work communities facilitated the growth of online sex work communities. These groups provide a space to talk with others in the industry and contain resources targeted to help those in the sex industry. These include information on black-listed clients and scammers, legal information, access to mutual aid funds, skill-building seminars, and virtual support groups, all of which can foster a sense of

community and a safety net for sex workers. Serenity, who started sex work during the pandemic, found that the support and help from other sex workers in her online community helped her avoid being scammed and taken advantage of when she began working.

The women I interviewed expressed that they were *not* expecting or relying on substantial support or caregiving from clients, managers, co-workers, or the online community. Instead, women in the study thought support was good when they got it and, for the most part, were willing to engage in reciprocal support, especially with managers and clients. They were very aware that options for support could change anytime.

Conclusion

Sources of support for the women in this study varied across their social networks. Every woman disclosed that they had at least one person in their lives that served as a source of support that facilitated them navigating their lives. Partners, families, and friends routinely provided support to the women in the study. However, the strength and consistency of the support varied widely and reflected the strength of the relationship between the woman and the partner, family member, or friend. There were also factors that the women needed to contend with, like the choice to disclose sex worker status, to maintain the relationship and the support that they received.

Work relations also provided support to the women but was dependent on the woman being a current or former sex worker. Much of the support centered around creating a safer and more profitable work environment for them as workers. Among managers and some co-workers this was focused on *current* employment in *specific* club and was directed at maximizing profits. For other coworkers, clients, and the sex work community these interactions were more friendly and cooperative, trying to create a positive working environment regardless of where the work

was taking place. Lastly, the support from the sex work community centered on facilitating work by disseminating information on harm reduction and stigma management by providing emotional and tangible support for the women.

It is important to note that there were few differences between moms and non-moms when it came to the sources of support. However, women with children noted that some sources offered them *more* support which was directed at their mothering or children. For example, Tori received childcare from her father and cousin while she was working, and her bosses allowed her to go home early without financial penalty on slow nights. This type of support was given because of Tori's status as a mom. However, if she was not a mom, Tori would still receive support from her family of origin and her bosses – it would likely *take a different form*. Thus, I extend my analysis and discuss what this looks like in the following chapters that focus on *types* of support received, rather than just the sources of support.

CHAPTER 6. TYPES OF SUPPORT: CONDITIONAL, CASUAL, AND STEADY SUPPORT

In this chapter, I will discuss the varying types of support the women in this study received from people who helped them navigate their work and personal lives. After a brief discussion of the support continuum, I will examine the specific themes that emerged from the narratives. I will first discuss the themes of Conditional Support, Casual Support, and Steady Support and how these manifested in the context of the women's personal, work, and community relationships. In the next chapter, I will discuss the theme, Caregiving and its three subthemes: Understanding, Caregiving by Proxy, and Stigma Management. The "support themes" will be addressed in the context of the women's relationships with others in their social network.

Figure 1. Support Themes

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Caregiving</th><th>Steady</th><th>Casual</th><th>Conditional</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Providing consistent tangible and emotional support where the other person engages in deep, internal and external emotion management.</td><td rowspan="2">Providing consistent tangible and emotional support, using external surface-level emotion management. Deep internal emotional management does occur sporadically.</td><td rowspan="2">Providing inconsistent tangible and emotional support, gestures are casually provided and use surface-level external emotion management.</td><td rowspan="2">Providing varying amounts of tangible and emotional support to the women. This could range from casual to steady support but was contingent on the women meeting a specific condition. Most of the time that condition was being a sex worker.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Understanding</td><td>Caregiving by Proxy</td><td>Stigma Management</td></tr>
<tr><td>Caregiving by engaging in deep-internal emotion management to understand the women's individual histories, motivations, goals, and issues.</td><td>Caregiving directed at individuals for whom the women cared for, usually her children.</td><td>Caregiving that helps the women deal with their stigmatized status by helping them to hide, evade, or reframe the stigma.</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Support directed at the women in this study varied in strength and consistency, which I discuss as a continuum. Still, the participants generally noted that any help they received positively affected them and their ability to navigate their lives. The support they receive is

usually characterized by individuals engaging in supportive behaviors directed at the women. These supportive behaviors ranged from commiserating about work, helping with childcare, and managing stigma. All the women in the study reported having at least one person in their life who supported them and that the support they received helped them navigate their lives on their terms.

Conditional Support can vary widely in strength and consistency. Conditional Support is characterized as support given *based on a specific condition* or conditions. For some this requires actively hiding their sex worker status as the (often unspoken) condition of the support they receive is a non-sex worker identity. For most of the women in this study it is their status as a sex worker, or worker at a specific club, that is the condition for accessing support. Because this support is based on a specific condition or conditions being met, the types of emotion management engaged in, and the consistency of the support vary. I place conditional support on the right of the table because it does not fit what is otherwise a continuum of support in terms of consistency and strength of support.

Casual Support, as the name implies, is causally but *inconsistently* given to the women in the study. Unlike Conditional Support, it is not tied to a specific condition, such as work status. Casual Support is also characterized by the external and surface level emotion management that is involved in providing it to the women in the study. Further, as it is inconsistently provided by those in women's lives, meaning that they do not rely on this as a routine source of tangible and emotional support. Lastly, the women in the study *perceive* these interactions as actively supportive of them and their work in the sex industry, even if the remarks are not wholly sincere or do not appear as supportive to others.

The Steady Support theme is characterized by its *consistency* as the women perceive these interactions (generally coming from friends, family and the sex work community) as reliable sources of tangible and emotional support in their lives. The emotional support received is routinely external and surface level but can include internal deep emotion management at times. The women perceive those providing Steady Support as not engaging in internal or deep emotion work consistently and most of the time. However sometimes deep/internal emotion work occurs within these interactions - but they are not routine within the relationship, nor does not meet the threshold of caregiving.

Finally, on the far left of the table is Caregiving, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter. Caregiving is characterized by the *consistent* nature of the tangible and emotional support the women receive. Further, the emotional support provided within the Caregiving theme utilizes *deep, internal, and external emotion management* – usually in the form of emotion work. This is consistent with the existing literature's view of caregiving that is characterized by individuals consistently providing tangible and deep-emotional support that attends to another's needs or well-being (Cottingham, 2022; Erickson and Stacey 2012; Stacey 2011).

This review of the themes, their definitions, and where they fall on a wider support continuum is intended to furnish a wider understanding of how this dissertation will discuss the different forms support that the women in this study experience. In this dissertation I focus on positive, supportive behaviors and in this chapter, I focus on Conditional Support, Casual Support, and Steady Support, all of which will be detailed in the sections that follow.

Conditional Support

Conditional support in these narratives is typified by the support the women received, which had some form of condition or conditions attached. These conditions can be tied things like taking on particular roles and responsibilities, hiding ones work in the sex industry, working at a specific club, or being a sex worker. While conditional support helped women navigate some aspects of their lives, it also created other obstacles that they then had to deal with. These obstacles were often viewed as a necessary tradeoff so that they could meet a more basic/immediate need in their lives.

In this section, I discuss conditional support by the source. I start with more intimate relationships, specifically their partners and family of origin. Then, I discuss workplace relationships, including co-workers, managers, and clients. Disclosure of their stigmatized status was an essential factor within intimate relationships. For example, some women chose not to disclose to their family of origin because they worried it would damage the relationship. In the narratives, it was the support from family, usually parents, that the women (15/20, 75%) were fearful of losing. Conditional support most often came from individuals who the women worked with in the industry (such as co-workers or managers or clients), however, sometimes family offered support that was conditions.

Partners

Nova's partner was the only partner who offered conditional support. He provided housing for her and her pre-school-aged son but stipulated that she not work while he was home. As a result, she was able to work as a cam model. Still, as she is her son's primary caregiver and has no other childcare, she cannot maintain a regular streaming schedule, thus decreasing the chance to cultivate regulars which is critical to a steady income (Jones, 2020). However, Nova was willing to make this trade-off, as her previous living arrangements were more precarious.

> …before I started staying with my boyfriend … I was staying in hotels, so, literally, I just never slept. So, I could have time to do *everything* I needed to do. And that that was the *only* way that I could balance it [work and caring for her son]. When I got over here [living with her boyfriend], I think I slept for like three days. Literally, I was just so, exhausted, like, "Oh, I forgot what it feels like to go to sleep"…
> [When I was living in the hotel] I would try to work. I would try to get [ready to go] on [cam] literally as quickly as possible as I could after he [son] went to sleep. So that way I can have the maximum amount of hours before he would wake up. And then there's no time for sleep in between that - because he only sleeps from 9/10 o'clock to 8 o'clock/9 o'clock. And so that's it. And that was like, a couple hours getting ready. And a couple hours on cam. And a little slight break in there, somewhere. (Nova, mom, cam model)

For Nova, having stable housing was worth the tradeoff of only working when her boyfriend was not home, and her son was asleep, as there was less pressure to make money so they would have a place to live and food to eat.

Family of Origin

Dancers Tori and Hannah both fear losing the support they receive from their parents should their work in the sex industry be discovered. These women rely on their parents' support to navigate their daily lives. Tori, a single mother, relies on her father for housing and childcare. Unlike the prior example with Nova's partner who gives the condition, Tori and Hannah infer support as conditional if they keep their work a secret.

> So, in my situation, I'm still living with my dad, and he lives in two houses. So, he lives here in [name of city] and then he's got another place that he goes to- throughout the week - to live with his wife. But he'll come to [name of city] - Monday, Tuesdays and Thursdays. And those are the nights that I get to work, because he'll be able to stay home with my baby. (Tori, mom, dancer)

Tori wants to tell her father about her work but is scared to tell him because of her mother's adverse reaction. While she did not disclose Tori's work, her mother *actively* tried to sabotage it by rescinding childcare at the last minute when she knew Tori needed to work. As a result, Tori

is acutely aware that the help she gets from her father and his side of the family enables her work and ability to provide for her daughter.

Similarly, Hannah, not a mother but a student pursuing a professional degree, relies on her mother's help to pay for school and her living expenses.

> …My mom pays more of my rent than I do. But I pay for all, like my household essentials and groceries and stuff like that, my textbooks. And then we're 50/50 on tuition. (Hannah, non-mom, dancer)

While Hannah notes that she and her mom have a close and strong relationship, she is worried that her mom would be upset she chose to do sex work, as "I don't think any mom is like, I want my baby girl to be a stripper" (Hannah, non-mom, dancer). This fear of disclosure to her mom also reduces the support Hannah could get from other family members, specifically her sisters, as she knows anything she tells one of them, everyone will find out about shortly after.

> No, cause then if I - Okay, because I don't know about your family. But it's one of those [things] if you tell one person, like, everybody's gonna know. (Hannah, non-mom, dancer)

For Hannah, this means that she does not disclose her work to anyone besides close friends and those she works with, thus limiting the sources of support.

Work

Most conditional support came from people at work. Women who worked in in-person settings, like clubs, received this support from co-workers, bosses, and clients. While women who worked in virtual environments received conditional support from clients as they did not have co-workers per se or bosses. Women who identified co-workers as friends received other forms of support, as the friendship negated the conditional component.

Co-Workers

At work, conditional support from co-workers centered around two things; 1) maintaining a good working relationship so that both women made money and 2) providing support to each other when faced with an outside threat or obstacle (unruly/rude customers or poor management). The co-workers who provided conditional support were not viewed as friends by the dancers in the study and had no relationship with them outside of the club. However, as Quinn discusses below, they viewed them as sisters-in-arms based on their shared stigmatized status.

> Yeah, [there is] definitely a camaraderie. I feel like people in strip clubs can be -and I hate the stereotype - that strippers are competitive with one another and just like bitches. Honestly [it's] just a reflection of misogyny and like our patriarchal culture. Which thinks that women like, I mean, in, when we are that way, we're pushed that way because of having to compete for, you know, [to] exist in a patriarchy. Because I definitely felt - and I know that a lot of other strippers have had this experience too - that I actually felt more accepted by women in general in the strip club, because "We're all sluts", so we're not gonna really slut-shame each other, right? (Quinn, non-mom, dancer)

The dancers in this study noted they worked to maintain good working relationships so that they and their co-workers could make money. Also, many of the dancers (N=12, 63%) indicated that these are basic expectations that newer dancers are informally taught when they start dancing. Therefore, they are given the benefit of the doubt when they don't adhere to the expectations.

Managers

The support from managers was not contingent on employment necessarily but was often focused on two or more of the following elements: 1) how much money they made for the club, 2) their likeability, and 3) having a valued master status. Many dancers noted that if they or their colleagues were high earners, they could 'get away' with breaching club rules. Dancers did not need to make the club excessive amounts of money to receive this as about half of the dancers

(N=10, 53%) said that by making consistently good money for the club they could bend or break minor rules and receive other benefits like working when they want. Freya explained:

> …They will treat you as nice as they recognize they need to - in order to get the most money out of you. But I don't think that any boss actually has my best interest at heart, ever. … If they ever, like, you know, like have my back - or protect me - or are nice to me - or, you know, whatever. It's just like [so] they can make more money (Freya, non-mom, dancer)

Thus, most dancers (N=13, 68% dancers) know that anything managers do to support them, or a fellow dancer, should be tempered by the knowledge that they are not doing this to make the dancer's life easier but because it is what is best for them/the club.

The second condition centered around likeability, such as how much the management liked the individual. Most dancers (N=13, 68%) noted that their managers had favorites who were given special treatment when it came to the club's rules. Similar to high earners, women who were liked by their bosses were able to break or bend the rules at the club and have control over their schedule. High earnings and likeability were frequently both referred to when the women discussed dancers being able to bend the rules. Isla's narrative speaks to this as she directly noted the correlation between earning more money and being favored by her management.

