

**They Walk Among Us:  
Sex Work Exiting, Re-entry and Duality**

by  
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## **Abstract**

This examination of sex work exit, re-entry, and duality includes the thoughts, experiences, and factors that individuals identify as having influenced their decisions about sex industry involvement. Utilizing literature on sex work exit from around the world, and using a blend of theoretical frameworks which include constructionist intersectionality, symbolic interactionism, and concepts of “capital,” “field,” and “habitus”, the decision-making processes of the 22 participants who contributed to this study are made clear. Their socio-structural positions as well as their personal dispositions are examined in order to understand exiting, re-entry, and duality from their viewpoint.

The 22 participants are split into three subsamples based on their level of involvement in sex work: a) those who have exited and do not intend to return (n=9); b) those who have exited and acknowledge that they may return (n=8); and c) those who live dual lives both in and out of sex work (n=5). Sample participants make sense of their involvement in square work and sex work through their personal convictions as well as their interpretations of interactions with acquaintances and loved ones.

**Keywords:** Sex Work; Sex Work Re-entry; Sex Work Exiting; Duality; Intersectionality; Symbolic Interactionism

*To all those who have cause to exchange,  
either for their survival or success,  
elements of their being that they deem to be negotiable.*

*Equally, to those who support the exercising of one's right to  
decide what is available for negotiation.*

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## Glossary

- Sexiting,  
Sexit      These two neologisms describe those who engage in sex work as a means to transition out of the sex industry. These individuals may or may not disclose involvement in sex work or square work to stakeholders in the two realms.
- Sex  
Work      Sex work denotes employment in a wide array of jobs in adult entertainment, including but not limited to: Adult film, erotic performances and dance, peep shows, in and out escort services, print pornography, web cam, bondage/dominatrix/sadomasochism (BDSM), some forms of waitressing, street-level sex work, milk maid services, fetish work, massage and bodywork, and hustling.

# 1. Introduction

This study was designed to help fill a void in the extant literature on exiting by examining what is entailed in the transition from sex work to straight work, or in what I term “duality,” i.e. the simultaneous involvement in both straight work and sex work. The study is based on interviews with twenty-two former off-street sex workers in British Columbia, Canada. My main research question asks: *how do people describe and make sense of their experiences of movement in and out of the sex industry?* The broadness of this question allows individuals to describe their decision-making process and explain how and why they chose to be involved in or to exit sex work.

This thesis comprises eight chapters. This chapter introduces the study and provides information about my background in order to explain my standpoint on sex work. In chapter two I provide a review of the extant literature on role exit theory, studies on sex work role exit and re-entry, and the literature on which I base my theoretical perspective. Chapter three describes the study’s methodology, analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter four contains general and sex work-specific demographic information about participants in order to locate them within the larger network of social relations. The results of this study are presented in three chapters focusing on three subsamples: “sex-work-no-more” participants (n=9) who have exited sex work and do not plan to return (Chapter 5); “sex-work-maybe” participants (n=8) who have exited but consider returning (Chapter 6); and, “dual-life” participants (n=5) who work in sex work and square work simultaneously (Chapter 7). Each of these chapters describes the thoughts, motivations, and factors that individuals identify in ‘making sense’ of their decisions about sex work involvement and the within-group themes that distinguish each from the other two. In the concluding Chapter 8, I identify the themes that were common to all three subsamples. I conclude with suggestions for future research on exiting.

In the now extensive research literature on prostitution, several studies (Benoit and Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2006; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Koostra, 2010; Law, 2011; Mansson and Hedin, 1999; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; McIntyre, 2002; Millar, 2002; Sanders, 2007; Westerlik, 2009) have examined the process of exiting and/or re-entering the sex industry. Movement in and out of the sex industry is a complex process consisting of personal, relational, structural, and situational factors, all of which have some degree of influence on decision-making. Existing studies identify and evaluate these factors in an effort to determine what combinations facilitate movement out of the sex industry. Several theorists have created models distinguishing push and pull factors that influence the process of role exit (Baker, Dalla & Williamson, 2010; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Mansson & Hedin, 1999/2003; Prochaska, Norcross & Diclemente, 1998). These models are based primarily on the experiences of persons who exited street-level work. However, according to the 2006 report of the Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, street-level sex work accounts for five to 20 percent of the Canadian prostitution trade, in which case more empirical studies are necessary to determine how well suited these models are for helping us to understand the exit and re-entry practices of people from off-street environments. The combination of factors that affect the exit process may not be similar across venues. Indeed, one of the nine gaps in Canadian sex work research that Lowman identified in 2001 concerned the “study of exit from male and female prostitution in different venues, both street and off-street” (p. 8). In order to contribute to the understanding of sex work exit and re-entry to off-street venues, and to capture the thoughts and reasons for movement as well as the factors that support and prevent movement, I adopt a blend of theoretical, philosophical, and psychological concepts. This mixed approach helps to answer my research question by locating individuals within their social contexts and uncovering their motivations for moving in or out of sex work.

I incorporate some aspects of cognitive dissonance theory (Aronson, 1997; Cohen, 1968; Festinger, 1957; Gruber, 2003; Kassirjian & Cohen, 1965) and Schütz’s (1932/1967) distinction of “in order-to” and “because of” motives to provide a framework for understanding what motivates changes in the ways participants make a living and how they make sense of their decisions. Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person holds two thoughts about a subject that are inconsistent, or when thoughts, behaviors and self-concepts are contradictory or misaligned (Aronson, 1997). Kassirjian and

Cohen (1965) add that people will change their least strongly held behaviors, thoughts or beliefs in order to reduce dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory has its flaws; however, I include it metaphorically, to help explain how participants' thoughts and involvement in sex work confirm or challenge their concepts of themselves and how inner conflicts may serve to motivate change after decisions to leave or stay in sex work are made. Dissonance theory, coupled with Schütz's "in order-to" and "because of" motives help distinguish between sex work exits that are done as a means to achieve some future goal or end-state, and those done as a result of past experiences.

I use symbolic interactionist concepts (Blumer, 1969) for theorizing human action. My participants' interactions with other people are examined to determine how these influence their inner dialogue or what Mead (1913) calls their "forum and workshop of thought" (p. 377). Decisions about exiting or re-entering sex work are shaped by this inner dialogue that participants have with themselves and their interpretation of interactions they have with those with whom they associate.

The social environment and context within which a decision about sex industry involvement is made is of key importance to understanding participants' choices. I utilize two main concepts that relate to environments: 1) Schütz's (1932/1967) "life-world" describes concentric spheres of relations that move from subjective to objective based on an individuals' direct experience with others in their environments; and 2) Bourdieu's concepts of "field," "capital," and "habitus" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). A "field" is the site of mediation between the practices of those within it and the social and economic structures that circumscribe their actions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Relationships within fields are determined by various combinations of social, cultural, financial, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), as well as one's ability to utilize the capital at their disposal to achieve desired ends. "Habitus" is a subjectivity that one acquires based on their exposure to structural forces (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) such as capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism. By extension, one's preferences and tastes, or "disposition" is informed by the structure one is exposed to, thereby shaping their decisions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Schütz's and Bourdieu's ideas are blended to conceptualize social environments as dynamic settings in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of individual choices and structural forces.

I draw on the concept of constructionist intersectionality (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006) because its proponents suggest that both agency and social structure affect human behavior. From this perspective an individual's life chances and decisions are formed through the intersection of their socio-structural position and their agency, in the form of the choices they make and how they perceive themselves. People are born into a society in which they are stratified according to their gender, race, class and other status attributes. Social structure is manifest in the ways that individuals perceive themselves, make decisions, and interact with others. To focus solely on the social factors and the structural positions underlying decisions to re-engage in sex work, quit altogether or engage simultaneously in both straight and sex work would be to deny the role that agency plays in the process. Conversely, to emphasize the role of agency in decision-making about sex work involvement and ignore the influence of social structure and interaction would be just as short-sighted. The ensuing study suggests that participants' cumulative "stock of experience" (Schütz, 1932/1967) or biography, together with their varying "dispositions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) as a product of exposure to structure, combine to influence decision-making. In this perspective, social structures such as colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy are manifest in social interaction as race, class and gender, and are internalized and interpreted by the agent in such a way that being involved in sex work or exiting are the outcome of human agency interacting with social structure.

To this work I bring my experiences and perspectives developed in many years of being involved in sex work issues. Beginning in the 1990's my roles included support and outreach services, Executive Director of a community-based sex worker organization, and Regional Coordinator of a British Columbia organization established for sex workers. I have worked with all of the major sex-worker organizations in Vancouver including: the Women's Information and Safe House (WISH); the Providing Alternatives Counselling and Education Society (PACE—formerly Prostitution Alternatives Counselling and Education Society; and the Prostitutes Empowerment Education Resource Society (PEERS). I co-founded HUSTLE Men on the Move outreach and support service for male, transgendered, and transvestite sex workers, and the Mobile Access Project (MAP), which provides outreach, supplies and support to street-based sex workers.



I have come to understand sex work exiting and re-entry as a complex issue. In my experience few individuals exit the sex industry—indeed many express no desire to do so. Instead, they seek to reduce their risk of harm while sex working and they promote human and labour rights for sex workers. My associates who have left the sex industry have dedicated their lives to social justice issues within and outside of sex work. Some of them hold conventional jobs and are leaders in the voluntary, public, and private sectors of Canadian life. A few have returned to sex work as a means to fulfil long-term financial and life goals. Others sell sex and hold 'straight' jobs at the same time. They have no desire to quit sex work; instead they negotiate clandestine or open existences in both worlds. My thesis aims to ensure that their experiences help to inform the development of knowledge about sex work exit, re-entry, and duality. People who have left the sex industry, as well as those who hold dual roles, are our family members, co-workers, neighbours, and friends—they walk among us.

## 2. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Role Exit

Transitioning from one occupation, position, or role to another involves an understanding of an actor's motivations, supports, challenges, and goals, as well as knowledge of the practical activities required to achieve a change, and the internal transformations that occur with respect to a person's identity. A heavily cited work on role exit is that of Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh (1988), a nun who left the Catholic Church to become a mother, a wife and a professor of Sociology at the University of Houston. Ebaugh argues that exiting a career or role involves an interaction between past and future roles. People journey from one role to another without fully letting go of their past role. In this journey, a person adopts a new reference group and adheres to new role expectations (Ebaugh, 1988).

Ebaugh's model of role exit envisages a four-stage process whereby people move from three contemplation phases through to the establishment of an ex-role. In the initial *doubting* phase, a person considers changing roles because of burnout, disappointment or unfavourable circumstances in their current role that causes them to question their commitment to an organization or occupation. During the second or *evaluation stage*, a person searches for alternative roles as they deliberate and explore social supports for the role change they are contemplating. In the case of careers, these searches for alternatives may be influenced by social-structural forces such as a person's employability. During the third stage, *a turning point*, occurs when an individual experiences a buildup of frustration about a current role that reaches a tipping point in the form of an event, time or a situation that propels him or her to announce their intention to change roles. A person then mobilizes resources to achieve that change. During the fourth and final stage the person creates an ex-role, at which point s/he may struggle with, "the lingering effects of the social labels attached to their former identity"

(Ebaugh, 1988, p. 399). At this stage, the person takes on a new identity and works to carry out the social expectations that accompany the new role and identity.