> And then in [name of city], you know, I think they just - were favorites, they showed favoritism to the girls who brought in the most money. And they did like me, but *I think they liked me a lot*. Because there was only a few times where I honestly took off my underwear in [name of city][1] I was not fully comfortable with it. And they fired a girl one night, because she wasn't taking off her underwear. But, I didn't really ever take off my underwear and they still kept me. So? [shrugs while talking to me] Somehow, I don't know why. But I think I was one of their favorites in [name of city]. (Isla, non-mom, dancer)

Isla remarks upon her ability to keep her underwear on, particularly in contrast to the other dancer who was fired for not removing hers because Isla was a favorite of the management. Most

dancers (15/19, 79%) discuss working to stay in their management's "good books" to get these benefits.

The third condition was having valued master status, usually that of mother or student. Of the 14 dancers who had external commitments that managers valued (i.e., children or education), eleven (79%) reported being able to get a favorable schedule. However, mothers reported financial penalties if dancers left work before their shift was done.

> …if you have a kid, you gotta let the managers know. Because of emergencies, because if you have to leave early, you have to pay $20 per hour and until closing time. So, say the club closes at 2[a.m.], and my baby's having like an emergency and it's 10 o'clock. I have to pay $20 until 2[a.m.] to make up for the profit that the club could have made if I was there. Like, that's another thing like emergencies, and leaving early, and having to pay *extra* to leave early. (Tori, mom, dancer)

However, Tori later notes that her managers have not made *her* pay these extra fees and often let her go home without paying the additional cost if it was slow.

> …sometimes the managers are really cool about it. Like on Mondays and Tuesdays, [they] are like the slow days, not a lot of clients come in. So, if we leave early, just for the sake of leaving early we can. *But* - on the weekends, we'd have to pay. (Tori, mom, dancer)

Tori also remarks that her bosses sometimes encourage her to leave early on slow days as they know she only gets to sleep between getting home from work and her daughter waking up in the morning.

Some of the dancers (11/19, 57%) noted when others were not making good money or not liked by the management, they were at a higher risk of being fired even if they had a valued status. These firings were entangled with race-based discrimination or not adhering to the club's perceived "look", which often appeared alongside rule violations as a reason women of color were fired. These firings would occur even when the white dancers had valued statuses. In this case, Laura, a student, violated the same rule.

> Like in my club, you have to work for five hours, and then you can leave. *But* if you are black, and you leave early all the time, they will fire you. (Laura, non-mom, dancer)

Laura, who is white, notes that when she reached her monetary goal for the night, she could, and sometimes did, leave work. But she was also very aware that her race and status as a student are tied to receiving this privilege.

Clients

Clients are a source of conditional support that appears in the women's narratives. All but one of the women in this study received support from clients in some way. For example, in-person workers received support through extra tips, paying for VIP or other extras, and positive verbal affirmation. As Isla recounts, it could also include the client showing up to the club when asked.

> …the one [customer] that I talked to you [about] today. Was- [short pause] someone who always, if I was having a bad day, I could just text them and be like, "Can you come in?", and then they'd be there. You know? So just this person was really supportive, and *actually* cared about me. (Isla, non-mom, dancer)

Many women (N=20, 69%) received conditional support from clients but this was usually when the client was getting what they wanted from the interaction. A few of the women recounted situations where clients said/did things that made the women feel positive, only to turn on a dime and start being demeaning or mean. Tori described an encounter where she had a customer help her feel comfortable when arriving at work, but then it turned into a negative encounter.

> … something that happened last night, that really felt disrespectful. It was that kid who was really helping me feel comfortable and talkative. He was really nice, but at one point - he put his hand on my face in a joking manner. He just brushed his fingers down, like [from] my forehead to my lip. And being, "Oh, girl, you're so funny!". And I wouldn't have minded if he had [done] that on my shoulder, or even my chest, just trying to be flirty. Because I tell my customers you can touch me from the waist up, as long as you're not like groping or pinching. And the only reason I felt disrespected or completely just

> grossed out by that is because my face is my identifier. My face is who I [am], it's *me* - that is my face. And so, when someone - put their hand on my face and brushed me off like that, it made me feel less of a person with like feelings and personality, and more of just an objectified object. And it really hurt because you know, we were having such a good conversation. But I felt *respected* up until that point that he literally put his *nasty hand* on my face and brushed my face down. (Tori, mom, dancer)

Tori felt this shift in attitude by the customer was in response to them not getting something they wanted. Sadie would have clients that would try to be the "cool, nice customer" only to ask her to go home with them or give them a discount.

> Oh my god, they always do. You know, "Will you come home with me?", "Will you come on a date with me?", "What are you doing after work?" You know?...They [customers] have this weird idea – they're like, "Well, supply and demand. No one else is asking you for a dance right now. Therefore, you should take a pay cut to dance for me." [I'm] just like, "Oh well, you forgot the part where I could also just not make any money and go talk to my friends, which is more valuable to me right now." (Sadie, non-mom, dancer)

Sadie notes that this is more annoying than hurtful for her, in part because she is no longer surprised when it happens.

Interactions like these are consistent across the dancer's narratives and even appear in those of online workers. Further, even if they didn't experience this firsthand, dancers had heard about these interactions from other workers. Dancers also often acknowledged that they thought it was likely to happen to them. Thus, the women in the study generally acknowledge that most of the conditional support they get from their clients depends on the interaction.

Conditional support can benefit the women, but how much it helps them navigate their lives depends on the obstacles they must navigate to receive support from that relationship. Thus, the women note engaging in emotion management directed at others to receive support. It is important to remember the inherent power differential and transactional nature of the relationship adds to this, as the women are expected to engage with customers and be pleasant and accommodating with customers and management. However, as Laura, noted the difference is that she can tell a rude customer to *fuck off and leave her alone* if they become rude or harassing,

which she was not able to do when working retail jobs. For her it might mean losing out on money in the short term, but her internal peace is more valuable and there will always be another customer. So, while the support women in the industry receive from clients can positively impact their lives, they are not willing to be treated poorly so customers and managers will view them as good sex workers and praise them.

The following theme, casual support, shares some aspects with conditional support as they are both surface level. However, casual support is not conditional on meeting expectations or hiding their work. It is also not as consistently provided to the women in the study as conditional support is.

Causal Support

Casual Support consists of individuals receiving gestures of emotional and tangible support from those around them. Verbal affirmations about sex work are viewed as supportive by the women, even if the remarks would not typically be viewed as such or are insincerely given. The women in this research have a lower threshold for what they see as support due to sex work stigma. Tangible forms of support come in the form of information that helps the women navigate their work environments (both in person and digital). Casual support is also inconsistently provided and is surface in nature (e.g., a kind word/gesture). Additionally, it is not conditional on behavior or status. Casual support is received from friends and from the online sex work community.

Friends

Isla disclosed her work as a dancer to friends in college and while they appeared to be supportive initially, they occasionally made comments that made her reconsider. I have felt a little judgment from some people though. Like, I felt like there was a few people who would, to my face, *seem* like they were okay with it and *seem* supportive. But then, I just had a feeling they weren't

actually [supportive], you know? [That they were] talking about me behind my back. (Isla, non-mom, dancer)

She chalked these comments up to her friends being in a bad mood or jealous about the money and attention, but it made her more hesitant as time passed. Currently, Isla does not talk about her work in the sex industry with friends she made at her new job, which is not in the industry. She is concerned not only about negative comments, but also the impact it could have on her future.

Similarly, Freya does not discuss her work in the sex industry with friends in her graduate program as she worries that it would negatively impact her later career. Freya is also hesitant to disclose to friends unless she knows they are already pro-sex work. Much like Isla, past experiences of disclosing to friends have made her hesitant.

> …with friends I talk about it. But, I feel like a lot of people even if they say that they're supportive, they actually aren't [sarcastic laugh]. And they actually think that, you know, people shouldn't *have* to sell sex. Because if they're selling sex and it's just because of [needing to make money], you know. It's like they think that it's more exploitative than other work somehow. Which if you are doing wage labor - you're being exploited, that's just the state of like [capitalism] (Freya, non-mom, dancer)

Freya, like other sex workers in this study, was annoyed when friends discussed sex work as exploitative all while willfully ignoring that most jobs in capitalist systems are exploitative and harmful to varying degrees and that women have the agency to choose to do sex work. Because of reactions like this, Freya has shied away from disclosing to friends outside of the sex work community.

Sex Work Community

The online sex work community is another frequent source of positive casual support identified by the women in this study. Many women (N=20, 68%) talked about the growth of online sex work and the activist/support community in the past few years. These groups are not

exclusively made up of sex workers, but also include sex work advocates and those who are interested in sex work. These groups are gatekept by those in the industry but can be joined by invitation if a sex worker or if an individual is viewed as sex work friendly. Interactions with these groups occurred via group chats, Discord, Reddit, or Zoom. For example, Naomi talks about how these communities are an essential source of emotional support to her as an online worker.

> I think if there wasn't any community, I wouldn't have been able to remain in this industry for so long. Because it can be very mentally and emotionally draining, very lonely, particularly if you're doing it from the comfort of your home. I mean, you don't go to an office, you don't talk to people every day. So, it can get very- very isolating. And so having that online community to talk to is really the only way you can survive. (10:21, Naomi)

Naomi and Serenity's narratives illustrate the importance of these online communities and the support they provide sex workers. However, what makes this casual support rather than steady support (discussed in the next section) is the surface-level nature of these interactions and the consistency that the women *themselves* choose to engage with it. For instance, some women, like Naomi, view relationships as more casual.

> …[It's]not so much as like an official collective, but we all- we all feel as though we're part of a community together. You know, we're co-workers, we're not like direct competition, per se. We all talk to each other through social media. We may be in different group chats or on different platforms together where we talk. So, this is just the general discourse... (Naomi, mom, cam model)

The discourse can also focus on harm reduction through identifying unsafe clients, as Serenity mentions when talking about the online chats she participates in:

> Oh, yeah, absolutely. We have big group chats. You can have 50 people in a Twitter group chat. So, we'll have six [Twitter] group chats of like a bunch of people we know and put it in everyone [of the group chats]. "Hey, John Smith did this to me. He tried to scam me, was rude to me, was racist. Don't work with him." (Serenity, non-mom, financial dominatrix)

These interactions, while supportive and beneficial to the women, are neither consistent nor deep. While the issues related to harm reduction might seem to require deeper emotional labor,

for the women in this study it is another part of their everyday work. So, while it is appreciated and viewed as supportive, it is more akin to service workers giving each other warnings about bad customers, managers, or scams that they are likely to encounter. Withing the sex work industry, unless you are working at a club or are selling items rather than encounters, workers are expected to check out or do background checks new clients when setting up initial interactions, of which checking the information posted within the sex work communities is a part.

In this section, the casual nature of the support stemmed from the equally casual relationships the women maintained with these groups, and the surface level interactions that they had with them. However, from this interaction the women felt that they had an overall positive impact from the support that enabled them to navigate their lives by drawing on emotional support and important information. The latter serves to reduce potential direct harm and interaction with timewasters who can reduce workers' time and energy for positive interactions. In the next section, steady support and the strength and closeness of the relationships are a factor for how much support is received.

Steady Support

Steady Support consists of individuals receiving tangible and emotional support from those around them. This support is *consistently* available though it routinely involves external surface-level emotion management. However, deep internal emotional management does occur sporadically. Sources of steady support in the narratives most frequently were received from individuals identified as friends, clients, or sex work community.

Friends

Friends are sources of support to the women in this study. About a third of the women (N=10, 34%) reported being 'out and proud' to friends and consistently receiving support from

them. However, when the women discussed the support they received, it was routinely surface-level support.

> …My other friends [non-sex workers] are supportive of that [her dancing], too. … I think my whole job is really baffling to my other friends. They were really interested in it, but they don't know how to begin to approach understanding it. (Sadie, non-mom, dancer)

Women reported receiving support from friends but did not report having in-depth conversations about their work. While this support was consistently given, many of the women noted the inability of their friends to understand what sex work was or why they chose to do it. So, while the women received consistent support, it did not frequently involve the friends engaging in deep internal emotion work.

Clients

Regular clients were another source of steady support. Just over half of the women who reported having long-term regulars (N=16, 55%), occasionally online but more often in-person, noted that they consistently received support from their clients. Sophie, a sex worker, mom, and writer, discussed the support she routinely received from her clients. The support she received is directed toward various parts of her life, including her career and family. These relationships are not fleeting but are steady sources of support in her life. For Sophie, having support from her regulars is vital to managing her different roles and commitments (e.g., mothering, writing, relationship, etc.).

> …If my son isn't feeling good. I can say to a client, "I'm sorry, can we reschedule this?" (Sophie, mom, escort)

This was similarly expressed by Ivy, also a mother, who has worked in the industry for over ten years and has received multiple forms of steady support from her regulars. Ivy goes on to discuss how she views these men as not just clients, but as friends who care about her and her family.

> …A lot of my clients already know I'm a mom, or most know I'm a mom. So, they work with me when I run late, … [or if] I can't make it, [or if] I'll have to reschedule. …I've had support [with] Christmas presents for the kid [oldest son when she was a single

> mom]. Sometimes back-to-school supplies. So, I'd say I have a pretty good supportive systems, both sides [family and regulars]. (Ivy, mom, escort)

While these regulars provide tangible and surface emotional support, there was no mention in the narratives that they engaged in deep emotion management during these interactions. These clients also differed from those discussed previously, as these were steady, developed regulars who did not flip interactions from positive to negative.