Wacquant (1990) critiques Ebaugh's approach to role exit, suggesting that she focuses on the *position* that people had left and not on a person's *disposition* or preferred way of being in the world (also see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Leaving a role needs to be understood in a broader contextual framework. Wacquant suggests that Ebaugh's conceptualization of role exit assumes that people are firmly attached to their current role and that they contemplate leaving it only because of some breakdown in their job. Instead, commitment to a role assumes that one has belief in the stakes and profits associated with fulfilling the expectations of their careers or social positions (Wacquant, 1990). Wacquant asserts that Ebaugh's approach to role exit does not acknowledge that keeping or exiting a role can be attributed to the "embodiment of certain social schemata of perception and appreciation associated with definite social positions and trajectories, that is [sic], inscribed in habitus" (1990, p. 402). According to this perspective, as organizations or situations change, some people stay in their roles, while others who believe that they can do other things with their lives leave. Those who leave have "embodied" social structures (colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy) in such a way that they possess the mental capacities or the "cognitive categories" (Wacquant, 1990) to change. They envision themselves doing something else *or being a new person*, and then proceed with the activities or the practices necessary to make change.

Bourdieu suggests that people have the power to change their practices and, in doing so, their fields, because "what people do in practice creates and reproduces the social factors (i.e., system of discourses) that make up the social world" (Burnett, 2011, pgs.12-13). Some people wake up in the morning and choose not to engage in the practices that position them in or out of a particular role. Wacquant suggests that people continuously conduct the "ideological work" of matching the realities of their workaday lives with their cherished convictions. They utilize various assets or what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as "capital" (1986)—such as social relationships, information, and financial assets—to maintain or change the roles they occupy and/or the environments in which their roles exist. People who change roles swap out their friends and build new relationships, all in an attempt to realign their cognitions with their behaviours and change their fields of interaction to open up new possibilities.

Choosing to leave a role or occupation is an act of agency. To have agency means that people exercise their internal powers and capacities to intervene in events that go on around them (Barnes, 2000). As active agents, people engage in the perception and the practice of their roles. When realities do not match up with their ideals, a person may contemplate and stay in their current role, or they may interact with other people in other environments and exit a role. Disidentification with a role is part of an ongoing dialectic process which, as Wacquant (1990) points out, may have something to do with position and disposition, environment and aspiration.

Although Wacquant critiques Ebaugh's exposition of role transition for its disregard of habitus and disposition in the transition process, he does not concern himself with role exit from disordered or stigmatized identities. Moving from or to marginalized roles further complicates the processes of role transition because people are likely to face labelling and stigmatization in social interaction.

## **2.2. Labelling and Stigma**

The processes of labelling and stigmatization are relevant in this thesis because the act of transitioning or position-taking with respect to a role takes place in a social context. Individuals are influenced by their interpretations of how others think and behave with regards to their own roles and performances. The process of being identified as belonging to a particular group—being “labelled”—can be comprehended in terms of public identities and statuses. Everett Hughes makes various statements about master and subordinate statuses, status traits, and group membership, in his discussion about ‘new kinds of people’, which is his code for women and people of colour who enter traditional professions. In his 1945 paper “Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status” Hughes discussed how race and class structure perceptions of occupational status. He distinguished *master status traits* that are pervasive, and *auxiliary traits* that are informally expected given a particular master trait. Some people may have the master status trait but not the auxiliary traits that would give them full status in a group. Hughes uses the example of being a doctor and being of African descent. In Hughes' day, doctors were expected to be Caucasian, “of old American stock” (1945, p. 354), male and middle-class. Any deviation from these traits would deny a person full entry into the status group of doctors and full legitimacy in that role. Auxiliary traits—such as race,

gender, and class—form the basis of within-group norms. Hughes suggests that these auxiliary traits determine group interests and define who can become part of the “inner fraternity.” Individuals who deviate from auxiliary traits may be labelled and excluded from a particular group (Hughes, 1945).

Becker (1963) builds on Hughes’ work by suggesting that the process of labelling people as deviants involves both master and auxiliary traits. The act of being convicted of a crime, for example, bestows upon a person an “outsider” status. Social groups establish rules and determine who is a deviant based on their ability to define deviance, in which case “deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions” (Becker, 1963, p. 9). Goffman suggests that “normal” people assign an “ideology of difference” and inferiority that makes stigmatized people not quite human. Goffman defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (1963, p. 3). Labellers perceive such attributes as character blemishes in persons who they consider to be deviant. He distinguishes “discrediting” and “discreditable” stigma. When a person is known to have a particular attribute they are discredited. When a person is not known to have a particular stigmatized attribute, a person is potentially discreditable but not yet discredited—they are left in a position to decide whether to disclose discrediting information.

Exiting from stigmatized identities involves the management of discrediting information (Goffman, 1963) and the shedding of master and auxiliary status determining traits (Becker, 1963; Hughes, 1945). Transition out of a role or identity is further complicated because individuals move from one network of relationships with stigmatized or labeled individuals to another. They change their associations and, in the case of those moving out of stigmatized identities, go about delabeling themselves.

### **2.3. Stigmatized Role Exit: Delabeling**

Being labelled a deviant and experiencing stigmatization influences a person’s public identity and shapes their group membership, but not everyone who is labelled will go on to fulfil the “prophesies” inhering in the label attributed to them (Becker, 1963). Goffman (1963) suggests that, like the process of labelling, the process of stigmatization occurs during interaction with others. How individuals respond to stigma or labelling

varies. Howard (2008) suggests that some people may shed their master status-determining trait—or “de-label”—in order to change how they are identified.

Delabeling may be a way of changing positions and opening up opportunities within or across fields. Delabelers reconstruct their social selves by disidentifying with old labels and adopting new self-labels or having no label at all (Howard, 2008). Their ability to shed labels may be grounded in the cognitive categories created through habitus and their general disposition. Howard (2008) conducted interviews with 40 current and former mental patients to examine the processes of disidentification. He suggests that stigma and labelling *causes* disidentification or role exit. He used the term “delabelers” to describe people undertaking this process, and held that they are confronted with three types of obstacles: existential, interactional, and cultural.

*Existential obstacles:* People in Howard’s sample did not use past roles to establish a new one as Ebaugh (1988) suggested. Instead, Howard’s participants revealed that leaving behind a mental health label was different than other kinds of role exit because they were not exiting to a new identity, but were entering a non-identity. Howard found that “this notion of a non-identity resulting from discarded disorder identities is significantly different than the ‘ex-role’ that Ebaugh (1988) elaborates” (Howard, 2008, p. 181). Howard suggests that people enter into an ‘identity void’ where they exit a disordered identity with no intention of replacing it with a new one. In so doing, his participants recognized that continuing to identify as disordered shaped their self-conception because the mental patient label is a master status (Howard, 2008). Some delabelers Howard spoke to saw no point in adopting a new identity, remarking that “it would be like sticking myself in another box that I would then have to climb out of” (Howard, 2008, p. 181). Others were reluctant to relinquish a current label because they were too attached to that label, even if they thought it was inappropriate.

*Interactional obstacles:* Howard states in the process of interaction with others some delabelers felt guilt and/or fear about the possibility of disengaging with a disordered identity because they had built relationships with other people who were similarly labelled. Howard describes these feelings as a *deserter complex* in which people felt solidarity with other group members; breaking these ties would mean abandoning one’s kin. In response to these feelings, some of his participants continued group membership to their detriment: “many delabelers describe feeling compelled to

continue identifying with the label even after they no longer considered it to be useful” (Howard, 2008, p. 184). Others who disengaged felt guilty because their detachment meant they had healed or succeeded in ways that other group members could not.

*Cultural obstacles:* Howard’s participants felt pressure to keep a former “disordered” identity because other people know them in terms of the way they were labelled. Delabelers experienced rejection by members of disordered groups, a phenomenon Howard describes as “reverse stigmatization.” This phenomenon has been observed by sex work researchers such as Millar (2002), who found that as sex workers left the sex industry they were challenged by active sex workers who resisted the exited person’s new identity.

Despite stigmatization and these three sets of obstacles, some individuals may still be able to shed old labels or construct new social identities and relationships. Reverse-stigmatization can lead to unique types of exit and roles assumed upon exit. By way of example, Hughes (1945) suggests that a professional man of colour may face reverse-stigma if he desires membership in a group occupied by professional Caucasian men. He risks being accused of “sacrificing his race” if he suggests that he is different in some way from other men of colour. Hughes suggests that to avoid this accusation, a form of segregation may persist where, for example, a female lawyer may service only female clients or an African American sociologist may teach only at an African American College (Hughes, 1945).

## **2.4. Stigmatized Role Exit: Transmuting Labels**

Brown (1991) examined transition from “disordered” identities by interviewing people who had previously been drug addicts and anorexics. Through therapy, these individuals transitioned into counselling roles. Brown suggests that professionalizing past deviance provides a pathway into mainstream jobs and roles. He designed a four-stage model to identify the process of becoming a “professional ex deviant.”

In the first stage an individual *emulates* their therapist and is exposed to new possibilities while engaging in therapy or other healing activities. This interaction may serve to expand a person’s cognitive categories so that they are able to view counselling as a possible future role. Following this stage, an individual experiences a *call to a*

*counselling career* whereby they see their past deviance as a therapeutic resource and a route to a new legitimate role.<sup>1</sup> The third stage involves *status-set realignment* where a person chooses to give back to their community by becoming a counsellor. In the process they take on a 'master role' (Brown, 1991), or what Hughes (1945) calls a "master status" (Becker, 1963). This overarching identity comprises at least one trait that determines group membership (Becker, 1963; Hughes, 1945)—in this case, being a deviant. In the final stage of *credentialization* a person develops skills and acquires the credentials that give the professional ex a heightened sense of self-worth and the ability to perform their role expectations.

Brown's model of stigma, reverse-stigmatization and labelling helps comprehend what roles or positions may be available to persons who desire to limit the effects of stigmatization.

## **2.5. Role Exit from Sex Work: Stigma and Agency**

Sex work theorists such as Pheterson (1993), Shaver (2005), Millar (2002) and Rickard (2001) have discussed the labelling and stigma sex workers experience while they are sex workers and after they have exited. Pheterson (1993) describes the "discrediting" experienced by active female sex workers as "whore stigma." She suggests that sex workers experience stigma because: 1) they sell sex, where sex is equivalent to honour; and 2) they sell sex for money, which is interpreted as "base gain." Pheterson proposes that although female sex workers challenge gender norms by exchanging sex for financial capital, they are stigmatized because they are perceived to sell their honour or virtue as women. Shaver (2005) adds that female sex workers experience more stigma than male sex workers due to gender role expectations. Millar (2002) and Rickard (2001) provide evidence supporting Pheterson, Shaver, Hughes, Goffman, and Becker's observations about labelling and stigmatization. Millar found that because of the ways in which prostitution is stigmatized, over two-thirds of the former sex workers she interviewed did not share information about their work with their

<sup>1</sup> This is similar to Howard (2008), who identifies that "recovery capital" (which is found in recovery networks), that supplies the bridging resources necessary to transition out of previous stigmatized roles and also supports the self-reflection process needed to move to new identities.



families; they did not access support services for the same reason. Rickard found that some female sex workers invented new identities when they went to school or worked straight jobs in order to hide their past identities because they wanted to avoid the whore stigma. It appears, then, that sex workers experience stigmatization not only while involved in sex work but also during and after their transition to square work.

The whore stigma may remain attached to an individual even after having exited sex work, hence the practice of hiding one's past (Millar, 2002) or constructing new biographies (Rickard, 2001) as part of the transition from sex work to square work. Transition into or out of stigmatized roles may require individuals to implement techniques to prevent the 'outing' of former identities and to hide discrediting information. The ways in which discrediting information is managed is relevant to understanding role exit because deception or omission may be an important part of the transition if a person is exiting a stigmatized identity. To understand movement in or out of the sex industry, it is necessary to incorporate what is known about role exit, labelling, stigma, and delabeling as well as identifying the specific factors that influence transition.

## **2.6. Factors that Influence Sex Work Exiting**

Sex work exiting is a complex multifactor process. Most researchers studying exit have focussed on street-level workers and the barriers they encounter. Benoit and Millar (2001) found that 70.6% of their sample of 201 sex workers left the sex industry and returned at least one time; 20% of the exited sex workers stated that they had no support to exit. Other studies highlight various personal and social factors that prevent exiting. For example, Dalla (2006) found that women are often prevented from exiting as a result of drug addiction, criminal charges, and/or the lack of social and financial support.

In an attempt to better understand the influences on primarily street-level sex work exit, Millar (2002) proposed five main groups of relevant factors: 1) *personal characteristics* such as age; 2) *family background*; 3) *work-related factors* such as type of sex trade occupation and length of time in the trade; 4) *contextual factors* such as financial situation and social supports; and, 5) *health-related factors*. Over 65% of Millar's sample of exited sex workers (n=32) left the sex industry to invest more time

parenting their children, because they quit using drugs, or they were burned out and just needed a change. The remaining 35% exited due to loss of self-worth, illness, aging, pressure from others, or because they started school or a straight job (Millar, 2002).

Law (2011) interviewed ten sex workers in Eastern Canada who were in the process of exiting off-street sex work. In contrast to Millar (2002), Law found that age was not a significant reason for exiting; instead money, work schedule, and lifestyle emerged as the biggest barriers. With respect to money, Law (2011) suggested that sex workers had challenges adjusting to lower paid service industry jobs. She stated that work schedules were an issue because sex workers struggled to adjust to working during the daytime hours and felt that they had less free time when employed in straight jobs. Also, adjusting to socially acceptable forms of employment meant that sex workers had to adjust to the lifestyles of lower paid workers which required money management skills that sex workers stated they did not possess (Law, 2011).

Koostra (2010) conducted a needs and strengths assessment of supports for sex work exit. Her sample comprised 223 sex workers in Macedonia, Uganda, Egypt and Vietnam. She found three sets of barriers to sex industry exit: individual, relational and structural. *Individual factors* included being happy with the sex work lifestyle and income, a lack of education for square jobs, debts, health issues, criminal records, and not trusting service providers. *Relational factors* such as lack of family support and isolation after leaving pimps and other partners who forced their involvement in the sex trade posed barriers to exit. *Structural factors* such as lack of education and employment opportunities, social stigma, attribution of a criminal label, and punitive social welfare policies also challenged sex workers who desired to leave the trade (Koostra, 2010).

Mansson and Hedin (1999) identified four sets of factors that influence the exiting process: 1) *structural factors*, such as employment, housing, education and social stigma; 2) *relational factors*, including relationships with family, intimate partners and children; 3) *critical incidents*, such as traumatic or cathartic experiences that motivated change; and 4) *individual resources*, such as a person's ability to cope. Mansson and Hedin found that it is the sex worker's own disposition and "stock of experience," (Schütz 1932/1967) that determines whether she is able to exit sex work for square work. They state that "the woman's own coping strategies play a major role in how she overcomes

the strains and hardships of prostitution and in her ability to listen to the signals from both body and spirit” (Mansson & Hedin, 1999, p. 76).

The suggestion that coping strategies greatly influence exiting success has been contested by theorists who do not fully accept its neo-liberal underpinnings and disregard of structural influences. The idea that a person’s demeanour can affect their health was useful for Mansson and Hedin because they were exploring Magee and Carr’s (1998) concept of “elastic resilience;” i.e. how past trauma can prepare individuals for future trauma, thereby increasing their ability to cope with adversity. McEwen (2011) used the term “dandelion children” to describe an ability of the developing brain to respond to stress in ways that help children to thrive in spite of adversity.

In reviewing the personal, relationship, structural, and situational factors that researchers have identified as affecting exit, it is clear that the process is complicated by the marginal location of sex work itself within the larger social structures of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. As such, sex workers hold labelled and stigmatized socio-structural positions and must contend not only with the interpersonal challenges of changing roles as identified by Ebaugh (1988) and Howard (2008), but also with the barriers that arise as a result of the interlocking structural systems of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1990) whereby high unemployment rates, combine with stigma, racism, and gender oppression to limit opportunities. For example, it is particularly difficult for an indigenous woman to leave sex work and find square employment.

## **2.7. Factors that Support Sex Work Re-entry**

The reasons given for re-entry into sex work in the research literature center mainly around financial pressures and challenges sex workers face in obtaining employment, housing and other resources (Dalla, 2006; McIntyre, 2002; Sanders, 2007). Benoit and Millar (2001) state that individuals who return to the sex industry most often do so for financial reasons, because of lack of support to help them maintain conventional lifestyles, and their difficulty keeping a straight job. Thirty-seven percent of McIntyre’s (2002) sample returned to sex work because of their need for money to survive. Millar (2002) found that 66.7 % of her sample returned to sex work because of financial hardship, while 21.2% returned to finance their drug dependency.

The frequency of failed exit attempts is so often reported that re-entry is viewed as a common part of the exit process. Koostra (2010) reported that 52% of her sample had left the sex industry at least once. The on and off-street sex workers who Millar (2002) interviewed made an average of 7.4 attempts to exit before they felt their exit was permanent. Twenty-nine percent of the mainly on-street participants in McIntyre's (2002) sample exited prostitution 10 or more times.

Socio-structural barriers do not force all exiting sex workers to return. Some sex workers have stated that they missed sex work and the independence it brought them (Benoit & Millar 2001; McIntyre 2002; Millar 2002); they return for those reasons. Ultimately, economic factors do affect transition out of sex work, but a person's desire to continue sex work cannot be ignored. Several models have been developed to capture the factors that influence the process of sex work exit and re-entry. Some of these models give individual factors primacy over structure by suggesting that factors such as drug addiction and financial hardship hinder exiting. Other models recognize that interactional forces such as stigma and criminalization, or structural forces such as patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism, block transition out of sex work.

## **2.8. Sex Work Exit: Typologies and Models**

Sanders (2007) typology of sex work exiting identified four types of rationale for exit. She maintains that *reactionary* exit occurs when individuals leave sex work as a result of a life-altering event like a pregnancy, violence or illness. Sanders suggests that this form of exit is prevalent among street-level workers. *Gradual planning* exit is slow and strategic, a process that is more common among off-street sex workers (Sanders, 2007). *Natural progression* exit is coupled with quitting drug use. "*Yo-yoing*" refers to a person's frequent movement in and out of sex work. Sanders suggests that street level workers "yo-yo" as a result of 'trapping' factors, such as the need for money or drugs or the response to being charged with a criminal offence. She suggests that off-street workers can also "yo-yo" when they find that straight employment is not as remunerative as sex work.

Westerlik (2009) developed a typology based on the exit strategies of 40 former sex workers in the Netherlands, focussing on how their attitudes to sex work affected their existence in the square world. Westerlik identified three basic exit strategies, which

she termed autonomous, instrumental and ambivalent. Former sex workers who fell into the *autonomous* category utilized their knowledge and experience from sex work to shape who and what they are in the square world. Those in the *instrumental* group used knowledge from sex work and from the square world as it suited them in different situations. Former workers who fell into the *ambivalent* group found it difficult to transfer knowledge from sex work into their current work-a-day straight lives. Westerlik (2009) suggested that these groups deal with the stigma associated with sex work differently: the *autonomous* group are able to acknowledge and work through the effects of stigma, the *instrumentals* avoid it, and the *ambivalents* succumb to it.

Prochaska, Norcross and Diclemente (1998) described a six-stage process of sex work exit. The first is a *pre-contemplative* stage in which sex workers are aware of a problem or feel discontent with their current situation. They are still engaging in sex work but they are wrestling with the idea of ending their involvement. In stages two, three and four individuals contemplate change, make a decision to change, and then act on it. In stage five individuals integrate the change into their new lives. The last stage is *lapse/relapse* where various barriers result in a person re-entering sex work. This experience will then inform future exit attempts.

Mansson and Hedin (1999) based their exit model on Ebaugh's work. They proposed a five-staged model of sex work entry and exit. In stage one individuals *drift* into sex work because of coercion, poverty or drug addiction. In stage two they become *ensnared* because they rely on sex work income for survival or to finance an addiction. In stage three, *pre-break away*, individuals start to think about leaving the sex industry due to various negative experiences or critical incidents. In stage 4 they *break away* from sex work. In stage 5 they work to stabilize their lives in the straight world. If they are confronted with personal, social and structural challenges they re-enter sex work, stage 6.

Baker, Dalla and Williamson's (2010) developed a model of sex work exiting that blended the factors portrayed in the work of Prochaska et al (1998), Ebaugh (1988), Brown (1991), Mansson and Hedin (1999), Sanders (2007), Rickard (2001), Benoit and Millar (2001) and Dalla (2006). Baker et al's six-stage integrated model consisted of *immersion* in sex work at stage one. In stage two individuals experiences a *visceral* and *conscious awareness* that sex work is not fulfilling and they feel the need to make a

change in their lives. In stage three they begin *deliberation* and *planning* in order to exit. At stage four they *exit*, but perhaps only temporarily. At stage 5 they may *re-enter* sex work if they confront personal, social and structural barriers. Like Mansson and Hedin (1999), Dalla (2006), and McIntyre (2002), Baker et al. suggest that upon re-entry, individuals can re-assess what they have learned from their past exit attempts and then cycle through the stages again to reach a stable and lasting departure from sex work. *Final exit* occurs in stage six.

These various sex work exit and re-entry models describe the diverse forces that affect exit decisions.

## **2.9. Issues Arising from Models of Sex Work Exit and Re-entry**

The ways that sex work exiting and re-entry are depicted in much of the academic literature is based on a view that sex work is inherently harmful, or which treats involvement in it as a failure to thrive in straight work. As a result, these approaches are limited when it comes to how they conceptualize the process of exit and re-entry. When exit and re-entry are not conceptualized in terms of particular religious, moral, legal, economic or medical frameworks, we can expand the way in which entry into the square world and re-entry into the sex industry are understood. As Law (2011) suggests: “if studies that understand sex work as trauma view transitioning out of sex work as final and successful, ‘exit’ can be seen to denote ‘cure’...women who have had good experiences in the sex industry do not define transitioning out of sex work as success” (p. 92). There appear to be several other problems with the conceptualization of sex work exit and re-entry.

First, none of the extant theoretical models and few empirical studies include the role that sex buyers play in sex work exit and re-entry. Most of the existing studies describe barriers to exiting—former sex workers miss the money, for example— but only Rickard (2001) describes the professional obligation that some sex workers feel toward their customers as constituting a barrier to exit. Two recent studies include “regulars”— i.e. regular customers—as part of the sex work exit process. My exploratory research (Bowen, 2011) revealed that some regulars support sex workers’ plans to leave the sex industry by financing and otherwise facilitating their exit. Similarly, some of Law’s (2011)

participants disclosed that they had relied on regular customers to support their transition out of sex work by, for example, funding their graduate education.

Second, there is little research on individuals who “perform both shows” (Goffman, 1963), i.e. the persons who do straight jobs and sex work at the same time. Law (2011) and Bowen (2011) found that some sex workers participate in both mainstream employment and retained regular customers during their transition out of sex work. Unlike Sanders (2007), who describes this phase as “yo-yoing”, Law characterized this activity as a “parallel employment trajectory” where “the transition is a gradual process characterized by overlap between sex work and mainstream work...paths have been shaped by strategy rather than disorganization” (2011, p. 71). For Law, this *duality* is a sex work exit strategy, which I refer to as “sexiting.” My sample includes individuals who have experience sexiting and those who live more intentional dual lives.

Third, the process of sex work exit is complex. My initial research (Bowen, 2011) suggests that it is shaped by a person’s experiences in differing sex work venues, their reasons for entry, and their age, gender, the length of time they have been in the industry, and other biographical factors, all of which need to be considered when developing models of the exit experience. Although the modelling exercise presupposes that exit and re-entry experiences are shared across a population, most models are based on the activities involved in exit from the street. In Canada street-based sex workers represent an estimated 5-20% of the sex working population (Lowman, 2012). More research is needed to identify the process of exit and re-entry, not only from on and off-street locations, but also from specific venues that exist within these environments. The process of exit from the street may be more abrupt than exit from off-street locations, and some individuals do move from on-street sex work to off-street work as part of their exit strategies. Further, focussing on the factors that support and challenge exit presupposes that lives outside of sex work are universally desired; however, individuals may choose and plan to re-enter.