Sex Work Community

Sex Work Community is another source of steady support that appeared in the narratives. Many of the women develop friendships with others in the sex industry through their work as well as their involvement in the community. Most of the women (N=21, 72%) remarked that having good relationships with other sex workers was vital as they understand and don't judge each other. Additionally, organized sex work groups/communities, online and in-person, are discussed by the women as steady support. Over half of the women (N=16, 55%) in this study discussed direct involvement in sex-positive or sex work community organizations. The women reported having a closer and consistent connection to these groups as they felt they received support, often in the form of a safe space to vent, talk, and engage with others. Freya clarifies this further when talking about how she feels she has to talk about sex work with people *outside* of the community.

> …There's a saying that if you're in sex work, … *you can't have a bad day*, you're, not *allowed* to have a bad day. You know – because you've – [exasperated pause]- there's this feeling that you always have to be presenting only the empowered part [of the work].… So, if you like ever complain about it, … people will probably like be like, "Oh, see, your work isn't good. Like I always thought - it's actually exploitative. You are actually being exploited." Well, it's just a normal job like anybody else. You know? (Freya, non-mom, dancer)

When I asked who she did feel like she could complain to, she emphatically replied, "I *only* complain to other sex workers." I asked why, and she said it is because she knows they are the

only ones who can understand what she does and won't think she is being exploited. Or at least any more exploited than any other worker within the capitalist system.

As with casual support – the consistency is based on the needs/wants of the woman and not the amount of support a community provides. The women who were part of these communities *chose* to engage with them consistently. Thus, the support they received was steady rather than casual or caregiving (which I discuss in detail in the next chapter). For example, Ivy, a former organizer for her local sex work community group, put on events where people chose how much they wanted to participate or socialize with others in the group.

> …[What's] really nice about this lifestyle is there's so many people, so many different people out there [in the community], that you're going to find what works for you. Like, in [city name], I would hold a once a month a Sip-and-Paint. Where we would, hobbyists [clients] and providers would get together at my house. And there'd be nothing about providing, nothing about work. It is truly to meet there and paint, enjoy each other's company, you know, talk about life. But we all got together, which was nice. You know, because there's some providers would bring their kids, knowing that it was that type of event that we were able to bring our kids and the kids will socialize [with each other]. And the adults could paint and just enjoy ourselves. And still have a good time but be around like-minded people. (Ivy, mom, escort)

From my involvement in similar area community groups, Ivy's experiences correspond to what I have observed at events. However, it is also important to note that building these communities also aided in some stigma reduction (which I will discuss in more detail later) through reframed narratives being espoused and reinforced by the "like-minded people" that Ivy refers to.

Of the 16 respondents who discussed being involved with sex worker communities, 13 of the women (81%) noted that online community support has increased in recent years. Serenity also remarked on how the tenor of the interactions had improved.

> And everybody's so welcoming, and [they] want to see you here. Especially with like, if you were a new person, and it's like, "Hey, guys, I just added this person to the group chat. They're brand new to the industry," and it's like, "Oh, my God! Welcome! We're so excited to have you! Let us know if you have any like questions!" Which that was also super refreshing as well. (Serenity, non-mom, financial dominatrix)

For Serenity, it was refreshing because a few years earlier when she had tried interacting with an online sex worker community, the response was standoffish and dismissive. However, Serenity thinks that the increased acceptance of sex work and the pandemic have opened up the sex work community.

Due to the increase in online organizing by sex workers, access to communities can be local to workers, online, or both, as many local groups are hosting online events and promoting them via social media sites. More formalized sex work organizations can also often provide emotional and tangible support to those working in the industry. Aside from mutual aid funds and support groups, many sex work organizations participate in activism.

Only one of the women, Genesis, a dancer, mother, and jewelry maker, discussed receiving support from the outside community. In Genesis' case the support came from her children's school when she was having difficulties dropping off and picking up her kids because she was short on sleep from working at night at the club.

> …I got called into the principal's office once. And, he asked me, "Do you need help? Do you need help? Because I can see that you're having a hard time." And it wasn't punitive. It was just like, "What can we do to help you?" And I kind of broke down in tears because I had been - for a year-and-a-half, almost two-years - I'd just been struggling. They [the principal] really couldn't do much to help, but the offer was there. And it was nice that they didn't give me up, no truancy charges or anything like that. But it was, it was [still] tough [to go through]. (Genesis, mom, dancer)

Even though the principal was unable to provide additional resources to help her, aside from no longer reporting her kids as tardy, he *offered help* instead of punitive judgment. That he *tried to find a way to help* was the important part of that interaction for Genesis. The steady support women reported receiving from friends, clients, and their community helped them navigate the varied challenges they faced. While this support did not involve deep emotion management on behalf of the giver, it was consistently available. Even when not utilized directly by the women,

as described in Genesis' narrative, it provided them with the knowledge that they had help if they needed it.

Conclusion

The forms of support that the women in this study recounted receiving helped them navigate their lives. Conditional support while often instrumental in nature helped the women in this study establish and maintain working environments where they could feel safe and supported while earning money to take care of themselves and their families. Casual support, which was not consistent and only included surface-level expression did provide support for the women in the study. Support expressed by their friends and others in the sex work community, served as a valuable resource for the women that helped them maintain a positive self-image when faced with negative experiences. Lastly, steady support that women received from friends, clients, and the sex work community helped them manage the complex aspects of their lives. For example, venting about work annoyances can be risky for those who engage in sex work so being able to do so within the safe environment of the sex work community or with friends helped the women deal with the everyday stressors that come with sex work, while also building a cooperative community where resources surrounding harm reduction and maximizing income can be found.

There were some differences between the moms and non-moms when it came to conditional and steady support. Among the moms, the conditional and steady support they received from others was routinely based on their identity as mothers. The support they received helped them balance caring for their children and financially supporting their family. For example, managers provided conditional support to moms in the form of flexible schedules. While clients provided steady support to moms by buying gifts for children and continuing to be regulars when sex worker moms had to cancel appointments so they could care for their children.

Non-moms did not receive this same flexible scheduling support unless they had disclosed a similarly valued identity, like student, to their managers. Aside from that, the conditional, casual, and steady support the women in the study received did not vary between women.

These differing types of support I discussed in this chapter, helped the women balance their work and personal lives. In the next chapter I discuss the final theme, Caregiving, and its three subthemes Understanding, Caregiving by Proxy, and Stigma Management. As with this chapter I will be addressing each of the subthemes in the context of the women's relationships with those in their social network.

CHAPTER 7: CAREGIVING

In the following chapter I explore the final support theme and its three subthemes that emerged from the interviews of women who work in the sex industry. This final area centered around the women in the study receiving caregiving from those around them. Caregiving is characterized by individuals consistently providing tangible and deep-emotional support that attends to another's needs or well-being (Cottingham, 2022; Erickson and Stacey 2012; Stacey 2011). In the narratives, caregiving most often came from individuals who had close relationships with the women, like *partners, family of origin, family of choice,* and *close friends*. The caregiving the women in this study received enabled them to navigate their lives and work toward their objectives. Figure 2 below illustrates the relationship between emotion management, forms of support, and caregiving. Caregiving will be analyzed using three sub-themes: understanding, caregiving by proxy, and stigma management. As with the previous chapter, I will address this final theme and its subsequent subthemes through their sources of support.

Figure 2. Caregiving Theme and Subthemes

Caregiving		
Providing consistent tangible and emotional support where the other person engages in deep, internal and external emotion management.		
Understanding	***Caregiving by Proxy***	***Stigma Management***
Caregiving by engaging in deep-internal emotion management to *understand* the women's individual histories, motivations, goals, and issues.	Caregiving directed at individuals for whom the women cared for, usually her children.	Caregiving that helps the women deal with their stigmatized status by helping them to hide, evade, or reframe the stigma.

Understanding

The first subtheme, understanding**,** is characterized by the caregiver (e.g. partner, family, or friend) engaging in deep-internal emotion management to *understand* the women's individual histories, motivations, goals, and issues. Many of the women I interviewed used the concept of "being understood" to convey that they felt cared for by the caregiver, in part, engaging in external behaviors and gestures that aid/support their partner. Understanding was not an achievement that occurs instantaneously but is a process that takes place over time. Understanding was not always achieved in the relationships which the narratives are trying to capture, but that people in these women's lives attempted to engage in the process and tried to understand the women was viewed as meaningful by the women who were studied. Understanding was engaged in by those with whom the women had a close relationship, specifically their partners, family of origin, and close friends/family of choice.

Partners

Among most women, the feeling that their partner understands them is an integral part of caregiving. For example, Freya's partner routinely engaged in caregiving using her understanding of Freya's individual needs. These are exhibited in small ways, such as the division of labor within their home. As Freya's partner is the primary breadwinner, their salary pays for the basic household expenses. Freya, because she has a more flexible schedule and needs an organized space to manage her Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), assumes tasks like organizing and tidying.

As a grad student who struggles with ADHD, Freya talked about needing a well-paying, flexible job that would not aggravate her ADHD. During our interview, Freya recounted past issues she had with her ADHD when working in traditional white-collar jobs. Her partner was

knowledgeable about these issues and deeply understood what worked and what didn't for Freya's ADHD management. This acute knowledge of Freya's needs and the ways she successfully manages them is what her partner drew from when assisting with Freya's job search.

> …when I first decided to start dancing. We scoped out clubs together and stuff. And so yeah, they're super supportive. (Freya, non-mom, dancer)

Demonstrating their understanding of Freya's needs by engaging in the search illustrated her partner's support of Freya. Further, it showed Freya that her partner was willing to invest time and energy to make sure that Freya got what she needed.

Sophie, a mother, wife, author, and sex worker, also discussed her supportive partnership in the context of understanding as caregiving. Her spouse was already working in the industry when they met. However, they initially tried to discourage Sophie from working in the industry as they were not sure she would enjoy it and they were worried about the stigma's impact on her mothering and other work.

> Yeah, so I started camming. And the reason that I started camming was because my partner was camming and writing a dissertation on sex camming. … I was like, "Oh, well, I'll try that with you." And they were like, - "No, that's ridiculous!" …[At the time] we were in a brand-new relationship, and … and I had a lot to lose. I was in the middle of divorce. I have, kids. I was in a custody battle situation. And so, they - it's not that they wanted to tell me what to do with my body. It's that they didn't want to be responsible for anything [going wrong]. They didn't want me to do it because they're my boyfriend, and they're doing it – you know? And so, we talked about it for a long time, because they were like, "Well, you need [to know], you don't just jump into online sex work - like that stuff stays with you." So, like, think about it for some time. So, we thought about it for a while. And then at some point, I was like, - "No, I want to. Let's try it, I'll come on with you." And we did some like couple cam shows. We tried to do a couple cam shows for like, several years. (Sophie, mom, escort)

For Sophie, her partner's initial discouragement and hesitancy for her to begin camming was viewed as caregiving. This is because they focused on giving her honest information about the work, the stigma, couching it in the larger context of their relationship and her status as a parent. However, they then stepped back so Sophie could make her own decision. Her partner's

caregiving behaviors, like attendance to Sophie's experience and preferences, are on-going within their relationship. After Sophie expressed that camming was not something she truly enjoyed, they also encouraged her to branch out and try other forms of sex work to find something she enjoyed.

> I didn't like it. You know? And I didn't have any traumatic experience. I was just like *this is really boring*. I don't want to stand up and twirl around for people and ask for tokens, and it's just not my thing. And then when they were doing their dissertation research, they were interviewing people like you are and … one of the people that they talked to was like, "Okay, I'm a cam model, but I kind of hate camming. And here's all the reasons that I hate camming. And I'm having much more success on phone sex." And all of the reasons that they didn't like it are the same reasons that I didn't like it. And so, [her partner] was like, "It's funny, I had this interview today. And she really likes phone sex. And it seems like you guys have similar orientation toward, both sex and performing and relationships and stuff. So maybe you might like that more." So, I set up an ad on NightFlirt. And the first day that I did that I got two or three calls. And one of the people that called that day - I talked to for a year-and-a-half, like all the time. And so, the first day I was like, "*This*, I can do." and so I got really into phone sex and did that almost full-time alongside writing and the podcast that we did together and never really went back to camming … (Sophie, mom, escort)

This deeper understanding of who she is, what she likes, her strengths, and most importantly, why it is essential for her to find a job that fits with her sense of self, exemplifies the emotional and tangible support Sophie receives from her spouse.

Family of Origin

The subtheme of understanding was also an essential aspect of caregiving for women when it came to relationships with their families of origin. Fearing that their family would not understand their choice of work, many women chose not to disclose. When the women in this study discussed their family's knowledge of their work, they noted that those who knew often engaged in some amount of internal emotional management before they could engage in substantive emotional support with the women. Among the nineteen women who currently had an ongoing relationship with their parents, 17 of the women (89%) having a parent, usually their mother, who engaged in internal emotion management to reach the point where they *understood*

their daughter's choice to do sex work. This work was viewed as caregiving by the women in this study. Among parents who reached understanding and engaged in caregiving with their daughters, the amount of time it took to get to that point varied by family. The process seemed to be continual as parents engaged in repeated internal emotion management to maintain understanding. Stella, a single mother, noted that after disclosing her work to her mom and sister they took time to adjust but remained supportive toward Stella during her pregnancy and the birth of her daughter.

> I told them when I got back to the house, during my pregnancy. Yeah. [I] told them so [they can] begin to adapt to it. They understood… me too. (Stella, moms, dancer)

Stella later noted that her mom doesn't like her job, but that it does not prevent her mother or sister from being supportive of her or her daughter. Instead, Stella noted that her mom and sister *worked* to adapt themselves and *understand* why Stella does it (to provide for her daughter and herself). This effort to manage their own emotional states is a part of the caregiving Stella receives from her family. The additional forms of caregiving Stella received, like help with her daughter and support as a mother, are then strengthened by her family's work to *understand* her choices and support her as a whole person.