Given these issues, current sex-work exit models may not adequately describe exiting or re-entry process across the sex industry. Sex work exit and re-entry can be understood in terms of a person’s motivations and related actions, and the assets they possess in terms of interpersonal relationships and their desire and capacity to change

roles. I have based my theoretical framework on Wacquant's (1990) assertion that role exit is not shaped solely by a person's social-structural position, but by a person's disposition as well. I employ an interactionist approach to understand the sex-work exit and re-entry process, informed by theories of motivation and action. I use the concepts of "field," "capital," "habitus," "life-world," and "intersectionality" to understand the interplay of agency and structure in the exit and re-entry process.

## **2.10. Motivation, Action and Dissonance**

Weber asserts that meaning provides the framework through which an actor consciously orients his or her behavior (Furner, 2010). Schütz (1932/1967) adds that action has past as well as future qualities. He distinguishes "in-order-to" and "because of" motives. "In-order-to" motives explain how on-going actions are made meaningful through the process of "antecedent projection," which requires a person to have identified specific behaviours intended to produce a desired outcome. "Because of" motives retrospectively link past events with a completed action (Schütz, 1932/1967). Actions are intentional and rational, based in one's "stock of experience" (Schütz, 1932/1967). A rational actor can project an end result beyond a journey's steps.

Individuals may be motivated to change because of past experiences or in order-to achieve some state in the future. Their knowledge of the outcomes of past behaviours helps shape their journeys and project them into new positions. Persons who do not hold a clear vision of where they want to be in life, or who lack background knowledge of how to get to a particular position would not necessarily have conceived of an end-state before engaging in action to achieve it. Change for these individuals may be motivated by their thoughts or beliefs.

Dissonance theorists attempt to explain how people make meaning out of their thoughts and behaviours (Aronson, 1997). Aronson suggested that dissonance is most profound when it involves a person's self-concept, as most people strive to preserve a consistent, competent, and morally good sense of their self. Dissonance theory consists of four assumptions: 1) people seek consistency in their thoughts, values, attitudes and behaviors; 2) dissonance is caused by a psychological inconsistency; 3) dissonance drives action and change; 4) dissonance motivates people to reduce or eliminate



inconsistencies in their lives (Gruber, 2003). Kassarian and Cohen (1965) stated that when individuals are presented with new information that conflicts with their thoughts or behaviors they respond in four ways: 1) they change behaviors, attitudes or thoughts; 2) they deny the new information and continue as usual; 3) they minimize the inner conflict they are experiencing; 4) they obtain new information that reinforces existing thoughts or behaviours so that there is no need to make changes. Participants in this study who experienced feelings of conflict about their sex work involvement may respond in all of the ways listed above. However, it is more likely that those who have made the decision to exit sex work, return to it, or live dual lives, may actively seek out information and relationships that make their decision consonant with their self-concepts and behaviors.

## **2.11. Symbolic Interactionism**

Schütz's conceptualization of "in order-to" and "because of" motives and dissonance theory need to be understood in relation to the inner workings of a person's mind, their world of social relations, and because action is only made meaningful through social interaction. G.H. Mead, in "The Self, the I and the Me" (1929) elaborates on social interaction, stating that the "self" is not known in its entirety. The individual only has knowledge of the self, or their many selves, from the position of those they interact with. As a result, the self is a social structure (Mead, 1929). The "me" is that part of the self which encapsulates the attitude controlling what the self does in interaction. The "I" is related to memory, and appears in one's experience only after action has been taken by the "me" (Mead, 1929).

Symbolic interactionists hold that people interact first with their inner selves (the "self" and the "me") in the process of becoming subjects unto themselves, and then they interact with others and become objects in the eyes of others (Mead, 1929). Mead posits that symbols, which include cultural norms and values, are interpreted and given meaning by the individual through this process of "self-indication" (Blumer, 1969). The individual becomes the object of his/her own actions while remaining an "acting unit"—a member of various social groups and also independent from them (Blumer, 1969). Self-indication, or what Mead calls a person's "forum of thought", is compatible with dissonance theory wherein a person's interaction with their self may serve to re-align cognitions and behaviours, and reaffirm self-conceptions, because individuals act on the

basis of the meanings they ascribe to the things and people in their social environment. Blumer (1969) states that human actions are done in response to and in relation to the acts of others, in that the persons one interacts with will have influence on their thoughts and dissonance (Aronson, 1997; Kassirjian & Cohen, 1965), motivations (Schütz, 1932/1967), and actions (Furner, 2010). Symbolic interactionism provides a useful way of conceptualizing the link between the actions of agents, their inner world, and their social environment.

## 2.12. Life-World

A person's social world contains other people who can be conceptualized as occupying positions in a series of overlapping spheres, all of which have varying degrees of influence on an individual's behaviour. Schütz describes the social world as a series of relations and "modes of knowledge" that move from intimate to anonymous, based on a person's proximity to others. He suggests that knowledge moves from subjective to objective as other persons become more distant or remote. People in one's immediate circle who share time, space, and direct face-to-face interaction are *consociates*. With these individuals a person holds a "we" relationship, and simultaneously experiences the world with them (Walsh, 1967). Those in "we" relationships shape each other's behaviors through social interaction (Schütz, 1932/1967). People beyond our direct experience can be divided into three groups: predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. *Predecessors* lived before a person was born. Predecessors are more remote and have a "pastness" (Schütz, 1932/1967) that can influence living beings through symbols and memories, records and monuments. *Contemporaries* live in the world with an individual and hold "thou" relationships. People are merely aware that these others exist and envision them quasi-simultaneously (Walsh, 1967), with no characteristics assigned to their existence (Schütz, 1932/1967). They are "ideal types" that become "we" relations only upon face-to-face contact (Schütz, 1967). Finally, *successors* are people who have yet to come into the world; they represent a futurity (Schütz, 1932/1967).

We are constantly interpreting the meaning behind one another's actions and finding meaning in our own actions through exposure to others. Meaning is co-produced through interaction with consociates and contemporaries—those who share time, space,

and experience—and predecessors and successors. An individual is nested within his or her own sense of self and world of social relations. However, Schütz pays little attention to the way that interactions are located in and shaped by the intersecting structures of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, which in turn influences the extent of a person's life-world, their self-concept and the motivations for their actions. The concept of intersectionality helps to overcome this limitation of Schütz's thinking.

### **2.13. Intersectionality**

Intersectionality refers to the way that an individual is situated within various identities, subject positions, groups, power relations, and social structures, and how these positions are experienced and reproduced in daily life (O'Neill & Campbell, 2011). From this theoretical perspective, class, race, and gender are not independent categories of analysis to which a person's actions or identity can be reduced; instead, human action is understood across intersecting categories of identity. This intersectionality serves to complicate and contextualize human behaviour not only because there is a relationship between the individual and structure, but also because there is a relationship among structural forces. O'Neill and Campbell (2011) state that utilizing the concept of intersectionality when examining sex work exit will "take us beyond the normative criminological structure/agency debates in explaining desistance, towards a materialist cultural feminist criminology that evidences the complexity, contingency and realities of sex work and sex working" (pg.163).

Patricia Hill-Collins (1990), a well-known theorist of "systemic intersectionality" discusses the "matrix of domination" wherein race, class, and gender are viewed as intersecting elements of social interaction. Hill-Collins rejects "either/or" characterization in favour of "both/and" approaches when exploring personal, social and structural levels of dominance. She argues that, within structures of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy are ranked categories of identity according to which privilege is constructed (Hill-Collins, 1990). Where a person is located within these structures and categories of identity will determine their decisions and life chances.

While I can appreciate the need to have a structural element in theorizing the decisions we make, locating a person's position in and across social structures may

overemphasize their importance, and downplay individual agency and the influence of social interaction. My investigation and subsequent analysis of sex work exit and re-entry combines structure and agency in a way that does not conceptualize them as mutually exclusive constructs. Instead, action is understood as being influenced by the internalization of structure through social interaction. This embodiment creates specific dispositions. A person's disposition results in the choices, activities, and practices that (re)produce social structures. The concept of constructionist intersectionality provides the integration of structure and agency, position and choice, in shaping human action.

Constructionist intersectionality acknowledges that people *choose* how they identify in terms of social structure and identity markers (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006); an insight that allows for more complexity and contradiction when making sense of sex work exit, re-entry and duality because these acts can be seen as choice is based on disposition and Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus—a person's internalization of structure, and disposition—their preferred or practiced way of acting and being in the world. Phoenix and Pattynama (2006) suggest that the concept of systemic intersectionality limits the complexity of social divisions and identity formation, because identity is seen as being shaped primarily by structural forces of domination and marginalization. Constructionist intersectionality recognizes agency in light of or in spite of structural forces. Individuals hold various positions within social structures. The act of transitioning from one position to another needs to be understood in terms of how agents choose to interpret their socio-structural positions—how they see themselves and their perception of how others see them. Individual abilities—how they utilize strengths to take on new roles, retain them and transition between them—are also important.

## **2.14. Field, Capital, and Habitus**

To recall, a "field" is a place of interaction where social and economic structures shape one's practices (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For example, relations of domination and subordination may infuse a persons' life. In complex societies there are many such fields, which are "specific and irreducible" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992); in other words, they may overlap and each have their own internal logic. Positions within a field impose determinations on a person based on their capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu suggests that there are four main “species of capital”. 1) *Economic capital* includes money and financial assets to which all other forms of capital are reducible. 2) *Social capital* is the power derived from a person’s group memberships and relationships. This form of capital is evident in such things as letters of reference or referrals from a recognized group or person on another’s behalf. 3) *Cultural capital* is “informational capital” that can be embodied through dispositions—i.e. preferences and tastes—acquired by a person as a result of their upbringing and socialization, objectified in the form of books or machines that contain knowledge, and institutionalized in the form of educational credentials (Bourdieu, 1986). 4) *Symbolic capital* is the form that each species of capital takes as people interpret them (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Possession of capital gives a person position within a field. How capital is perceived by others in the field gives capital its power. Bourdieu uses the analogy of a “game” to describe social interactions within fields. Players of the game believe in and compete for the stakes or profits available. Each player possesses cards that represent their power, but their influence is determined by the characteristics of a specific field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Some cards are trumps and are valid across all fields. The value of particular forms of capital is based on the construction of the field. Bourdieu suggests that players can exercise agency to increase or retain their capital within a given field, and they can work to change the value of their cards by devaluing those of others or elevating value of the particular kinds of capital they hold.

Field and habitus are intertwined. Habitus is a “socialized subjectivity” produced by a person’s history—an internalization of social structure that binds the human mind to a system of categories used to understand the world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). People take these cognitive categories for granted. Bourdieu explains that, “the world encompasses me (*me comprend*) but I comprehend it (*je le comprends*) precisely because it comprises me” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128). We take in our surroundings and relationships in the process of understanding ourselves. We interpret situations and then act. Through our actions we reproduce our surroundings and relationships. Through this dialectic, agency, structure and interaction become one.

With Bourdieu’s conception of the social environment in which action takes place, the life-world (Schütz, 1932/1967) evolves from being a network of relationships to a field of positions, stakes, and possibilities. A person’s ability to engage with the various

forms of capital in their possession, and that which is available to them from within their fields, is based on what they believe is possible to achieve and their ability to manage the capital in their possession in order to attain desired ends.

Within the context of social interaction, a person's disposition can determine how they view their life trajectories in terms of opportunities available to them within fields. Bourdieu and Wacquant state that "cumulative exposure to certain social conditions instills in individuals an ensemble of durable and transposable dispositions...inscribing in the organism the patterned inertia and constraints of external" (1992, p. 13).

Moving positions within or across fields derives from socio-structural positioning and intersectionality (Dhamoon, 2011; Hill-Collins, 1990; O'Neill & Campbell, 2011; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006), social relationships and symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1913/1929), the internalization of structure and the preferences it produces (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), as well as a variety of motives (Aronson, 1997; Cohen, 1968; Gruber, 2003; Kassarian & Cohen, 1965; Schütz, 1932/1967).

### **3. Methodology and Ethical Considerations**

Former sex workers are difficult to locate once they have left the sex trade because many do not disclose their past work or re-associate with people in the sex industry (Matthews, 2008). Complete disassociation from deviant or stigmatized identities is common (Goffman, 1963). Consequently, I utilized my social capital—my extensive social network of connections to people actively and formerly involved in the sex industry—to purposively sample individuals who are ‘out’ about their sex work involvement.

#### **3.1. Recruitment Process**

I solicited participants using a chain referral/network/snowball sampling strategy based on personal contacts and via the various Vancouver sex worker organizations that I have come to know during my seventeen years working in the voluntary sector. I sent email invitations and made follow-up phone calls to PACE Society, WISH Drop in Society, the Mobile Access Project outreach van (MAP), PEERS Vancouver Resource Society, and Hustle Men on the Move Outreach service. I also posted an invitation to participate in the research on a sex worker website, The Naked Truth (TNT). Potential participants were provided with information about the project in order to obtain their informed consent, which described:

- the purpose of study;
- the benefits and risks of participation;
- who has access to raw data and interview transcripts;
- how to give and withdraw consent;
- how confidentiality will be protected;
- how information will be made public; and
- how to access this study once it is published.

Special attention was paid to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants, as many people do not want their histories in the sex industry to be known. To protect privacy, verbal consent to participate was obtained at the beginning of the interviews. Participants chose whether to conduct the one-on-one interview in-person or via telephone, computer assisted voice-image (e.g., Skype), or computer assisted Short Message Services (SMS) e.g., Microsoft Network (MSN). When using Skype, participants could choose audio-video or audio-only conversation options. Participants who elected to participate in an in-person interview were free to select a location most convenient for them.

Only one participant elected to participate via Skype audio-video, the remaining participants selected the in-person interview option. Interviews took place during a 12-week period, from February 15<sup>th</sup> to May 7<sup>th</sup> 2012, in restaurants, bars, private homes, and coffee shops throughout the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). Participants were not paid for their contribution. A total of twenty-two interviews were completed, lasting between one and three hours, with an average length of one hour and thirty-eight minutes.

This small sample size is similar to other studies on sex work exit, including Law (2010) n=10; Mansson and Hedin (1999) n= 23; Sanders (2007) n= 30; McIntyre (2002) n= 38; Westerlik (2009) n=40. A “sociological imagination” (Mills, 1959) is required in order to extrapolate from the personal supports and challenges that participants identify with respect to movement in and out of the sex industry to larger socio-structural conditions. Exposing the intimate lives of individuals can provide insight into the structural forces at play in our society that affect decision-making. According to C. W. Mills, personal troubles are social issues and are worthy of inquiry because there is a direct link between biography and history.

### **3.2. Observation/Data Collection Technique**

Blumer states that individuals interpret their interactions with others in terms of “objects designated and appraised, meanings acquired, and decisions made, [consequently] the process has to be seen from the standpoint of the acting unit” (1969, p. 86). I opted to conduct phenomenological interviews because they aspire to be



reflexive instead of merely observational (Flood, 2010). This allows participants' descriptions to be thoroughly investigated. I started with a general guide for the interviews (Appendix A), to which I added prompts encouraging participants to provide examples and their reflections on the experiences they were describing.

Employing the phenomenological approach to the observation, collection and analysis of interview data provided several advantages. First, it allowed participants to describe and share their experiences of transition without being constrained by a specific set of questions or framework for understanding sex work transitioning. Second, it provided the opportunity for me to take on the role of an interpretive phenomenologist, to use my practical experience and theoretical knowledge of sex work exiting and re-entry processes to formulate appropriate follow-up questions during interviews. Third, it supported the democratic co-production of knowledge about transition in and out of sex work by eliciting and recording participants' memories (Sipe, 1991). I gathered 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) about their experiences that may help to refine theories and models about transitioning.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

Once the interviews were completed, the digital audio files were transcribed and analyzed using QSR NVivo 8, a widely used qualitative data management and analysis software package. Transcripts were read multiple times and coded to identify themes within and across interviews. This approach follows the basic tenets of phenomenological data analysis, as it involves an iterative process that requires a "reading and rereading of transcripts of interviews to identify meaningful pieces of information that can help answer the research question" (Connelly, 2010, p. 128). I compared the themes as they emerged from the data with theories and concepts from the literature on role transition, sex work exit and re-entry. I then engaged in a reflexive process where I moved back and forth between the data and the literature in an attempt to make sense of participant experiences of transition.

The process of reading and coding the transcripts made me realize that my sample (n=22) comprised three distinct groups, based on the themes that emerged during the interviews: 1) those who had exited and had no intention of returning to sex

work at the time of the interview (sex-work-no-more participants; n=9); 2) those who had exited and would return to sex work under certain conditions (sex-work-maybe participants; n=8); and, 3) those who live dual lives both in and out of sex work (dual-life participants; n=5). This categorization allows a deeper understanding of how people make sense of their movement in and out of sex work.

To supplement the qualitative data analysis, I collected information about the socio-demographic characteristics of my sample. I used PASW/SPSS data analysis software to generate descriptive statistics about the sample.

## **4. The Participants**

The following chapter presents a general demographic profile of the sample. Biographical information about individual participants will be reported in later chapters that describe their experiences of sex work exit, re-entry, and duality. Participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

### **4.1. Demographics**

Study participants ranged in age from 20 to 61, with an average age of 38.45 years. The median age of participants was 38 and the modal category for age was 43 years. Fifteen of the participants (68.2%) were Caucasian, two (9.1%) were of Caribbean descent, two (9.1%) were Aboriginal, two (9.1%) were Asian/Southeast Asian, and one (4.5%) identified as mixed race. Eighteen participants (81.9%) were females; three (13.6%) were male; and one (4.5 %) identified as a "femme gender queer". Ten participants (45.4%) were heterosexual; seven (32%) were bisexual; three (13.6%) identified as "queer"; and two (9%) were homosexual. Some participants who identified themselves as being heterosexual stated that they were open to bisexuality.

With respect to economic security, four participants (18.2%) considered themselves to be "working poor", or one pay cheque away from poverty; five participants(22.7%) labelled themselves as "working"— two pay cheques away from poverty, and 12 participants (54.5%) deemed themselves to be "middle class", having job security and savings.

Twenty-one of 22 participants (95.4%) were employed at a straight job at the time I interviewed them. Their occupational categories included health services, corrections, education, and the private and voluntary sectors. One participant was an entrepreneur and one was a graduate student. I distinguished those who worked in the voluntary sector providing support services to sex workers from those who were

supporting other populations. Eight participants (36%) held upper managerial and executive positions, four (18.2%) worked in upper management in sex worker serving/support organizations, and four (18.2%) held comparable positions in community organizations supporting groups other than sex workers. Five participants (23%) provided direct outreach and support services to sex workers.

With respect to the level of education, of the 22 participants 91% of participants had graduated from high school; 73% were university or college educated. Thirty-six percent (n=22) held post secondary degrees and certificates in various disciplines. The highest level of education achieved was a Master of Arts (MA) degree. One participant was writing her MA thesis.

When it came to their relationship status, half of all participants (n=22) were primary caregivers to between one and three children. Of those eleven, 10 participants were parents during their time in sex work. At the time of interview, 13 participants (59.1%) were single and never married, four were married (18.2%), one was divorced (4.5%), and four (18.2%) were living in common-law relationships.

## **4.2. Health Issues and Social Skills**

Participants were asked whether they considered themselves to have any physical, mental or emotional issues that affected their quality of life. Twelve participants (55%) disclosed health issues. Of those, 10 participants (45%) identified themselves as having a disability. Health concerns included celiac disease, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, sex work-related post traumatic stress disorder, ADD/ADHD, drug-related liver and kidney diseases, cataracts, anxiety disorder, chronic herpes, schizoaffective and bipolar disorders, epilepsy, and HIV infection.

Seventeen participants (77%) disclosed alcohol and drug use before, during or after sex work involvement. Drug and alcohol use ranged from casual use of marijuana and alcohol to extensive use of heroin and cocaine before and during sex work. Two participants (9%) disclosed drug dealing while they were involved in sex work. Five (23%) began alcohol and drug use before entering sex work, 11 (50%) began use during sex work, and one person (4.5%) began drug use after she exited sex work.

Participants were asked to identify what skills, traits, or attributes helped their transitions in or out of sex work. Participants listed the following: care-taking ability; people skills and the ability to 'read' others and negotiate terms; conflict resolution; various social and management skills; honesty and directness; the ability to put people at ease and make others feel safe; patience; the ability to be a confidante; multi-tasking; and entrepreneurship.

### **4.3. Sex Work Experience**

My intention was to interview persons who had exited or re-entered off-street sex work. Twenty participants (91%) fit this criterion. However, one participant had almost exclusive street-level experience and another had exited from the street but continued to see regular clients for some time during the exit process.

Ten participants (45%) worked primarily as out and in-call escorts for agencies or as dancers. Twelve (55%) worked as independent sex workers through ads, chat lines, and the internet. Participants' sex work experience included: dance (VIP and stage); pornography (adult film and print); massage and body work in various massage parlours and 'rub and tugs;' phone sex; bondage-domination-sadomasochism (BDSM); live erotic performances such as peep shows and web-cam; tickle torture; cross-dressing performing; and nude modelling.

Participants had spent between 1.5 and 31 years in sex industry work (see Table 1). Participants who had exited had an average career length of 12.5 years. Nine of the 22 participants (41%) entered the sex industry as adults (i.e., 18 years of age or older). The average age of entry into the sex industry was 19.2 years. Some entered as young as 14 and as mature as 35 years of age. The average age of exit was 30.6 years among the 16 participants who consider themselves out.<sup>2</sup> Age of exit ranged from as early as 19 and as late as 51 years of age.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to interviewing Jessie I was not aware that her experience in the sex industry was as a youth. She entered at 14 and exited at 15.5 years of age. She was excluded from the age of exit statistic.

**Table 1. Age-Related Demographics**

<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Average Age at Interview</b>	<b>Median Age of Exit</b>	<b>Average Age of Entry into the Sex Industry</b>	<b>Number of Participants Who have Exited</b>	<b>Average Length of Career (when interviewed)</b>	<b>Average Age of Exit (N=16)</b>
22	38.45	38	19.2	18	12.5	30.6

Other research on off-street sex work exit and re-entry (Law, 2011; Rickard, 2001; Sanders, 2007; Westerlik, 2009) consisted of samples with similar a composition with respect to general and sex work-specific demographics. Personal factors such as health, drug addiction issues and the skills my participants identified also were consistent with these other studies.

## **5. Squaring Up: Sex Work No More**

In each of the chapters describing the experiences of participants comprising the three subsamples I have incorporated participants' biographical information and aspects of their upbringing, experience in sex work, and self-conceptions to contextualize their decisions, stocks of knowledge, and the manner in which their social positions, relationships, and environments influenced their movement in and out of the sex industry.

### **5.1. Thoughts about Exiting**

Seventeen participants (73%) identified themselves as having exited the sex industry. Of those seventeen, nine (53%) stated that they will never return to sex work. This subsample 'sex-work-no-more' will be the focus of this chapter.

Sex-work-no-more participants discussed the act of exiting as a form of liberation. Leaving the sex industry was thought of as a way to eliminate harm in their lives; to gain control over their lives; or as a progressive step toward a personal or career goal. These three ways of thinking about exiting were not mutually exclusive.