Zoe's parents provide her significant emotional and tangible support as a parent and individual. Similar to Stella's mother and sister, Zoe's parents had to adapt themselves to accept their daughter's chosen job, a large part of that is *understanding* her reasoning:

> My family is awesome. They *weren't* originally supportive of what I do now. But I think they've come around, just - *because they understand*. You know? There's nothing else I can really do, that I can go make the same amount of money just working only two-three nights a week. So, I think that we have a better relationship now than we ever have had. And I'm actually, going back to visit them for the holidays. I'm excited for that. They're part of my son's life. (Zoe, mom, dancer)

While her parents both let Zoe know that they want her to move still closer to them and get a job in a field she has formally trained in (Yoga instructor, BA in Religion, Certified Doula), they

also *understand* and *accept* that these jobs wouldn't make her enough money to support herself and her son. Zoe continues to work in the industry because it allows her to be a stay-at-home mom and work on the weekends when her son is with his dad. Her parents *understand and respect* that choice and do what they can to support her and her son.

In some cases, parents are some of the biggest supporters of their daughter's work. Serenity, a former sex worker in her early 20s, gets substantial support from her mom and aunt. Serenity describes her "Aunt" as a non-biological family member who is her mother's best friend. Her aunt has been present and active in Serenity's life for a long time, thus the honorific title Aunt.

> My mom knows to every extent what I did, and what I was doing, and she was very proud of what I was doing. And she'd openly talk to my, her best friend, who I call my aunt because they've been friends for so long. She would very openly brag about how great I was doing, and- you know- how good things were. (Serenity, non-mom, financial dominatrix)

Caregiving from Serenity's mom and aunt goes beyond just acceptance; they bragged about Serenity's success to friends and continued to give emotional support through rough times (bullying in high school, moving to the Midwest, working in the industry, and passing of her father). Caregiving also takes the form of tangible support, like Serenity getting help from her aunt with her taxes.

> I didn't have to do much of the tax work. I have my aunt, who knew what I was doing. I called her up when I was doing my taxes. Expecting I [was going to] have to write off all this stuff and do all these things. But I didn't actually have to. And somehow, I got some sort of tax break? *And* I didn't have to pay much out for taxes, which is incredible! (Serenity, non-mom, financial dominatrix)

Filing taxes is something that many people struggle with and is an issue for sex workers due to their status as independent contractors and the questioned legal status of their work (Jones 2020). Being classified as independent contractors requires workers to track their income and expenses to pay their taxes accurately. Further, unlike independent contractors in the "straight"

economy, sex workers are often hesitant to use accountants or tax preparation services because the nature of their work puts both them and the accountant/agency at risk (SWOP Chicago 2022; *TVPA* 2008).

Her aunt's help with her taxes enabled Serenity to keep her work in the sex industry from her brother, another independent contractor she was going to ask for help filing taxes, but she believed he would not have supported her work. Serenity's aunt sharing her time and expertise *and* helping Serenity hide her work from her brother demonstrated that her aunt and mom understood her.

While Stella's mother and sister worked to understand her choices, not all families are so cohesive. For example, Naomi's mom, in-laws, and siblings-in-law know about her work in the sex industry but choose to ignore it. While Naomi seems blasé about their attitude, her tone and demeanor shift when talking about her father's open acknowledgment and support of her work:

> …My dad's super supportive. He helped me launch my website. He helped me set up my email server. And he even bought me a $2,000 computer so that I could upgrade my stuff to like 4K editing and stuff. So, I was really appreciative….And he's not wealthy by any means. So, that was a very generous gift on his part. So, it meant a lot. (Naomi, Mom, cam model)

Naomi noted that this was really important to her because her family isn't wealthy, so her dad would have had to save to afford the computer. Further, her father took the time to find a laptop that would work for the type of editing work Naomi was doing. That he took the time to plan, save, and purchase something *right* for her work showed that he *understood and cared* about her and her career. Therefore, the laptop is not merely a material possession but a reminder that her father understands and supports her.

Understanding, as I have noted previously, is an ongoing process. Thus, individuals do not need to *fully* understand for caregiving to occur. However, for some of the women in this study, the act of seeking to understand was viewed as caregiving in and of itself. This is because

seeking to understand indicates effort, such as internal emotion work, that the person was willing to engage in to foster/maintain the relationship. Sophie and her mom's relationship and the process that her mom went through to understand and accept Sophie's choice to do sex work as a career illustrate this process. After discovering her daughter was camming with her partner, Sophie's mom didn't speak to her for about a year. Sophie discussed that her relationship with her mother healed because her mother worked to understand Sophie's perspective and decisions. Understanding required her mom to reframe ideas she held about sex work, shifting from a 1980s feminist "all sex work is exploitive" frame to a mindset acknowledging the agency and consent of those engaging in sex work.

> …When my mom just asked us about it - because my mom thought that we might be camming - because [my partner] talked about [their] research all the time. And I thought she knew because like, "How would she not know that?" And she didn't, apparently, and so she was like really sad about that… [Overtime] my mom has actually made bigger strides, where she's kind of worked through some of her- her shit. And [she] has recognized that a lot of what she's projecting onto me is about *her* trauma, and that I don't share her trauma. And I don't share the same sexual trauma that she does. And so, I'm not going into the work the way that she would, or like, what she fears would happen. And so, we've had a lot of discussions about the fact that she doesn't really understand the choices that I've made, but she's going to stop projecting that onto me. And just assume that I'm making the best choices for me. (Sophie, mom, escort)

Currently, while Sophie feels that her mom doesn't like her work in the industry, she does *work to understand* Sophie's perspective and trusts that Sophie is making the best choice for herself and her family.

Similar to telling parents, choosing to disclose to siblings was difficult for the women in this study. However, over half of the women (10/18, 55%) described their relationships with their siblings as overall positive, even if they were not close. In addition, of the ten women who reported having a close positive relationship with their siblings, 7 (70%) chose to disclose their work in the sex industry. Those who did not, like Serenity, did so because they were worried it

would negatively impact their relationship. Thus, past close positive relationships with family members increased disclosure about work.

When work in the sex industry was disclosed, siblings' responses were relatively sedate. Many siblings chose not to comment on their sister's work but maintained an otherwise positive and supportive relationship. When asked how her siblings responded to finding out about her work, Ruth's response summed up the reaction many women in the study got from the siblings.

> No, they really don't have any problem [with my work]. We're all adults. So, they have their things going and I have my things going. So, just cool. (Ruth, mom, dancer)

Similarly, Penelope, who began working in the sex industry in her 40s, and Sadie, a dancer on the West Coast, noted that they have disclosed to siblings but that their work is not often discussed. Ruth, Penelope, and Sadie noted that their siblings don't stigmatize them for their work, and Sadie's siblings are not averse to *her* talking about it. However, it is not a focal point within their relationship.

The perceived economic stability of the women may also be a factor, as aside from help with children, most of the women who disclosed to their siblings are self-supporting. Further, in some cases, like those of Katy, Stella, and Ivy, the women care for themselves and their children and financially support other family members. Stella, Katy, Sadie, Penelope, and Ivy noted that their ability to support themselves was important for their siblings and fostered the process of understanding.

For some women, caregiving from siblings was vitally important as they had few people who supported them. Katy's parents died and she had to raise her younger sister. Katy entered the sex industry to pay for their living expenses and her sister's education. Katy was open with her sister about her work in the industry and received positive emotional support from her

directly and indirectly as an involved aunt. Later, Katy's sister took on a more active caregiving role for Katy and her daughters:

> She's always there for my kids. She helps me prepare dinner for them. Sometimes more when I am at work. And she's just around. (Katy, mom, dancer)

The caregiving that Katy and her daughters receive from Katie's sister helps the family function daily in a way that Katy knows would not be possible without her sister's help.

While Katy focused on functional caregiving, Isla discussed more emotional support-based caregiving. Isla, a former dancer in her mid-20s, was outed to her parents, who disapproved of her work.

> …My family is very close-knit, which is also why I decided to stop. Because my dad - you know - kind of threatening to cut contact with me, if I continue to do it. (Isla, non-mom-dancer)

After Isla's father and stepmother learned about her dancing, they threatened to cut Isla out of the family. Because of this, Isla decided to disclose her work to her 16-year-old sister, so that she knew but also so that Isla could use her as a potential source of support for dealing with their parents and her sadness about leaving dancing.

> When they [her parents] found out, I did tell her [her sister]. She's very open-minded and very bright and mature for her age. I told her and she was, "That's awesome!" … She's very close to me, and she always comes to me for advice. So yeah, she was fine with it. But she's the only one in my family that knew-- that was thought it was cool. (Isla, non-mom, dancer)

Isla also noted that, over time, her sister has continued to provide substantial emotional support. This support enabled Isla to have someone to help her process having to leave a job she liked and the difficulties with her father. In addition, the caregiving that Isla received and continues to receive from her sister makes Isla feel that her sister is on her side and understands and respects her choices.

Family of Choice/Friends

Women in this study discussed that the main advantage of making/having friends who you meet within the sex industry or sex work community groups is the understanding of the work. Some women discussed being more open with select friends, especially current or former co-workers, as they feel understood and not judged for being a sex worker. For example, Sadie notes several of her close friends are dancers with whom she has worked:

> …Actually [with] dancing, I think you tend to form stronger bonds with people, *because* it's such a vulnerable intimate job. So, I'm friends with people that I haven't danced with for years. (Sadie, non-mom, dancer)

Sadie goes on to talk about how "among people who are dancers, we tend to have really supportive friendships" (Sadie, non-mom, dancer) and that, in many instances, she can talk and connect with her friends in the industry more deeply than her friends who do not do sex work.

Quinn, a dancer in the Northeast, noted that her friends are her family of choice. She met many in the addiction recovery and sex work community. Quinn feels that her chosen family supports and understands her while holding her accountable.

> I think I get support from my friends. Mostly from just venting to them and kind of like telling them what's going on and like what I'm struggling with. And yeah, they'll validate what I'm feeling. And also, one of the things that I appreciate about a number of my friends [is they] …. can be real with me and hold me accountable. And I know that they're not just paying me lip service. They're *actually listening* to what I'm saying. (Quinn, non-mom, dancer)

Many members of her chosen family are members of the sex work or/and recovery community, and they also share a stigmatized status. However, Quinn's support and understanding from her chosen family have positively affected her life as she feels she can count on this family to be there for her. The ability to depend on others for support is also crucial for the kind of caregiving which will be discussed in the next section, caregiving by proxy. In this section, the support is indirectly provided to the women through individuals engaging in caregiving with those closest to the women, usually the women's children.

Caregiving by Proxy

This subtheme was distinguished by caregiving directed at individuals for whom the women cared for, usually her children. Partners, family, or family of choice almost exclusively enact caregiving by proxy.

Partners

Caregiving by proxy is routinely referenced in Sophie's narrative when discussing her children and spouse. Sophie has two older children from her first marriage and she and her spouse have a special needs child of elementary age. They both work full-time jobs: Sophie as a sex worker, podcaster, and writer, and her spouse as an academic at a local university. Sophie notes they try to divide labor as equally as possible with their schedules and that they both take on child-rearing responsibilities and share in the care work within the home. Sophie discusses how she and her spouse manage their schedules to accommodate the needs of their family, each other, and their work schedules.

> …My oldest kid lives in her own apartment. My middle kid has 50-50 custody with my ex-husband. And so, he spends a week at our house, and a week at my ex-husband's house. …I usually try to set up most of my appointments on the weeks that he's not here, because it's just a little bit easier. Especially since he's 16. … [When I work my spouse] and my little one are… by themselves [one night a week]. …I would say I probably I try to get 15- to 20- hours of writing in a week. And then I probably average about 15 appointments a month. Which doesn't work out to like every other day because I try to stack [the appointments]. … Like, it's funny because, I'll go through a week where… I didn't have any appointments. And then I'll have five in a week. Yeah, that's kind of how it goes. So, and then there's like the kid's stuff. So, now that I think about it, I dropped the kids off from like 9 to 12. I usually have writing things, then I have some admin stuff. Then from 3 [until] 7 or 8 - I usually do the mom thing. Actually – until I go to bed, I usually do the mom thing. Unless I'm working then I'll leave and my spouse will take over… [but otherwise] I'm [the] second shift. (Sophie, mom, escort)

Sophie notes the differences between her current spouse and her ex, who did not engage in any childcare, much less split the labor associated with raising children or maintaining a home.

> …It's more equitable [with my current partner]. Because also, my partner has a more flexible schedule, too. So, less flexible than mine because they have to teach on Tuesday,

> Wednesday, Thursday, and that's not they can [leave]. Just like me, if like my son isn't feeling good, I can say to a client, "I'm sorry, can we reschedule this?" Whereas like, they [my spouse] actually have to go to work. But they don't have a 9-to-5 [job]. They're always home on Monday and Friday. They're home during the weekends. They can do a lot of grading and stuff from here [home]. So yeah, they take over a lot of childcare responsibilities. Right now, we've kind of [switched] – Also, they did a lot more childcare when our son was younger than I did because I was hustling more, and they were home writing their dissertation. So, we've kind of taken turns. So, when they were doing their dissertation, they were doing more childcare than I was, and I was working more. And now I'm kind of treating my, my book, like [they did] their dissertation and in the sense of, you know, it's the same process. You know, I'm like home writing. So, I have the more flexible schedule. So, I'm doing more of the housework now. And we'll see, we kind of go back and forth. But we both have, the whole time we've been together, had relatively flexible schedules on purpose. (Sophie, mom, escort)

For Sophie, her spouse's willingness to have a flexible schedule and use that time to parent is valuable to her partner, Sophie. Taking on these responsibilities supports and facilitates Sophie's writing and work in the industry. Also, that they are treating her book as equal to her spouse's dissertation is telling in the level of importance and legitimacy that her writing has in their family dynamic. It is also telling that, although Sophie says the division is equitable, she still refers to herself as the second shift if she is not working in the evening. Thus, I think that when she is not working, she is likely the default primary parent.

Caregiving by proxy is also present in Naomi's narrative when she talks about her husband and his role shift in the family. Naomi's husband initially encouraged her to begin camming when she was interested in it. She notes that he has been her biggest supporter throughout her career in the industry.

> He's 100% supportive, encouraging. And he's actually the one who suggested that I start… I've always been kind of interested in the sex industry as well, even before I met him. And so just over three years ago, I guess is when he just encouraged that I start it. And so, I finally got the self-confidence up enough to start through Reddit, because I felt most comfortable with the site, and I gave it a try. And- it just kind of, it really grew from there. It started as just a way to get some extra pocket money while in college. And it then became- it became, like a pretty big contributor to our monthly income. And then about 10 months ago kind of exploded when I went viral on TikTok, twice. And then he ended up quitting his job and becoming the stay-at-home parent. And so, for the last, I want to say- nine months - I've been the sole provider. (Naomi, mom, dancer)

Becoming the stay-at-home parent and taking on the daily responsibility of the children and household was a weight off Naomi's shoulders as, up until their recent move, Naomi's husband worked full-time as a long-haul truck driver. His work left Naomi to balance camming, college, and their children's needs. At the time, they lived in rural areas and had few daycare options. As a result, the children routinely experienced issues that Naomi, the primary parent, had to handle.

> …They were in daycare before [they moved]. And I wasn't really happy with the daycare. I wasn't really happy with *any* of the daycares that they'd been in. And my son who's autistic- he was having a lot of difficulty in it [at daycare]. And a lot of behavioral issues, he even got kicked out of two. (Naomi, mom, dancer)

These continued issues with childcare caused Naomi additional stress as she had to leave work to deal with the issues or scramble to find new childcare at the last minute. When Naomi's career began to take off, she and her husband decided to shift their family dynamic so that Naomi could prioritize her work.

> I would say definitely my husband staying home and becoming … the primary parent, primary house taker [homemaker], whatever you call it [has helped me]. He also does a lot of the errands, he schedules a lot of the appointments, and all that. So, just having him take over a lot of those responsibilities [by] taking them off my plate, it gave me a more manageable load to juggle. (Naomi, mom, dancer)

Naomi's husband's transition to primary caregiver and taking on managing the household so that Naomi could advance in her career in the industry demonstrated to her that he was willing to take a step back and become the primary caregiver so that she could take on more of the work she enjoys.

Family of Origin

For many of the mothers in the study, caregiving takes the form of childcare while working. Most often, it is the mother's mom or another female relative who is providing childcare. The financial background (e.g. class status) of the family seems to have little to do with these arrangements. More often, these arrangements are related to the relationship between

the woman and the family member pre-pregnancy and the geographic proximity (i.e., less distance usually results in more caregiving by proxy).

For example, Stella lives with her daughter, mother, and sister. While she did not initially disclose to her family that she was working in the sex industry, when she did, they supported her. After becoming pregnant with her daughter, Stella moved back in with her mother and sister. Currently, all three adults work or go to school and share the care for Stella's 5-year-old daughter. Stella is the household's primary financial contributor (75-80%) and works a lot, so her mother and sister frequently care for her daughter.

> They help a lot. A lot- a lot of time they help taking care of her. Taking her to school, and all. Most of the time. Without them, I wouldn't be able to balance both. So, they do a lot. (Stella, mom, dancer)

Stella goes on to talk about the parental/caregiving role that her mom and sister have taken on with her daughter when she works…

> They help as a parent, most times when I'm not around. Sometimes I stay out for days and weeks. And [during that time] my daughter doesn't feel bad or lonely at all [because] they're always with her. (Stella, mom, dancer)

Stella goes on to say that the positive relationships and emotional caregiving that her daughter receives from her family makes Stella feel like both she and her daughter are loved and cared for.

Zoe similarly reports feeling that her parent's caregiving by proxy with her son helps her emotionally and functionally. Unfortunately, Zoe's parents live a few hours from her and are not able to provide support in terms of daily childcare/help. However, since moving back east, Zoe notes that her parents have tried to be active, hands-on grandparents when they can and in ways that support Zoe and her mothering.

> I decided to come back east just to be close my mom and dad, and they've been really helpful. I mean, they take my son. I think next week for Christmas - they're going to take him two nights early. So, I can work two extra shifts to make up for not being able to work Christmas. … it's just good to be closer to them. (Zoe, mom, dancer)

While Zoe does not live close enough to receive daily help as Stella does, her parents are very involved in her son's life. They engage in caregiving behaviors with him, arrange to see him frequently, maintain a positive relationship, and provide care when needed.

Interestingly, caregiving by proxy can continue as children age, as seen with Sophie's mom. Sophie's older children are no longer in need of hands-on care. Thus, Sophie's mom has shifted to other forms of caregiving (e.g. advice) with them as young adults, whereas she continues to engage in hands-on caregiving by proxy through providing care for Sophie's youngest son, who has autism spectrum disorder, when they are on a family vacation or during a visit. Sophie discussed how much she appreciates her mom's efforts with her children, especially her youngest. Even though he has other grandparents nearby, they do not engage in caregiving by proxy.

Family of Choice

Caregiving by proxy is also received from their families of choice. Here again, family of choice is a nexus of various relationships that consist of close friends, co-workers, and the sex work community. Sophie recounts the invaluable support she received from her family of choice when her partner underwent cancer treatment.

> I very much think of them [her close friends in the sex work community] as chosen family. Like - it's a clear sense of like chosen family. I have really close ties with a handful of sex workers, but and then I know a lot of other ones that are just in my big social circle. When [my spouse] got sick, [they] had cancer twice. The second time when they were on chemo and had an operation. And were just out for months, [almost] a year actually. The community *really, really* stepped up for us. … They raised close to 10 grand, so I didn't have to work. So, I could take care of [spouse], which was really amazing. Three different sex workers [part of their family of choice] came and stayed at our house for long stretches of time and took care of the kids. So, I could take them [my spouse] in and out of the hospital, which is what I was doing a lot of my time. They came in [and] cleaned, did all kinds of stuff. And so, I feel a real indebtedness, and a gratitude for the people who have really held our [immediate] family. And yeah, that's been, that's been really amazing. (Sophie, mom, escort)

Caregiving by proxy here was not just directed at the children but also toward Sophie's partner, and their home.

Genesis, and the friends she worked with, received caregiving by proxy from each other. Specifically, she discussed how she and other dancers provided childcare for each other during their maternity leave. This was especially important because independent contractors do not qualify for maternity leave/Family Medical Leave programs as individuals need to be employed full-time by a company that employs 50+ people to receive up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for birth/delivery (United States Department of Labor Family Medical Leave Act 1993).

> …Girls that were pregnant, or had just had babies, were babysitting for other people. And [continued] until they could go back to work. So, [that] kind of kept it all [in the family]. … One of the girls that was my kid's babysitter for a year, she had an older daughter. Who, when she got even older, and her mom went back to work, babysat my kids because she was big enough by then. So yeah, it was pretty cool. (Genesis, mom, dancer)

Having her children cared for by other dancers meant they knew what she was trying to juggle. This caregiving by proxy also extended into times when women at the club faced hardships. Genesis and her children had to start over from scratch after she left an abusive relationship, losing her housing and most of their possessions. Her club family helped her family with clothing and linens. She tries to give back to others as much as possible and recounts times when she watched and fed other dancers' children when they faced hard times. Unsurprisingly, most of the nineteen moms 16 (84%) discussed the importance of knowing that their children are somewhere where they are safe and well cared for so that they can work without worrying.

> …I had a babysitter who would come over [to watch the kids]. And …I slept at work because I knew my kids were being taken care of … (Genesis, mom, dancer)

Women like Genesis expressed that knowing that their kids were being cared for helps with the mental (over)load and stress they experience as mothers. Therefore, through engaging in caregiving by proxy, the caregivers can reduce the stress that the women are experiencing and make it easier to balance work and home responsibilities. The final subtheme of caregiving,

stigma management, also helps women reduce the stress they experience. As with caregiving by proxy, it is those closest to the women, partners and those in the sex work community, who help manage stigma.

Stigma Management

The final subtheme that emerged from the caregiving narratives was stigma management as a part of caregiving. Stigma management was characterized by someone close to the woman who knew her stigmatized status helping to hide, evade, or reframe the stigma. Most partners (17/18, 94%), and to a lesser extent, parents, engaged in some form of stigma management for the women in this study. Creating and maintaining boundaries is important for women as their stigmatized work in the sex industry was often hidden from some in their lives, including family members, neighbors, bosses, or professors. Hiding their work was crucial for nearly all of the women in this study (N=28, 97%) as public exposure carries risks (children, education, future career). While they might disclose to intimates like partners, family, or close friends, there are still family members, friends, and institutions that the women did not want to know about their work. For example, Serenity's mom and aunt, who were very supportive of her work in the industry, did not disclose her work to her older brother. Serenity believed her brother would have been troubled by her working in the sex industry, so her mom and aunt didn't tell him or talk about it in his presence.

Partners

Freya, a dancer and scientist, is not out to her or her partner's parents, the University she attends, or with some of their friends because of the stigma linked to the sex industry. Freya's *confidant and co-conspirator,* keeping Freya's work in the sex industry hidden from those they believe will react negatively. Freya is acutely aware of the negative impact that disclosure could

have on her life, particularly her ability to find an academic job, or any job, in the hard sciences. She and other women in the study who are pursuing their education were worried about their professors or departments finding out about their work as it would reduce their overall likelihood of success in their field. Because of this, Freya only worked at clubs a few hours away from home, requiring her partner to cover for Freya with their friends and family when she works out of town.

Like many of the other current partners in this study, Freya's partner actively helps create and maintain boundaries around their partner's work in the sex industry. These boundaries help the women avoid stigma conferral and retain their existing social network, which is vital to their present and future. For example, Freya discusses how she and her partner create and maintain boundaries and their rationale for doing so with particular people in their lives.

> …My partner's family is - definitely more supportive [than Freya's]. But I definitely wouldn't tell them…that I do sex work. (Freya, non-mom, dancer)

Freya goes into this further later in the interview:

> Yeah, I mean, some people - I just don't tell them what I do. Mostly, if people seem like they are, just more progressive and just would not be super judgey, then I tell them. *And* if I know that they don't interact with either my parents or potential jobs. Like, potential jobs that would care. Because those are the two people that I or the two entities, my parents, and [my partner's]'s parents, that I don't want to know about it. Yeah, so if I feel like word would get back, in any way, to either set of parents or potential work, then I just don't talk about it. (Freya, non-mom, dancer)

Freya views her partner's actions as support. This support enables her to talk to her partner openly and not feel she needs to hide part of her life. Also, being Freya's confidant allows her partner to shoulder some of the stress from the stigma that stems from working in the sex industry.

Hiding the stigmatized work was not only about who was-and-wasn't told, it was also about choices made regarding physical presentation and material goods. For example, Naomi and

her husband had to actively choose what to buy or wear when living in a rural area. This presentation was so people would not ask how they could afford luxury items on her husband's salary as a truck driver.

Others, like Sadie's partner and parents, engaged in stigma management by adopting Sadie's reframing of her work. Most of the women (25/29, 86%) in this study, Sadie does not view sex work as inherently exploitative or taboo. She has reframed the narrative and discusses sex work as empowering, having a good work-life balance, and less exploitative than her previous position as a graduate student. Sadie's partner and family have adopted this reframed narrative when discussing her work in the industry.

Friends and Sex Work Community

A recurring reason women did not disclose to friends was their fear of adverse reactions and public disclosure of their work. This decision was based on the closeness of the relationship and if they felt that person(s) would support them and their work. Violet is a white-collar working mom who started sex work in her 40s after learning about selling worn lingerie online from her book club. She discusses how these women have always known about her work and have been very supportive.

> I would say the women in my book club, have always known. So, I'm part of the poly kinky book club. And they have always known - all of them. Like- there's 10 of them. We've been together as a book club [for a long time]. I mean, right now, we're not reading very much. We're just supporting each other. But we call it a book club -it's kind of a wine club, now. They've always known, and two of them are the ones who were talking about it as an option. And a couple of them have done one-off sales or whatever, but never anything serious. And one of them engages in some Pro-Dom work on occasion. I don't think she does anymore, but she did for a while. So, they have always known. And you know, one of the rules of Book Club, is what happens at book club stays at book club. Like, we have very clear rules. And there would be very severe penalties like, you know, you would lose your access to these friendships. I mean it would be bad. And they've [friends from Book Club] always been super supportive. (Violet, mom, panty-seller)

When disclosing to others outside of her book club, Violet was notably more hesitant. This reluctance was because she wasn't sure how others would react, even those within her polycule (people linked through their relationships, usually romantic or sexual, to one or more members of a polyamorous group). As a result, she said she would *only* disclose once she believed the group would support her.

> …One evening we had been hanging out and I feel really comfortable with all of them. You know? Through these four years [that she has been a part of the polycule]. And we were playing *Two Truths and a Lie*. So, I put that in my two truths and a lie- or whatever…. And, you know, they were all very supportive and interested and that kind of thing. *But* I just don't tell a lot of people you know I often say like with my poly-self, I'm not wearing the t-shirt around to the grocery store. (Violet, mom, panty-seller)

Notably when she disclosed, she did so using the game "Two Truths, and a Lie," where she could more nonchalantly mention work in the sex industry. However, she quickly points out that she only discloses to those she is comfortable with and, like her poly identity, doesn't share her status casually.

Women in the study rarely disclosed to friends unless they were also working in the industry. As I noted earlier, friendships among sex workers are cultivated online and in person. Women in the sex industry developed friendships with others through the sex work community and activist groups. These groups provided a space for workers and allies from across the industry to engage with each other.