#### **5.1.1. Exit as a way to Eliminate Harm and as a Path to Liberation**

Colleen, Debbie, Richard, Lianne and Shannon viewed exit as a pathway to eliminate harmful behaviours and as an act of emancipation.

##### **Colleen**

Colleen is a 30 year-old heterosexual Caucasian female with no dependents who now works in the voluntary sector. As a child, she always felt that she was able to listen to her intuition and get what she wanted; however, her father was not at home very

much and she only felt safe when he was around. When her mother and father divorced, her mom formed a new relationship within a month. Colleen reflected negatively upon her mother's dependency on a man for survival and for supporting her child. In sex work Colleen was seeking the safety and security that she believed men provided. She worked for a pimp who was physically and emotionally unavailable to her. Her father was absent from her life in a similar way.

Initially, sex work presented Colleen with independence and a new found sense of self-esteem. Her lifestyle with her pimp was alluring. Later she began to realize that sex work involvement meant dependency on a man/pimp for protection. She wanted to break free from this dependency because it reminded her of the weakness she saw in her mother.

Colleen thinks of sex work exit as emancipation not only from the sex industry, but also from her dependency on men. Colleen also believes that exiting entails more than just stopping sex work: for her it was a transformation in how she interacts with others and how she uses her sexuality. She stated:

*I think it's more now, like before it was just not working, which isn't, I don't think it's exiting. I see myself not using my sexuality to get things.*

## **Debbie**

Debbie is a 43 year-old bisexual mixed race female with no children who lives in a common-law relationship. Debbie was raised as a Roman Catholic and stated that her family had few resources. A key aspect of her upbringing was her abandonment at age 15 by her mother and her exposure to the 'whore stigma' (Pheterson, 1993).

*My mother didn't want me and he [her uncle] would call me a whore after he would treat me badly as a child...He called women dirty whores...I didn't think I was a sex worker; I thought I was a whore.*

Debbie disclosed that she engaged in self-harm through drug use and cutting herself because she never felt she deserved anything positive in her life. As a result of the experience of being labelled a whore, sex work involvement represented failure and reinforced the idea that *all* women are whores, just as her uncle claimed. To resist her



internalization of the whore stigma, Debbie would limit her engagement in paid sex to earning what she needed to survive and giving any extra money away.

Debbie stated that she began drug use while engaged in sex work. She disclosed that she felt pathetic. Debbie characterized sex work as a something that she overcame. Leaving was a way to reclaim her virtue and shed the whore stigma that had haunted her for much of her life.

## **Richard**

Richard is a 38 year-old gay Caucasian male with no dependants. Sex work involvement affected his feelings of self-worth. When he was eighteen a client told him that he was too old to be involved in sex work:

*I remember a date telling me at 18 you're washed up you're aged out now...I was seeing him since the age of 14 and I never ever forgot that.*

Richard discussed his feelings of powerlessness and dependency on his sex work customers. Exiting for him involved more than ending paid sex; it was a way to become self-sufficient. Similar to Colleen and Debbie, exit was a way to end his dependency on men and drugs. Richard questioned whether he really has exited the sex trade because, as part of his employment as a support worker, he is exposed to other people's experiences of exploitation.

*I get so fucking triggered ... and feeling my own fucking powerlessness from when I was a kid ...I don't really understand exit.*

Supporting others in dealing with trauma reminds Richard of the harm he endured while in sex work.

## **Lianne**

Lianne is a 43 year-old heterosexual Asian female, married with no dependents. She had experienced childhood sexual abuse and, as a result, felt that she became a bit reckless. She was attracted to the "bad boy" type in school and began to hang out with gangs in what she interpreted as an act of rebellion.

She linked her racial identity to feelings of not quite fitting in among Euro-Canadians growing up. She rejected her cultural heritage in an effort to build relationships with her peers. Her family was conservative and she felt that she had always had a double-identity as a child: one within her family and cultural unit, the other among those outside.

Sex work, like her early gang affiliation, was a way of retaliating against being violated by men. She dealt and used drugs and drank alcohol. To numb herself, she sought a body-stone when using marijuana.

For Lianne sex work was, for the most part, a performance and a job like any other. Leaving the sex industry was a way of putting an end to her rebellious stage and liberating herself from past sexual abuse.

## **Shannon**

Shannon is a married 47-year old bisexual Caucasian female who has one adult child. As a child she was adopted. She felt that she spent most of her life trying to be what others wanted her to be. She never felt that she was good enough:

*I'm adopted so ... my adoption myth ...involved me being good, obedient and smiling all the time.*

She developed from her father the idea that the world is fair, but this belief was soon shattered by her upper-middle class environment. Shannon came to believe that the world is a façade, full of people who she felt were lying and pretending all the time. Her belief that her world was full of deceitful people was reinforced by her mother who was unfaithful to her father when Shannon was growing up. She witnessed her mother receiving gifts from many men with whom she was intimate.

Shannon described herself as very direct—the opposite of her mom and the people in the affluent community of her upbringing. In sex work, however, she had to become inauthentic, a manner that did not sit well with her. Shannon was severely drug addicted and homeless while involved in sex work, both of which made her feel worthless. Shannon first sought exit from what she deemed to be a cruel world by planning to suicide by taking a drug overdose. A regular customer who she had grown

fond of came to meet her for their weekly session. His care and concern for Shannon made her re-evaluate her life circumstances, and this prevented her suicide.

Originally, Shannon viewed exiting as a means to get back the life she lost through her involvement in sex work and drug abuse. However, after exiting she realized that there was no way to return to the world of justice that her dad had constructed for her. Shannon is still working to reconcile the way that her father talked about the world with the way that her mother lived in it.

### **5.1.2. Exit to Gain/Maintain Control, Esteem or Self-Worth**

#### **Amy**

Amy is a 35 year-old heterosexual Caucasian female with one minor dependent. As a child she lived in 16 different foster homes and was adopted twice. From a very early age she had to adapt to living in a multitude of environments with diverse families. As a consequence of this transient upbringing, she does not build relationships easily. This “no strings attached” approach to relationships suited her well in sex work. As a sex worker she played various roles, but unlike during her upbringing, sex work gave her the opportunity to choose how she lived:

*I saw the way to move up through it where I could work less for more money... I was very business about it.*

Amy is currently a serial entrepreneur and believes her need to ‘bob and weave’ is rooted in her unconventional upbringing, which included physical and sexual abuse in some of the foster homes in which she lived. She transitioned into sex work without ever being involved in another way of making a living:

*I went right from being abused by people in multiple homes right into the trade.*

Leaving abusive foster homes and entering sex work was a liberating transition for Amy. The act of charging men for her services and controlling their access to her body was a way for Amy to practice her autonomy. The income earned through sex work helped stave off destitution and protected her against violence:

*I was much more free from violence because the people that were my age that weren't in the trade, they had to do all sorts of things to get by at night like ... go to shelters where there's all these old men that were just gonna touch them anyways ... I had enough money that I could get a hotel room ... so there's many ways in which it made me safer as well.*

Amy was involved with organized crime groups while selling sex. Consequently, in terms of the levels of physical and sexual violence she experienced, the sex industry began to mimic the foster homes in which she lived as a child. Exit from sex work for Amy was another transition—a way once again to be free from violence and gain control over her body and destiny.

## **Josey**

Josey is a 26 year-old bisexual Caucasian female with no children. She lives in a common-law relationship and holds a Master's Degree. She was raised in a middle class home, but stated that she did not conform to middle class norms, nor did she learn how to respect authority. From an early age she determined that her mother was not very smart and this gave Josey a sense of intellectual dominance over her family.

Josey discussed social stigma and felt embarrassed about her sex work involvement. She stated that how others view her is important to her and felt that her need for approval and desire to be accepted reflected her middle class upbringing.

Exit from sex work for Josey was essential in order to relieve the stress associated with her self-concept—the negative feelings she had about being involved in sex work and how this conflicted with the way she obtains acceptance—through approval from others in the square world. In order to continue to view herself as intelligent and strong and to feed her need to be viewed by others as an ideal specimen in terms of her race, class and gender, exit was imperative. After exit she obtained a graduate degree. She attributes this accomplishment in part to her race-class privilege.

### 5.1.3. Exit as a Progressive Step

#### Jessie

Jessie is a 41 year-old Caucasian femme gender queer who has co-parented three children. As a child she lived with her mom who was enslaved to a wealthy man. She explained that, from the outside, her family was well-off, but she experienced sexual abuse and her step father refused to spend money on raising her. Instead she was put to work at age 11 doing menial labour outside the home to earn her keep. Jessie dreamt of a different kind of life and an escape from childhood sexual abuse, so she ran away from home. She ended up in a big city and lived with a group of youth her age. She began dating a young man at the time. While he and his friends sold drugs and engaged in petty crime for money, she turned to sex work. She felt really good about her ability to earn money. When her relationship with her boyfriend ended, Jessie returned to her home community to live with friends of her family.

Jessie was involved in the sex industry as a minor, but does not consider herself to have been exploited. Sex work was not a challenge for her as she had already experienced sexual abuse as a child in her home. She thinks of sex work exit as a natural occurrence that resulted from the end of an intimate relationship and a change of environment.

#### Stuart

Stuart is a 43 year-old gay Caucasian male with no dependents. His upbringing was stable but his family did not accept his sexual orientation. Identifying as a gay person, he felt isolated during his childhood but, outside of this experience, he describes his socialization as quite standard for his race, class and gender.

Stuart became involved in sex work as a way to explore his sexual and gender identity, and to seek acceptance and feel desired:

*I was looking to fulfill something very personal in the work...which got me into trouble because it all became very like you know love and sex and money and power and control and acceptance was all of this toxic soup I like to call it.*

He used hard drugs for the first time with his first client and admits that he was not well-suited for sex work because of his inability to manipulate people. Stuart's subsequent drug addiction caused him to "lose" himself, which negated the very reason why he entered the sex industry in the first place—to "find" himself. Stuart thought that exit from sex work was the next step forward in his personal development; the sex industry had served its purpose.

## **5.2. Factors Facilitating Exit**

The nine participants who would not consider returning to the industry had numerous overlapping factors facilitating their exit, including: 1) developing new relationships or relationship breakdown; 2) health conditions; 3) frustration with sex work; 4) self-esteem issues; and 5) violence. They expressed seven reasons for not ever planning to return to the industry: 1) relationships; 2) frustration; 3) fear of incarceration; 4) age; 5) sex work is not empowering; 6) sex work requires emotional health; and 7) sex work serves no purpose.

### **5.2.1. Intimate Relationships**

The primary factor facilitating the exit of five participants was a desire to pursue a new intimate relationship, or as a result of a break up. Josey, Lianne and Shannon left the sex industry primarily to pursue a new relationship. Josey started a new relationship with a man while in the process of escaping a violent relationship with another man who was living on the money she earned in sex work. In her case, both a new relationship and a breakdown of an established relationship inspired her exit. Her new partner drew a picture of her that made her look very sad and pathetic. She was shocked by how he viewed her and stated:

*He drew me... how he saw me and I remember seeing that and just crying and crying and crying...I felt like I had been seen for the first time...*

Josey mused; it was like he "held a mirror up to me." The potential of having a happy future with this new man—the first person to ever really see her—was irresistible. This event changed how she thought about her involvement in sex work. Josey stated

that her race and class background led her to believe that she could be anything she wanted to be.

Like Josey, Lianne befriended a man while she was in an abusive relationship with another man during the period she was a sex worker. Finding a home and support in this new relationship, Lianne fell in love and married him. She attributed her exit from the sex industry to her husband.