Eighteen of the women (62%) in the study discussed being a part of sex worker community groups like these and having found friendship, fellowship, and support from these groups. These groups are also crucial regarding stigma management as they work to change the negative perceptions of sex work in society. They do this through publicizing the role of agency in sex work, engaging in harm reduction efforts, embracing sex-positive frameworks, and championing decriminalization of sex work. Lastly, involvement in the sex work community can

further help to reduce what many of the women in the study refer to as “internalized whore-phobia” by working to dismantle stigma associated with sex work.

Conclusion

Overall, the results show that support from others, even when casual or conditional, as in the previous chapter, helps women in the sex industry navigate their lives. This support included things like balancing work commitments and their private life. This support directly impacted their mothering, education, and self-perception. Further, support from their workplaces, even when conditional, helped women manage and meet their responsibilities through things like flexible scheduling. Additionally, support from sex work communities, both online and in-person, was frequently discussed as a crucial source of support by women in this study. Aside from the emotional support, the women reported having access to critical harm and stigma reduction resources. Lastly, caregiving was essential to the women, mainly from partners, family of origin, and family of choice. Unlike the other forms of support discussed in the study, the women described caregiving as consistently and holistically aiding them by providing substantive and consistent support and understanding.

Across the caregiving theme, moms and non-moms consistently received tangible and deep-emotional support that attends to their needs or well-being, or the needs and wellbeing of someone close to them. For the sub-themes, understanding and stigma management, there were minimal differences between the mom (N=19) and non-mom (N=10) groups. Both groups of women reported receiving these forms of caregiving from people they were closest with (e.g. partners).

In contrast, there was a distinct difference between the mom and non-mom groups within the caregiving by proxy subtheme, with this type of care being directed toward mainly moms.

This did not mean that the support was solely directed at children – although that was most instances. Some of the care was directed other responsibilities that the women had to manage. These could include caring relatives, partners, or everyday tasks needed to manage a home (i.e., invisible labor and managing the house). An example of this is Sophie's family of choice within the sex work community helping her keep her household running by taking on tasks that her spouse would have split with Sophie while they were undergoing cancer treatments. This did not mean that childcare was not involved in these instances, but care of the children was not the sole type of caregiving by proxy that was being engaged in.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how these findings connect to the broader literature. I will then review this project's limitations and future directions for this work. Finally, I discuss the strengths and contributions of this work, including the theoretical and practical implications we can draw from these findings.

CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION

This dissertation explored how women who work in the sex industry navigate their work and private lives. From the narratives of the women interviewed a key factor that enables the women to navigate their lives is the social support that they receive from those around them. This support comes from many sources and varies in its intensity based on the individual relationship. The various forms of support that emerged within the data were developed into themes that, based on their characteristics, were placed on a support continuum to better orient the underlying variation, but interconnectedness of the themes.

In this chapter I will be discussing the key findings from this project, contextualizing them within the existing literature, and highlighting how this research adds to the greater knowledge and understanding of this group. I will first discuss how the women viewed any amount of support, even when inconsistent or insincere, as having a positive impact on them. Next, I will discuss how specific statuses enabled women in the sex industry to get additional support from those they work with. I will then discuss Caregiving through Understanding. Finally, I will discuss the main differences between the Moms and Non-Moms in the study.

Key Findings and Contributions

The first key finding that I will discuss is that support from others has a significant positive impact on the women in this study. This finding is consistent within the wider social support, mothering, and work literature (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2003; Flavin 2009; Gerson 1985

Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Jefferys and Gerson 1996). Further, the literature on mothering and work notes that receiving support from others is important to mothers as it enables them to navigate their various work and home responsibilities more easily and with less stress (Gerson 1985; Gerson and Jacobs 2010; Hochschild & Machung, 2003; Lareau 2003).

One of the strengths of this research is the themes developed from the narratives classify the varying strength and consistency of the emotional and tangible support that the women in this study received. Further, the findings note the types of relationships that most often provided those types of support. Past research has noted some of these things, but often focusing on one aspect of support, such as high or low amounts of support (Frangieh, Jones, Kinser, Wood, and Baker 2023). Thus, the support themes developed within this research help expand the social support literature, moving toward a better understanding of what support entails.

One of the more interesting findings is that small casually given gestures, even when seemingly insincere, are important forms of support for the women. Casual support, where individuals are engaging in external surface emotion work, helps women working in the sex industry reduce the stigma they experience as a sex worker. While these gestures can be seen as relatively innocuous or insincere by outsiders, the women in the study view them as an important form of social support as it directly counteracts the stigma associated with their work. Further, these remarks, especially those that come in via social media accounts, could be taken as further evidence that stigma attached to sex work is declining in society.

The stigma attached to sex work has been reducing over the past 50 years (Benoit and Mellor 2023; Cao, Lu, and Mei 2017; Lou 2020; Weitzer 2010). Starting with the move to the mainstream of movies like Behind the Green Door and actors like Traci Lords and Jenna

Jameson going mainstream. More recently the Covid-19 related lockdowns that put many people out of work lead to a rise in online sex work like OnlyFans (Benoit and Mellor 2023). With more people engaging in sex work, being open about their work, and knowing with those engage in sex work has increased societal acceptance of sex work and thus reducing the stigma associated with it (Cao, Lu, and Mei 2017).

The reduction in stigma is likely also related to policy shifts in some cities and states, including places like New York City, to decriminalize prostitution. This itself touches on a national study conducted by Data for Progress that finds 52% of Americans voters somewhat or strongly support decriminalizing prostitution (Lou 2020). These shifts in conjunction with the casual support in the form of positive comments that the women in this study received in person and online enables them to feel that, while they are stigmatized by parts of society they are supported by some people.

The second significant finding centers around the other statuses that the women hold, outside of sex worker. Having the status of student and/or mother enabled some women to access additional support. For students, this appeared in the narratives as managers and house moms who oversaw managing schedules giving preferred schedules that could be changed based on their class needs, as well as time-off around and after end of term exams. Moms received similar flexibility with their schedules. Students, however, did not get the same flexibility as Moms to call off work for non-medical emergencies. These women likely received additional support in the form of flexible schedules because their conventionally valued identity of student.

Being a student is a valued and positive identity and this is supported within the literature as Trautner and Collett (2010) note that the positive identity of student, which in turn enabled

them to frame their work in the sex industry as a transient occupation. Within the participants' narratives in this dissertation study, many of the students expressed this transitory sentiment. For instance, Diana made it clear that she only intends to continue dancing until she completed her education and gets established in her field.

It is important to point out, however, that some dancers, such as Laura and Becca, noted that they would consider continuing to dance when they have completed their education. Both dancers felt that the work was a good fit. Others, like Sophie and Sadie, used their work in the sex industry to help them leave the unhealthy academic programs they were in at the time. Thus, the dancers in this study, while they received additional support from managers and co-workers based on their status as students, did not necessarily plan to discontinue dancing when they completed their education.

A third major finding was the importance of the sex work community to the women in this study. While the stigma associated with sex work reduced or eliminated the support from some sources, such as family of origin, it was also the key to accessing support from specific groups that was vital for the women's ability to navigate their lives. These groups were the sex work community, co-workers, managers, and clients. This manifested as giving mothers more flexible schedules, allowing them to call off work, leave early, or cancel last minute for child-related issues. While not all mothers took advantage of these flexible working conditions, many of them felt that, should an issue occur with their children, that their managers would allow them to leave with little to no penalty. Further, they received extra support from those associated with work when they were facing difficulties in their personal lives.

Genesis recounted how her managers and colleagues helped her, and her kids, get back on their feet twice after leaving unsafe relationships. She also noted how women at some of the clubs she worked at would help by taking on childcare when they could. Ivy recounted that when she was short on funds and had difficulty providing for herself and her son, it was her clients who gave her extra money and would buy birthday and Christmas gifts for her son so that he did not go without. Both Genesis and Ivy paid this support forward to other women in the industry. Genesis discussed sending money to other sex workers in need and helping co-workers when they needed support. Ivy also provided money for sex workers in need, and she also became a resource for others on how to keep themselves, and their children, safe when working as a sex worker. While Ivy and Genesis provide support to their co-workers in clubs they worked at, they also provided support to the sex work community through their online and offline interactions.

The sex work community played a large role in facilitating women's ability to navigate work and home. The community is expansive and the support they received varied widely based on who they were interacting with the community and their relationship with that person. The sex work community, for those who work on and offline, was an important source of support for the women. Although the support varied by interaction and individual relationship, thus this group appears in some form across the themes discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. It appears within the Conditional Support theme tied to their status of current sex worker. These interactions aided women by reducing stigma through normalization of their work, allowing them a place to vent their work-related frustrations in a non-judgmental space with people who could directly identify with the issues they were going through, and along with skill building itself as the online and in-

person sex work communities often provided information on how to make more money and harm reduction.

The varied amounts of support coming from others in the sex industry is discussed in earlier research. Jones (2020) noted that the cam models they interviewed communicated with each other online. These online interactions, like those in this study, varied in consistency and strength and could be focused on commiserating about work issues, sharing skills, collaborating, and warnings about scams. Thus, this finding is consistent within the sex work literature. However, the status of "mom" giving women extra support through work is inconsistent with the general mothering and work literature (Correll et al. 2007; Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). In other workplaces, women are expected to mother like they have no other job, and work like they are not mothers (Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003). Even if women can accomplish this seemingly impossible "cultural contradiction" (Hays 1996), Correll and colleagues (2007) note that mothers are viewed as less committed to work based on their status as a mother. The shared stigma that the women in this study experience may be a reason that they rely on each other more than other professions, and as the status of mother is valued among this group and not seen as a barrier to being a good worker, it explains why moms receive additional support from their bosses, co-workers, and communities.

A fourth contribution of this dissertation is demonstrating the importance of caregiving and, further, the ways in which the women felt others gave care. Caregiving through Understanding was important as it helped women in the study feel heard and understood by those in their lives. Social support literature identifies the concept of understanding and being understood as an important form of support but does not discuss it as a form of Caregiving

(Daynes, Kearney, and Gallagher 2023; Frangieh et al. 2023). In this study, however, the narratives of the women that discussed those around them attempting to understand them consistently engage in deep, internal and external emotion management, which meets the criteria for caregiving.

Frangieh and colleagues (2023) developed the theme 'Listening and Understanding' which is thematically similar to Caregiving as Understanding as it notes the support that the nurses felt they received when those around them (usually family and friends) listened to them and tried to understand where they were coming from. This is consistent to the remarks made by women in this study, however many of them could not disclose their status as sex workers due to the stigma involved in their work. Whereas, Frangieh and colleagues (2023) interviewed nurses, who while they engage in "dirty work", are still employed in a respectable professional job that is seen to have social value by the larger society. In contrast, I interviewed women whose work is still highly stigmatized – and conferred on them a stigmatized identity. Thus, the emotion work involved in understanding is likely even more valued since it is not as available as the understanding the nurses would potentially receive.

Tying together the finding of the importance of the sex worker community and the importance of caregiving through understanding, Daynes, Kearney, and Gallagher's (2023) research on online support groups for caregivers identifies the theme "The Group Are a Tribe and the Tribe gets It". Their finding echos the tacit understanding (i.e. getting it) that Frangieh's and colleagues (2023) nurses discuss having with their family and close friends and that is shared among sex workers in their own online groups as well as through in person interactions with family, close friends, and members of the sex work community. Overall, nurses and sex workers alike feel they benefit from people who "get it".

Finally, one of the more unique and significant contributions from this study stems from the ability to see how Moms (n=19) and Non-Moms (n=10) garner support differently and how they use that support to navigate their lives. Support for the Moms in the study focused around enabling them to financially and emotionally care for their children. While the support that Non-Moms received from those in their lives was less focused on a particular area of their lives, it still enabled them to more easily navigate their worlds. These differences manifested the most within the Conditional and Steady support themes and the subtheme Caregiving by Proxy.

In the Conditional support theme, Moms received support from others because they were mothers. The support they received helped them balance caring for their children and financially supporting their family. This manifested at work with managers giving moms more flexibility with their schedules than non-mom workers and bending club rules to let them rest while at work, leave early or call off last-minute should there be an issue with their children. Non-moms did not have this flexibility *unless* they had disclosed a similarly valued identity, like student, to their managers. However, being a student had limited benefits that included only flexible scheduling and did not include calling out of work or leaving early.

This support for mothers is evidenced by the special treatment they received in the workplace. The first club that Genesis, a single mother and dancer, worked at initially hired her because she was a mom. Her managers then allowed her to catch up on sleep at work if it was not busy because they knew that she had little time to sleep otherwise as she was caring for her two oldest children during the day. Other managers were not as accommodating as Genesis's, but Tori, a single mom and dancer, said managers routinely let her leave her shift early without penalty if it was a slow day so that she too could get more rest as she was caring for her daughter

as well. Tori also believes that should a last-minute emergency occur with her daughter, that her bosses would allow her to leave without being fined or risking her employment.

Support directed towards moms from managers and others within the workplace has been noted in other research on sex work. Alexa Albert's (2001) research at the Mustang Ranch in Nevada notes that moms who worked at the brothel received extra care and consideration from those around them. Albert (2001) discusses this in terms of those they work with recognizing that it was additionally difficult on moms to be away from their children as the rules of the brothel required women to live in the brothel while working and work 3-weeks minimum. For many moms, this meant they had to be away from their children for extended periods of time. My research extends this prior study by showing how support works for mothers employed in more common forms of sex work and who have daily contact with their children.

Clients were also a source of Steady Support to Moms in the study. This took the form of purchasing gifts for women's children and continuing to book regular appointments when the moms had to cancel or reschedule appointments. This support was contingent on the women disclosing their mom identity to the client. It was only with regular clients that the women trusted that they disclosed their identity to for safety reasons. Ivy, an escort and mom, was selective as to who she disclosed her mom's identity to protect her child.

Within the existing literature there is little to no discussion that I am aware of regarding clients' providing additional support to sex workers based on their status as mom. This is possibly because many of the mothers in other studies chose not to disclose their status as a mother to clients for safety reasons (Albert 2001, Jones 2020; Price-Glynn 2010; Sanders et al. 2009). Hoang (2010) does note that the moms she interviewed in Ho Chi Minh city that provide

the Girlfriend Experience to clients, often hope that the men they 'date' will marry them and support themselves and their children. However, it is unclear in whether these men know that the women have children or if they treat the children differently based on their status as a mother (Hoang 2010).

The finding in this dissertation where there is a very distinct difference between Moms and Non-Moms is the Caregiving by Proxy subtheme. This type of caregiving was provided exclusively by partners, family, and family of choice and it was directed almost exclusively toward moms in the sample. Specifically, most of the Caregiving by Proxy was directed at women's children. This often took the form of childcare or taking care of child-related tasks. More rarely, Caregiving by Proxy was directed at tasks the women had to deal with like caring for others or daily tasks required to manage the home. It is important to note that when those around them engaged in Caregiving by Proxy directed at non-child related aspects of their lives, this support also helped moms be present with their children while managing other parts of their lives.

There is exiting literature that supports this finding specifically regarding childcare, although it is not discussed in the context of Caregiving. These past studies note that mothers in the sex industry heavily rely on their families for childcare (Albert 2001; Hoang 2010; Rosen and Venkatesh 2008; and Ulibarri et al. 2014). Specifically, Albert (2001), Hoang (2010), and Ulibarri and colleagues (2014) noted that the children of mothers in their study received childcare from their immediate or extended families. And the women in Albert's (2001) previously mentioned study depended on their family providing childcare more than other sex worker mothers as they were required to live-in at the brothel for a minimum of three weeks at a time. Others, such as Rosen and Venkatesh (2008) noted that moms in their study relied on help

with childcare from their families, but the mothers were still the primary caregivers to their children.

The importance of support in childcare and family management is also noted in the mothering literature. Previous research finds that women's access to childcare and support for their mothering is important to their ability to navigate their lives as well as their overall health and well-being (Craig 2006; Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003; Liss et al. 2013). This finding highlights the importance of childcare and other forms of familial support for moms who work in the sex industry. When the moms in this study received Caregiving by Proxy it allowed them to focus on their other paid work responsibilities with the knowledge that their children were safe and well cared for.

Conclusion

This chapter has noted the significant findings within this dissertation and placed them in the context of existing literature. The first finding discussed in this chapter is that the support the women in this study discuss receiving from others helped them navigate their lives. Support the women received varied in consistency and strength and even when inconsistent and casually given had a positive impact on the women's lives.

The second key finding discussed in this chapter was how specific statuses, like student and mother, facilitated additional support from those they work with. The extra support was important for the women as it gave them additional flexibility with their schedules. For moms it could also provide help when their children or the family unit had an emergency. Further, while this finding is consistent within the sex work literature regarding student and mothering status within the sex work industry, it is important to note that it diverges from the literature regarding

mothering and work. This literature notes that women with children receive little support from managers and they are viewed as less committed to their work because of their status of mother (Correll et al. 2007; Crittenden 2010; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2003).

I then discussed the theme significance of the theme Caregiving through Understanding. This finding extends the existing social support literature by identifying understanding as a form of caregiving, where individuals engage in deep internal and external emotional management to understand the other person. While past research only identifies it as a form of social support, which while important did not acknowledge the emotion work involved.

Finally, I discussed the main differences between the Moms and Non-Moms in the study. One of the most important features of this research is the significant number of moms in the sample which allowed for these differences to appear and be explored. Overall, what it was found was that the status of mother often served to increase the support that women in the sex industry received from others, especially if those they disclosed their status to were also working in the sex industry in some way. The additional support these moms reported receiving was vital to their ability to balance mothering, work, and other aspects of their lives. In the next, and final chapter of this dissertation, I will discuss limitations of this research, overall contributions of the work, and future directions for research.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION

The stigma and legality of work in the sex industry has changed drastically in the past 50 years (Benoit and Mellor 2023; Cao, Lu, and Mei 2017; Lou 2020; Weitzer 2010a). This shift has not eliminated sex work stigma or whorephobia within society, thus work in the sex industry is still more stigmatized than other professions. The purpose of this research was to better understand how women who work in the sex industry navigate their lives.

This research illustrates the important role that support plays in these women's lives. It is important to note that the amount and type of support the women received varies widely and came from many sources in their lives. Additionally, while the source of the support (e.g. Partners, Family, Co-workers) was important, the type of relationship did not completely dictate the level of support that the women received. The findings around support are far more nuanced. Within the women's narratives, it was the differing levels of consistency of the emotional and tangible support that determined how women viewed the support.

The support these women received was not a magic wand that made the sex work stigma disappear, but the support they received helped them navigate their lives. This study found that even small amounts of support, casually given, had a positive impact on the women in this study. This support gave them a sense that others support them and their work and indicated a reduction in the stigma associated with sex work.

Support from the sex work community was also vital to helping the women in this study navigate their lives. The sex work community appeared as a source of support across most of the

themes in this dissertation. With the support the women reported receiving depending on the individual relationship between the woman and that member of the sex work community, with some relationships being identified as family of choice.

The deeper relationships within the sex work community were a source of steady support and caregiving for the women in this study. They relied on the support to help normalize their work in the industry and reduce the stigma they dealt with. For moms this support helped them navigate their lives and meet their mothering responsibilities.

Moms in this study needed, used, and got support differently than the non-moms. Within their workspaces they were given additional leeway by others to set their schedules and deal with family emergencies. From their partners and families, they received help with managing childcare and household responsibilities so that they could manage the tasks required of them.

The findings in this study expand on the existing sex work, mothering, support, and caregiving literature. It identifies many new areas that can be explored. In this next section, I will discuss the limitations of this study and how they impacted the research process.

Limitations

This research has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First is the difficulty in recruiting participants. The resulting qualitative sample consisted of 29 cisgender women who had worked in the sex industry within the past five years. As with any research, additional money and time would likely have aided in my ability to recruit and interview more women; however, resources are finite. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic limited recruiting and in person interviewing due to public health restrictions.

It is essential to also remember that women who work in the sex industry are a difficult population to reach and build rapport with because of the stigma attached to their job and the

resulting risk they encounter if their work is publicly disclosed. Further, there is an inherent skepticism by sex workers towards research done on their industry as it can and has been misused in the past (Albert 2001; Barton 2002, 2006; Hoang 2010; Jones 2020; Price-Glynn 2010). These difficulties are exacerbated when the focus is even narrower, like in the beginning of this study, on mothers who work in the sex industry.

Some might view generalizability as a second limitation. I recruited women online using public posts on social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit). Posts were shareable and those who viewed them were encouraged to share and repost them. I also used snowball sampling with the women I had already interviewed which was moderately successful as some of the later interviewees noted that they had been sent or shown the flyer by women who said they had done the study.

Further, the sex work organizations I worked with shared the flyer via social media, noting that I was an ally and member of their groups. This led to my flyer being shared more widely among the local and national sex work community. Thus, while the sample contains interviews with women who lived across the United States, it is a convenience sample that does not represent the wider population and should not be generalized. That said, generalizability is rarely a goal of qualitative research (Lofland et al. 2006), and it was not a goal in this research. Instead, this research sought to increase our understanding of a very under-studied population.

The final set of limitations centers around, more generally, engaging in research during the Covid-19 pandemic. When I was designing this project, summer and fall of 2020, the United States was still in lockdown. This greatly impacted the choices that were made in terms of recruiting and interviewing subjects. The first of these study design choices is where I recruited. Although I could interact with local and national sex work organizations, many of them, along

with the local clubs, were shut down during part of the interviews. Further, masking mandates were not generally enforced at clubs, and I chose not to recruit from those spaces when they opened back up for safety reasons.

The second of these study design choices was how I interviewed the respondents for this project. I had initially intended to do only some of my interviews online so I could talk to women across the country. However, I also planned to do some of the interviews face-to-face in my local area and when I traveled for work. Unfortunately, research-related pandemic restrictions meant that I could only interview participants virtually. This was further complicated by the university's decision to require the use of MS Teams for research, which was lesser known and often not trusted by my population. Additionally, there were significant technological issues with MS Teams (poor signal, cutting out of audio, etc.) that added barriers to the interviews that many of the women in the study noted made them hesitant to do the interview.

Despite these limitations, the difficulties in accessing sex workers in general, and accessing sex workers who are mothers even more so, this study contributes to the sex work literature. Specifically, this study expands the understanding of the importance of, and sources of, support women in the sex industry receive. Support from others helps these women navigate their lives, including parenting, educational, and familial obligations. This support also comes from a variety of sources in these women's lives, the level and type of support varies, and sometimes the support is in the form of caregiving.

Overall Contributions

While it is seemingly easy to recognize that large amounts of consistent support from family and friends helps women in this study navigate their lives, the less obvious forms and sources of support were found to also be vitally important to the women in this study. First, the

small inconsistent gestures or verbalizations of support, that others might see as inconsequential, made women in this study feel like they are supported by others. This support also seemed to normalize sex work as work within the wider society. This support was important even when this support was inconsistent and not always sincere.

Another contribution of this study is the importance of the sex work community as a major source of support for the women. This support ranged widely across the continuum and varied based on the women's relationship with that member or members of the community. Thus, casual relationships, such as those the women had online would involve things such as liking and commenting on posts or sharing new information. While other relationships with the sex worker community were far closer, with those members becoming part of these women's family of choice and consistently providing deep, internal and external emotional and tangible forms of support to the women.

Another contribution is the importance of the support that the women in the study received from their places of work. Past studies note that high pay and flexible schedules were main motivations for women deciding to work in the sex industry (Albert 2001; Barton 2002, 2006; Berg 2021; Brents, Sanders, and Hausbeck 2009; Jones 2020; Lewis 2006; Milne 2005; Price-Glynn 2010; Ross 2009). However, this study found that valued statuses, like mom and student, enabled those women to access additional supports. For moms and students this included more flexibility with scheduling, while only moms were able to call off or cancel appointments at the last minute if there was an emergency with their children.

Lastly, this study highlights the differences and similarities between Moms and Non-moms, and the ways that support impacts them differently. The support moms received often centered around managing their responsibilities as parents. As I noted previously, at work the

status of mom gave them more flexibility with scheduling and dealing with emergencies. From those closest to them, this support manifested in the form of Caregiving by Proxy, where moms received help with childcare and child related tasks. Non-Moms did not receive this type of support. Rather the support they received was not focused on any one aspect of their lives.

This study contributes to the sex work, mothering, social support, and caregiving literature. This study adds to understanding of the importance of, and sources of, support women in the sex industry receive. In the next section I will discuss the future direction of this research.

Future Directions

This dissertation captures only a small part of the data from the interviews. Therefore, my future directions for research will begin with this data. I will initially focus on analyzing additional themes that have emerged from the interviews such as sex work as caregiving work, resistance and resilience among sex workers, and disability in the sex work industry. The themes discussed in this dissertation indicate a need to further examine the support women in the sex industry receive from people in their lives. For example, while dancers noted that their managers backed them up and provided Conditional Support, there is more to explore in these narratives regarding the type of club these interactions took place in, past employment, and sex differences of the managers (for instance, managers who were men versus women).

Beyond the data I have already collected, I intend to do follow-up interviews with women from this study. These interviews will further explore the support they receive from the wider sex work community and how that has impacted the strain and stigma they experience. The follow-up interviews can also potentially capture changes to the women's lives over time, especially regarding their mothering and intimate relationships.

I would also like to do a broader study. Using information from the existing interviews, I want to construct an online survey questionnaire that can be widely distributed among individuals working in the sex industry. The survey could also incorporate existing measures for emotional labor, caregiving, and stigma, which would contribute vital information from a larger population of women sex workers. Additionally, online and community groups and organizations were consistently identified by the women in this study as positively impacting women's lives through the support they offered. As such, a more comprehensive analysis should be directed at these groups and the diverse forms of positive support they provide to sex workers.

Lastly, I strongly suggest that researchers work *with* sex work activist organizations and take on the role of scholar-activist, as it is the most ethical path to engaging in research with this population. I plan to continue to offer my services as a volunteer, organizer, and support person for the various sex work organizations I have worked with over the past few years. Additionally, researchers and social scientists should make their research and grant writing available to this community to help identify and apply for grants and engage in activism harm reduction and stigma resistance.

Conclusion

This study has increased our understanding of how women in the sex industry use social support from others to navigate their lives. The research illustrates the important role that support plays in these women's lives. It also illustrates the complexity of support at it delves into the varied amounts and types of support they received, as well as the multiple sources of support that the women relied upon to navigate their lives.

The main contributions of this study illustrate the importance of support in these women's lives and the impact that even low levels of casually given support can have on them.

Additionally, the ability to analyze the differences between the mom and non-mom sub-sample demonstrates how moms who work in the sex industry access and use support differently than non-moms.

The findings in this dissertation represent a small part of the much larger picture when it comes to the narratives of these women. I will be exploring these as I move forward with my research and plan to continue to work with the sex work community to bring their experiences to the forefront. Working with these women and the wider community has been a privilege and I hope that this research helps others better understand their perspectives.