*I really believe that if I had not met him especially at that time, I don't know if I would have ever exited...*

Shannon became intimately involved with a regular client and described how he supported her to end her drug use and find self-worth. Like Josey, Shannon had someone 'hold a mirror up to her' and helped her to view herself as he saw her—intelligent and beautiful. This inspired Shannon's exit from the sex industry. This regular client was instrumental in referring her to a sex worker support organization, where she was surrounded and supported by others who had left the sex industry.

Debbie and Jessie stated that the breakdown of an intimate relationship inspired their exits. Debbie was dating a man who fell ill. He had to make some decisions about his illness that included him living in a healthier environment. He informed Debbie that he could no longer continue in the relationship if she continued in sex work. Her partner left. She viewed this separation as an event that provided her the space to decide whether she wanted to exit the sex industry. Debbie exited to demonstrate her love for her mate and to care for him during his illness.

Jessie was dating a young man who ended the relationship due to her infidelity. This caused her to leave the city she had been working in and return home. Jessie is an exception in the study because she entered and then exited the sex industry while still a youth. She attributed the permanency of her exit to a change in environment, which altered all of her relationships. She drifted from one life to another, commenting that she felt like she just 'walked through a door' to a new world. Sex work just happened not to be part of that new world.

Reactionary exits (Sanders, 2007) are due to an event, and can be linked to what Mansson and Hedin (1999; 2003) call "turning points," which are eye-opening events and revelations, violence, parenthood, and falling in love. These circumstances have

also been referred to as contextual factors (Millar, 2002), relational factors (Brown et al, 2006; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Koostra, 2010; Mansson & Hedin, 1999) or emotional reasons (Law, 2011). For Josey, Lianne and Shannon new relationships or relationship breakdowns are a type of interpersonal event that inspired relatively immediate exits from the sex industry.

Dalla (2006) states that sex workers who exited the sex industry often identified new relationships as motivating their exit. Those who returned often cited relationship breakdowns as precipitating their re-entry (Dalla, 2006). Schütz (1932/1967) frames human action in terms of “because of” motives that are linked to past experiences, and “in order-to” motives that are future oriented. Exit to pursue new relationships is a form of “in order-to” motive, whereby the prospect of a new love inspires change.

Similarly, Dalla (2006) identified loss or threatened loss of a significant relationship as another factor motivating exit, which was the experience of Debbie and Jessie.

### **5.2.2. Health**

Like Debbie and Jessie, a breakdown in Stuart’s relationship with the man he loved sent his life into turmoil. In this relationship Stuart characterizes himself as “needy” and desiring a lot of love and affection. The desire to be loved was the reason for his entrance into sex work. The abrupt ending of this relationship devastated Stuart. He then had to contend with health issues and increased drug use that came as a result of his emotional instability.

After a lengthy drug binge, Stuart found out that he was HIV positive. His doctor said that he needed to stop using drugs and start anti-retroviral medication or he would die. Stuart continued to engage in sex work and use drugs until he became fed up with the ‘working to use, using to work cycle.’ Like Josey and Shannon, Stuart used a mirror analogy, stating:

*I kind of looked in the mirror and I was like I don’t even know who you are...I don’t like this person. I’m scared.*

At this point Stuart made a decision to go to detox and put an end to his drug use and his involvement in sex work:



*I got a whole bunch of meth and I did it all myself and the next day, the day before I called and made an appointment at detox... the next morning I just left my keys on my bed and left.*

Although I placed Stuart within the exit for health category, clearly his broken heart created the platform for his decision to exit.

Several other studies report physical health issues are reported as motivation for exit (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Brown et al, 2006; Koostra, 2010; Law, 2011; Millar, 2002). Almost 8% of sex workers in Benoit and Millar's (2001) sample, and 6.3% of exited workers in Millar's (2002) sample left the sex industry because of serious health issues. However, Stuart is the only person in my sample who included a physical health issue as part of his exit decision-making process. Stuart exited sex work for a situational reason (Law, 2011) and in a reactionary way (Sanders, 2007).

### **5.2.3. Exit Due to Frustration and Lowered Self-esteem**

Colleen and Richard identified lowered self-esteem and frustration with sex work as their reasons for exit. When she was a sex worker, Colleen was with a man who was similar to her father, who made her feel safe when he was around, although he was not around often. Like Josey, Shannon and Stuart, Colleen used a mirror analogy to describe how sex work had affected her self-esteem and how, upon reflection, she made the decision to leave the industry:

*Over time it was the eventual like downward feeling of self-esteem and feeling of...like...looking in the mirror and not recognizing myself and feeling like I was so lost.*

When a family member saw Colleen working in the sex trade she panicked and called her pimp for support, but he did not express any concern for her well-being. She then called two police officers who she had developed a relationship with and they supported her through this crisis. Colleen discussed her pimps' disregard for her feelings as the 'final straw' or "turning point" (Ebaugh, 1988; Mansson & Hedin, 1999) that motivated her exit.

Richard's exit was initiated by the build up of frustration he was experiencing when clients touched him, which generated feelings of violence towards them. Richard

desired independence and not be forced to rely on others for his survival. His other motive for exiting was simply to change his life:

*I just wanted to be more than what I thought I was.*

He had no clear plans for his future; he just wanted to end his drug use and to be a new and independent person. He wanted to get off drugs and thought that if he stopped sex work he could kick his drug habit. After attempting to quit and failing he understood that he needed to end the drug use in order to quit sex work.

Mayhew and Mossman (2007) found that sex workers will take breaks from work because of their impatience or frustration with clients. Colleen, Debbie and Richard all made reference to their impatience with customers and their overall fatigue with sex work. Many sex workers describe this frustration as a form of burn-out and identify it as a key motivation to exit (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Koostra, 2010; Law, 2011; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; McIntyre, 2002; Millar, 2002; Rickard, 2001; Sanders, 2007). The most frequent reason for exiting that Millar's (2002) respondents' reported was burn-out and job stress, with 22.9% of active workers in her sample experiencing this pressure. Law (2011) reported burn-out as an 'emotional' reason for exit, explaining that sex work is a type of emotional labour that wears on a person. Such wear is similar to the burn-out experienced by those in counselling and other helping professions. Law's findings echo the work of Sanders (2005), who describes the mental strain associated with the emotional component of sex work.

Colleen, Richard and Amy mentioned lowered self-esteem due to sex work involvement as motivating their exits. Exiting due to lowered esteem can be categorized as a natural-progression exit or as an emotional reason to leave. Eleven percent of sex workers in McIntyre's (2002) sample left the industry to improve their self-esteem; Benoit and Millar (2001) reported that 9.9% of their sample was motivated to leave sex work because of their feeling of low self-worth and shame, while Millar (2002) found that 9.4% of exited workers cited low self-esteem as their main reason for exit.

#### 5.2.4. Exit Due to Violence

Amy explained that she contemplated an exit from sex work because she wanted her daughter to be proud of what she did for a living. She also feared that while engaged in sex work she might die and leave her daughter behind to grieve.

*I had a vision of my daughter pulling out a shoebox full of newspaper clippings [about me] from underneath her bed...*

Amy had experienced a violent incident in which she was held captive by a number of men, raped, and left for dead:

*...I was raped by multiple guys and held in a room for multiple days and they thought I was dead...*

During the incident she promised herself that, if she lived, she would exit. Her love for her daughter coupled with the violent incident concretized her decision to leave the sex industry. Exit for Amy was signified by a moment when she realized that she was living transparently:

*When I exited I remembered the greatest sensation ...realizing one day somebody could have followed me around for 24 hours...I wouldn't have had a thing to hide, nothing!*

Sanders (2007) classified violence-induced exit as “reactionary,” while Law (2011) described it as a “situational” reason to leave. For Amy and Richard their experience of violence motivated their exit. This is in stark contrast to samples like McIntyre’s (2002) where 47% of sex workers left the industry due to violence, death or bad dates.

Although escaping violence was the ‘event’ that ultimately motivated Amy to leave, the fear of violence resulted in an uneasy feeling about her sex work involvement prior to this event, as revealed in her comment about her fear of dying and its effect on her daughter. Dalla (2006) found that the potential loss of a relationship with a son or daughter motivated sex work exit. Amy was motivated to exit “because of” her fear of violence and the violence she ultimately experienced as a sex worker.

### **5.2.5. Reasons for Not Returning to Sex Work**

Reasons for not returning to sex work can be conceptualized in terms of Schütz's (1932/1967) "because of" and "in order to" motives. Some reasons for not returning are directly linked to the reasons people report for exiting in the first place. The link is clearest among those who left the sex industry to pursue new relationships. Josey, Lianne and Shannon cited love and respect for their partners as reasons for exit and as preventing their re-entry. Likewise, Colleen, Debbie and Richard gave frustration with clients and sex work as their reason for exit. They are motivated not to return "because of" these past experiences.

Scoular and O'Neill (2007), Koostra (2010) and Dalla (2006) described criminalization as a barrier for sex workers who wish to exit. Sanders (2007) suggested that the criminalization of sex workers for minor offenses traps them in sex work and forces them to chaotically "yo-yo." Richard is unique in my sample because he refused to return to sex work "because of" a fear of incarceration should his frustration with clients lead to him assaulting one of them. Although Richard maintained that sex work is honest work, his thieving from clients—"I had my moments when I didn't think [the client] paid me enough and I would take what I thought was owed to me"—put him at further risk of incarceration

Participant perceptions of the effect of their age on their ability to attract clients inspired exit and prevented re-entry. For example, Colleen considered herself aged-out at 30, while Debbie, who is forty-three, refused to become a 'cougar' in the sex industry. Richard mentioned age coupled with lowered self-esteem and frustration over how customers treated him as among his reasons for exiting. Sanders (2007) included age in her typology of sex work exit, noting that aging is part of "gradual planning exits" that are common among off-street workers. Rickard (2001) notes that some sex workers see their work as age limited. Koostra (2010) reported that many sex workers see the age of 40 as a natural boundary to be engaged in sex work; hence their suggesting that the ideal retirement age is between 30 and 35 years of age. Likewise, Brewis and Linstead (2000) reported that 35 years of age is the cut-off for non-self-employed sex workers. Law suggests that the "retrogressive dynamic" of age may lessen one's commitment to sex work, thus inspiring exit (Law, 2011).

Amy and Debbie did not want to return to sex work because they did not see it as empowering or they associated it with prior sexual abuse. Amy intends not to return to sex work because she sees it as harmful to her mental health “because of” past experiences of sexual abuse. Debbie did not think that sex work empowers women. Sex workers in McIntyre’s (2002) and Mansson and Hedin’s (1999) samples similarly suggested that trauma related to childhood sexual abuse is exacerbated by sex work. Amy and Debbie experienced sex work as a place where their pre-existing experiences of abuse were exacerbated. As a result, for them, avoiding sex work is an act of self-preservation.

Debbie, Amy, Jessie and Shannon experienced childhood sexual abuse. Jessie and Shannon suggested that mental stability was a prerequisite for healthy sex work involvement, as it involves emotional labour (Law, 2011; Sanders, 2005). Jessie and Shannon not only avoid sex work because of past abuse, but also refuse to return to sex work because they do not want to engage in the therapeutic process, such as counselling, that would be necessary to facilitate their re-entry. They explicitly avoided the emotional healing necessary to re-engage in sex work in a healthy way. In an extreme act of avoidance, Jessie had withdrawn from sexual activity entirely.

Stuart stated that he would not return to sex work because it no longer served a purpose in his life. For him sex work was a way to explore his sexuality and identity. When he ‘found’ himself there was no need to stay involved. This sentiment is implied in the thoughts and actions of others who exit the sex industry in order to acquire new relationships and live in the square world.

### **5.3. Factors that Support Exit**

When it comes to the process of exit, participants identified several factors, including having a withdrawal period, emotional and financial support from organizations and individuals they interacted with, and employment in straight jobs.