CHAPTER 10. REFRENCES

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

1. **Tell me a little about yourself.**
2. **Tell me about your typical day/week.**
3. **Tell me a bit more about your family?**
    a. Probe: What are they like?
        i. Probe 2: Age and number of children
        ii. Probe 2: Romantic relationship status
        iii. Probe 2: Extended family network
        iv. Probe 2: Caregiving responsibilities
4. **Tell me a bit more about your work?**
    a. Probe: How did you get into sex work?
        i. Probe 2: What drew you to this work?
        ii. Probe 2: How would you describe your work in the sex industry?
        iii. Probe 2: What type(s) of sex work have you done?

    b. Probe: How do you feel about the people you work with?
        i. Probe2: How are your bosses?
            1. Scheduling etc?
        ii. Probe2: How are your co-workers
            1. Supportive/camaraderie?
        iii. Probe 2: How are your clients/customers?

5. **How do you balance home and work?**

a. Probe: How does your work impact your caregiving?
    i. Probe 2: In what ways do you receive support/help from others (partner/family/friends).
b. Probe: How did doing care work impact your work in the sex industry?
c. Probe: How do these interactions with your children/partner/family leave you feeling at the end of the day?
    i. Probe 2: Tell me about a time when a particular interaction seemed more draining than other interactions?

6. Shifting gears, how do you discuss your work with those around you?

c. Probe: Who knows about your work in the sex industry?
    a. Probe 2: How has this impacted the relationship(s)?
d. Probe: How has disclosure impacted the support you get?
    i. Probe 2: Support for caregiving/kids?
    ii. Probe 2: Support directed towards you as an individual?
    iii. Probe 2: What does this look like?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share that we haven't talked about?

Age Race SW% of HINC Avg. hrs/wk worked

Appendix B. Informed Consent Script

Study Title: *'Good' Mom vs. 'Bad' Mom: An Examination of Stigma and Strain on Sex Worker Mothers*

Principal Investigator: *Tiffany Taylor, Ph.D. & A. Davies Robinson, M.A.*

The goal of this research project is to understand how you navigate your work and personal life simultaneously. Before we get started, I want to make sure you consent to participate in the research and understand any benefits or risks associated with participation.

Your participation in this research is 100% voluntary. You may choose not to answer certain questions or leave the interview at any point after it starts. Some of the questions are personal, and you might feel uncomfortable discussing some topics. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it, and we will switch topics. I expect the interview to take about 60 minutes, depending on how our conversation develops.

This interview is being recorded, and the recording will not be shared with anyone. Our conversation will remain 100% confidential, and I will use pseudonyms to protect your identity. All recorded interviews are saved on Kent State University's server in password-protected folders. None of your personally identifying information is linked to interview responses.

You will be compensated with a $25.00 Amazon gift card (online) for your participation in this research, but there are no other direct benefits to your participation. However, talking with you

will help me understand more about how you navigate parenting and work. Therefore, there are no anticipated risks for participating in this research.

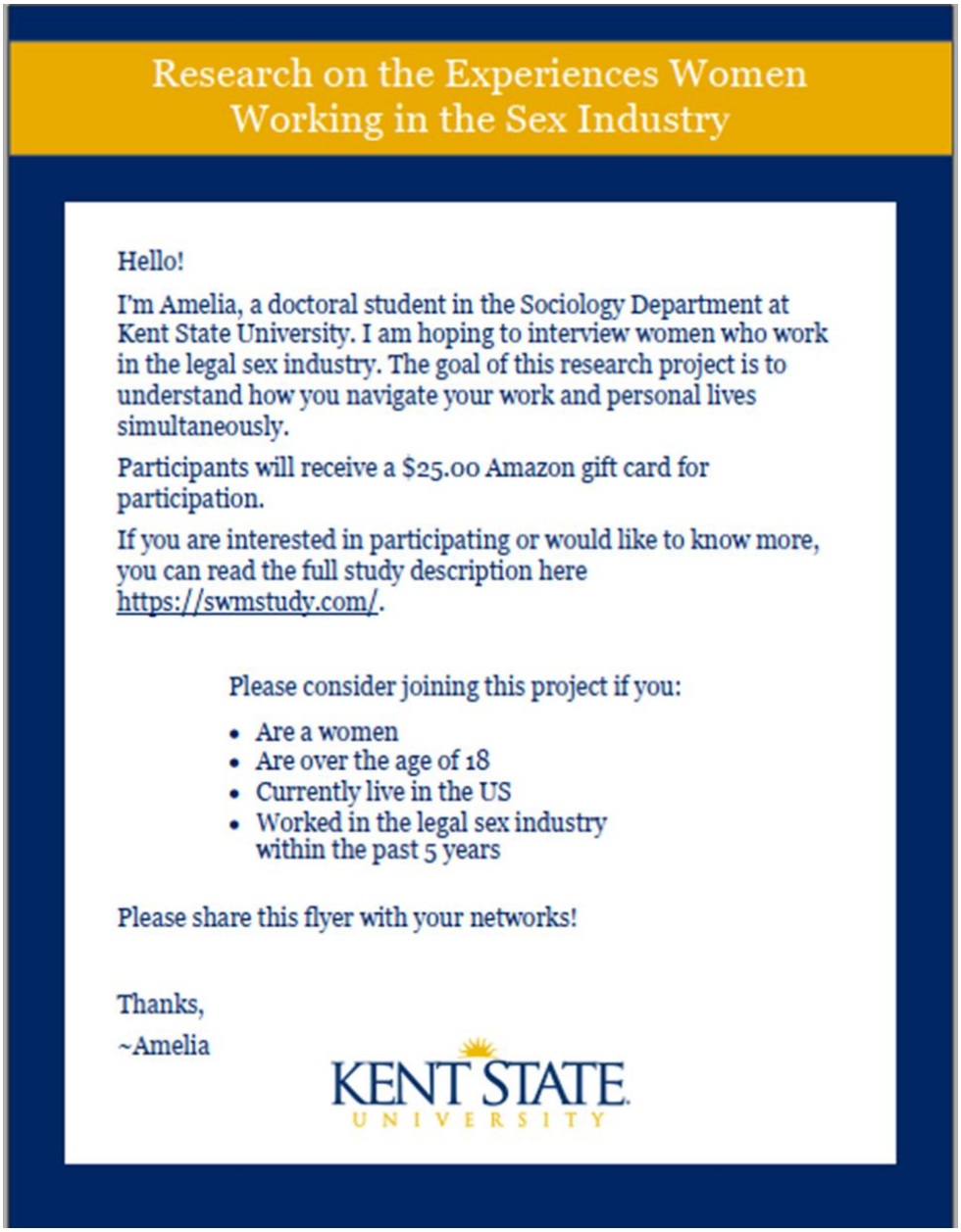
Do you have any questions or concerns about this research?

By consenting to participate in this research, you confirm you are at least 18 years old, living in the U.S., and were employed in the sex work industry in the last 5 years. Do you consent to participate in this research? If you agree to participate in the research, please confirm your consent with a verbal "yes."

This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330-672-2704. In addition, if you have any questions about the study, please contact A. Davies Robinson (adaviesr@kent.edu) or Tiffany Taylor (ttaylo36@kent.edu) .

Appendix C. Recruitment Materials

Flyer



Website Homepage

Home Blog About Contact

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Research on the Experiences Women Working in the Sex Industry

I am hoping to interview folks who work in the legal sex industry to better understand how you navigate work and home

Are you:

- Are a women
- Are over the age of 18
- Currently live in the US
- Worked in the legal sex industry within the past 5 years

If you are interested in participating in this research, please email me, Amelia, at adaviesr@kent.edu, or book using https://swmstudy.youcanbook.me, where you can pick an interview time that works for you.

More About the Project...

Who? Hi, I'm Amelia, a graduate student in the Sociology Department at Kent State University.

What? I'm hoping to interview folks who work in the legal sex industry. The goal of this research project is to understand how you navigate your work and parenting simultaneously.

Where & When? You will choose a time that works for your schedule, and we will have an online video chat. Any information you share with me will remain confidential and won't be shared with anyone else for any reason.

Why? Your experiences matter and I'm hoping you'll share them with me.

*This research has been approved by the Internal Review Board at Kent State University (IRB # 20-407).

Sex Worker Mom, Blog at WordPress.com.

Appendix D. Email Correspondence Templates

Email #1 – Response to initial contact – Booking Info (revised to inc parameters)

Hi [Insert First Name],

Thank you so much for reaching out—I really appreciate your willingness to share a little bit of your time, and I would love to interview you to hear more about your experiences. Here is a link to my scheduling calendar, where you can pick an interview time that works for you: https://swmstudy.youcanbook.me. If the times on the booking site do not work for you, please contact me directly (adaviesr@kent.edu) to set up an interview.

If you have any questions about the study or the interview, I would be happy to talk about them over email (adaviesr@kent.edu). For further information you can also visit the study's website www.swmstudy.com. Interview responses are 100% confidential.

The $25.00 online Amazon gift card will be sent to the email you provide to the You Can Book Me website after the interview is completed.

All participants in this study *must be* women, who are over the age of 18, reside in the United States, and have worked in the legal sex industry within the last 5 years.

Best,

Amelia

Email #2: Follow up email – 5-7 days after initial contact if not booked

Hi [Insert First Name],

Thank you so much your email last week expressing interest in participating in my research on how mothers navigate work and parenting simultaneously. I would love to interview you to hear more about your experiences.

This is the link to my scheduling calendar; https://swmstudy.youcanbook.me. This site allows you to easily select an interview time that works with your schedule. If the times on the booking site do not work for you, please contact me directly (adaviesr@kent.edu) and I'd be happy to set up an interview that works with your schedule.

If you have any question about the study or the interview, I would be happy to talk about them over email (adaviesr@kent.edu). For further information you can also visit the study's website www.swmstudy.com. During the interview you can choose to not answer questions, skip questions, or leave the interview at any time. The $25.00 online Amazon gift card will be sent to

the email you provide to the You Can Book Me website within 24 hours of the end of the interview.

Thank you so very much for considering participating in my research. Have a lovely day.

Best,

Amelia

Email #3: Follow up email – 10-14 days after initial contact if not booked

Hi [Insert First Name],

Thank you so much your email expressing interest in participating in my research on how mothers navigate work and parenting simultaneously. If you are still interested, I would love to interview you to hear more about your experiences.

This is the link to link to my scheduling calendar; https://swmstudy.youcanbook.me. This site allows you to select an interview time that works with your schedule. If the times on the booking site do not work for you, please contact me directly (adaviesr@kent.edu) and I'd be happy to set up an interview that works with your schedule.

If you have any question about the study or the interview, I would be happy to talk about them over email (adaviesr@kent.edu). For further information you can also visit the study's website www.swmstudy.com. During the interview you can choose to not answer questions, skip questions, or leave the interview at any time. The $25.00 online Amazon gift card will be sent to the email you provide to the You Can Book Me website within 24 hours of the end of the interview.

Thank you so very much for your time and consideration. Have a lovely day.

Best,

Amelia

Email #4: Thank you and please share link with others

Hi [Insert Name],

Thank you so very much for taking the time to contribute your lived experience to my research. It was lovely talking to you.

You have been sent a $25.00 Amazon gift card to the email you used to book your interview. Please fill out the attached PDF form confirming that you received your gift card and send the

completed form back to me. To endure your anonymity please use the name used during your interview (and the one used in this email) to sign the documents.

If you know of anyone who you think would also be interested in contributing to this research, please share the study information and website with them. Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me. Have a lovely day.

Best,
Amelia

Amazon GF Thank You Message:
Hi [name],
Thank you so much for participating! You will receive an email from me shortly to confirm that you received your gift card. Please fill out the necessary information and return it to me at your earliest convenience.
Have a lovely day.
Best,
Amelia

MS Teams meeting Msg:

Thank you for signing up to participate in this research!

Participants in this research *must be* women, who are over the age of 18, reside in the United States, and have worked in the legal sex industry within the last 5 years.

If you have not done so already, please accept the Teams meeting invitation and use the provided link to access the meeting using a web browser such as Chrome or Firefox. By using a web browser, rather than the MS Teams app, it will provide an additional layer of anonymity for you. My university requires that all online interviews be conducted via Teams.

If you have issues logging on or have any questions prior to our meeting please feel free to email me (adaviesr@kent.edu) or text 330-474-9409. I look forward to talking with you!

Best,
Amelia

MS Teams NO SHOW Msg:

Hi!

Your interview booking began 45 minutes ago. Due to time constraints, I am not sure that we would have enough time to talk without going over our scheduled time. If

something unexpected came up, I completely understand. If possible, I would still like to arrange a time to talk with you. You can reschedule our meeting using the https://swmstudy.youcanbook.me link. But also, please feel free to email me (adaviesr@kent.edu) or text 330-474-9409 if that is more convenient for you and we will find a time to talk. I am happy to schedule times and days outside of the hours listed on my booking site, I just need to secure childcare for that time. Have a lovely rest of your week.

Best,

Amelia

NO SHOW Reconnect Msg:

Hello!

I hope this email finds you well. I am checking in to see how you are and if you were still interested in participating in the research on how moms who work in the sex industry navigate work and parenting. The study is still looking for participants, and I would be interested in hearing about your lived experience. Participants will receive a $25 Amazon gift card for their participation.

You can schedule an interview using the https://swmstudy.youcanbook.me link. If the booking site does not have times that work with your schedule, please email (adaviesr@kent.edu) or text me (330) 474-9409 and I will happily answer any questions or set an interview time that works better with your schedule. Thank you for your time, have a lovely day.

Best, Amelia

MS Teams Outside US/*suspicious with evidence* Cancellation Msg:

Thank you for your interest in this research!

Unfortunately, you do not seem to be a good fit for this project. Thank you for your time & interest, have a lovely day,

Best,
Amelia

MS Teams Multiple Bookings Cancellation Msg:

Oops! You may have booked multiple appointments in error. All multiple bookings are cancelled as a precaution. If this cancellation was made in error please contact adaviesr@kent.edu.