#### **5.3.1. Withdrawal: Time Away from It All**

Two sex-work-no-more participants stated that they lived in seclusion while exiting. This withdrawal is akin to the contemplative stages that Mansson and Hedin

(1999) and Prochaska et al. (1992) described, or the planning stages that Baker et al. (2010) described in their exit models, but they do not discuss how these stages are made possible.

Opportunities to spend time in isolation where they could contemplate exit, plan re-entry or duality, and develop the skills necessary to pursue their interests in the square world or in sex work was critical for participants across subsamples. Participants who were substance addicted accessed rehabilitation programs where they could withdraw from the world to heal and detoxify. This withdrawal gave participants time to catch up and reconnect with the square world by reading and browsing the Internet. Debbie was isolated in an apartment for three weeks before accessing a sex worker organization for support. Having never used a computer before she took this time to develop her computer skills, work out, and read.

*...I didn't leave my apartment...and I remember walking like out the doors after 3 weeks and the fresh air hit me and I'm like holy fuck...*

Amy lived in isolation after experiencing a violent assault. She spent this time deciding whether she was going to continue in sex work, earn money in other underground economies, or exit. She chose exit.

Sex-work-no-more participants Debbie and Amy stated that time away from sex work and the square world was essential to their transition. Debbie and Amy spent time on self-care and reflected upon their experiences in sex work and planned their futures.

### **5.3.2. Support from Regular Clients**

The role of clients in exiting has not been reported in previous research on exiting, perhaps because there are few studies of off-street workers.

Clients were engaged in the exit process of participants in my overall sample through the financing of what I refer to as “incubation,” i.e. the period when a person spends time in seclusion while considering exit. Debbie and Amy both received large lump sums from clients who gave them money to exit, which they used to facilitate weeks in isolation.

Clients also provided support in non-monetary ways. While working on a chat line Lianne met a client who supported her emotionally and helped her access public assistance and other resources that she was not aware existed. Shannon told a similar

tale of a client who had aided her in accessing supports to stop using drugs. Later, she married him.

Colleen kept client contact information as a backup measure; in the event she needed money she could engage in sex work with “regulars,” i.e. clients with whom a sex worker has had repeat business on a relatively long-term basis. Law (2011) also reported this practice among her participants.

### **5.3.3. Sex Work Venue Owners and Managers**

Amy was employed at an exclusive escort agency and advised the Madame that she wanted to work there as part of her exit process:

*I went to her and asked if I could work there as part of my plan to exit and she agreed... she'd been a madam for like 30 years and she said that I was the only person who said they were going to exit and did.*

Information about the role that managers and owners of sex work venues play in the exit process is not reported in previous research on exiting. Continuing to sell sex as part of one's exit strategy, or “sexiting” (Bowen, 2011), was noted by sample participants. Whether my participants were employed by escort agencies, worked independently, or both, 50% (n=11) continued to service clients as a way to finance their exits. More research is needed to determine the role that sex work venue owners play in supporting the exits of their employees, as experienced by Amy, or challenging their goals to leave sex work.

### **5.3.4. Support from Sex Work Organizations**

Sex work organizations played a key role in the exit process of five (56%) sex-work-no-more participants. These participants discussed the importance of finding a community of individuals to whom they could relate and who did not judge them. By accessing a program at a sex workers organization, Debbie received support for seven month's worth of living expenses and funding for school. Colleen, Richard, Amy, and Shannon also accessed sex worker support organizations. They similarly found that support from these organizations aided their exit process. Amy attended a sex worker organization during her incubation period at the urging of a friend. At this organization she connected with a support worker who played a key role in changing her life. Colleen

commented that even though the people in sex worker support organizations had problems of their own, she is thankful that they were there for her. Richard stated that he attended a sex worker support organization and encountered a community of exited workers who he previously did not know existed.

### **5.3.5. Employment in Sex Work Organizations**

Sex-work-no-more participants Debbie, Amy, and Shannon, all became employed at a sex worker organization during their exit process. This kind of transition from sex work to sex worker support is similar to Brown's (1991) discussion of the process of becoming a professional 'ex.' My participants could use their experience in sex work to obtain and hold employment in support organizations.

The transition from sex work to square work can be understood using Bourdieu's concepts of "capital" and "field." Some of my participants developed social capital in the form of relationships with ex sex workers who were employees of sex worker support organizations. These organizations represented a new field of interaction wherein individuals with experience in sex work could find square jobs. Debbie, Amy, and Shannon described their employment at sex worker organizations as an opportunity that "chose them." Regardless of how it came about, employment has been identified as one of the primary factors supporting exit.

Further, individuals who leave sex work to work at sex worker organizations may experience post-decision dissonance reduction. According to dissonance theory, individuals may seek confirmations for their choices to reduce post-decision dissonance (Aronson, 1997; Cohen, 1968; Festinger, 1957; Kassirjian & Cohen, 1965); thus exposure to individuals in sex worker organizations who have left the industry and to those who are seeking to exit may serve to reassure participants like Debbie, Amy and Shannon that the choice they made to exit was the correct one.

### **5.3.6. Support from Community Organizations, Government Agents and Agencies**

The wider community also was a source of support for participants. They made contact with various community organizations and government officials while in sex



work, as was the case for Colleen who met two law enforcement officers who facilitated her exit. She explains:

*So I called these 2 detectives at 930 on a Friday night and they left this interrogation to come check on me and that was so significant... these people who are strangers think that I deserve better than this.*

Richard, Shannon, and Stuart entered detox or a mental health facility in order to obtain treatment, housing, and financial support. Stuart remarked that treatment helped him change the “people, places and things” that were unhealthy in his life.

### **5.3.7. Relationships: Consociates and Contemporaries**

Two participants discussed the impact that reuniting with family members had on exit decisions. Josey stated that once she rekindled her relationship with her family sex work lost its appeal. Jessie sought support to relocate after her relationship ended. She approached her step-father’s ex-wife “Jennifer”, for help to exit because Jennifer hated “Jason”—her ex-husband. The gamble paid off:

*She wasn’t thrilled but I figured she would help me ‘cause she hated my mom and her ex-husband and I was right.*

Other studies of exit note the importance of the influence of relationships with family members on exit decision making (Dalla, 2006; Mansson & Hedin, 2003; Millar, 2002). However, Jessie benefited from familial support even though helping her was not the primary motive of her step-father’s ex-wife.

Consociates other than family members also had an important effect on exiting decisions. Richard was in despair and had a conversation with a director of a detox centre:

*I was sitting on the stairs there and I was gonna get loaded again cause I was feeling kinda hopeless...the executive director told me that you just need to have faith... then he’s like I want you to start to go volunteer.*

Sex-work-no-more participants made reference to family members, intimate partners, and passing conversations with strangers as having a significant influence on their decisions about exit. Participants made sense of their decision to exit through their interpretations of these social interactions.

### **5.3.8. Deception**

Successfully engaging in deception supports exit because people are able to hide aspects of their pasts and access resources that they could likely not attain if they disclosed their sex work involvement. Four participants (44%) admitted to lying to ease transition out of sex work. For example, one participant lied about a mental illness in order to get disability income assistance. Another stated that lying was necessary in order to obtain housing and have some stability as part of the exiting process:

*Milking the system when you needed a break and making sure you have that stable \$X a month cheque every month... keep a little roof over my head.*

Other participants disclosed that they worked while on income assistance and did not disclose their income to the authorities. Sex workers lying about sex work involvement in order to access public services is not new. For example, Crago and Arnott (2009) cite lying as a regular sex worker practice to obtain contraceptives and health services in several African countries. Sex workers in Canada and around the world deny being involved in sex-work to avoid stigma and poor treatment by staff at support organizations. While the prevalence of lying is not known, my participants were candid about their strategic use of deception.

## **5.4. Conditions that Challenged Exit**

### **5.4.1. Relationships: Consociates**

Sex-work-no-more participants gave many examples of how exit could be or was resisted by those closest to them. These participants were experiencing the “cultural obstacles” related to exiting (Howard, 2008) that resulted from people in their lives identifying with them as being sex workers.

Amy discussed the difficulty she had ending her relationship with friends who were active sex workers. Her friends expected her to try to convince them to leave sex work too. Stuart accessed a drug rehab center as part of his exit, but his boyfriend tried to prevent him from attending support meetings:

*I came in and said that I had to go to a meeting and he was just laying there and literally wouldn't move. He had his head on my lap and I had to literally pick him up and go 'get out!'*

Shannon appealed to her mother for help to exit to no avail:

*I'd begged my mother to let me come home and to help me get out.*

Shannon's brother was interested in helping her exit but her mother told him that she was not interested in changing her life. As a result no family member came to her aid.

#### **5.4.2. Clients**

Like Amy, Josey worked at an escort agency as part of her exit strategy but was also servicing clients in addition to those that the agency referred to her. Such extra-agency contacts benefit both sex workers and clients because workers do not have to pay agency fees and they pass these savings on to their clients. Josey's customers however, told the agency and she was caught by a 'secret shopper' who had informed the agency of her activities; she was fired. Her goal to finance her exit via her escort work was thus thwarted.

#### **5.4.3. Employment**

Many studies (Hester and Westmarland, 2004; Koostra, 2010; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Rickard, 2001; Sanders, 2007) describe how individuals who leave the sex industry experience challenges to keeping or obtaining square work. When Tammy moved to a new city and began working as a waitress she realized that she did not thrive in a square job. Josey easily found square jobs, but holding on to them posed a challenge because she had no work ethic. Richard felt a sense of hopelessness while in detox because others around him were recovering and becoming employed while he was unable to find work:

*I was a year clean and I was watching everybody go out and get jobs that seemed effortlessly to me...*

Law (2011) and Sanders (2007) identified the adjustment to a lower paying job as a significant barrier to exiting. Amy took her first square job while she was still

working at an escort agency. She stated how shocked she was by how little money people made:

*I asked how you get paid and she said it was \$7.50 an hour... I had the clearest visualization of a 5 dollar bill, a Toonie, and 2 quarters in my hand and I looked at her and I said for an hour? (laughter)*

Shannon applied to a position providing support services for female alcoholics but felt that she would never be able to fit in with the women who were interviewing her because the facility was located in an affluent area of Vancouver. Shannon perceived her potential employers as upper class women because of how they reacted when she made the link between addictions and survival sex work:

*During the interview I said the words sex work...they were just horrified.*

Josey discussed her challenge with the dress and appearance codes required in square jobs:

*(Laughter) I was wearing stilettos...That's how people dressed in my world...I guess I looked like a tart!*

These experiences reveal how the social and cultural capital derived from sex workers' lived experiences are not necessarily transferrable to the square world (also see: Law, 2011; Murphy & Venkatesh, 2006). However, Shannon's experience may have more to do with the "whore stigma" (Pheterson, 1993) and her disclosure that the skills and abilities she would bring to the new job originated from her experiences in sex work. Social and cultural capital from sex work is transferrable as long as information about how it is acquired is not disclosed.

#### **5.4.4. Community Organizations, Government Agents and Agencies**

Colleen accessed a religious housing organization upon exit. She described how rivalries among community organizations prevented her from accessing a sex worker organization. She stated that the housing organization was not helping her exit and how she had to fight with its organizers who were attempting to dissuade her from seeking help from other organizations:

*I had to fight with [religious housing organization] to let me go...I just kept pushing to be able to go to [sex worker organization].*

Community organizations have been helpful to some participants while exiting; however, Colleen's experiences highlight the way that some organizations compete for clients and create barriers for people who require a broad range of support services.

#### **5.4.5. Money**

Adjusting to the relatively poor pay in square jobs made exit much more difficult for all sex-work-no-more participants, just as it did for those in many other studies (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Kooststra, 2010; Law, 2011; McIntyre, 2002; Rickard, 2001; Sanders, 2007). Amy did not realize what things really cost until after she left sex work. As a sex worker she never had cause to look at a price tag, just buying what she wanted. She described how this aspect of exiting meant that she could not maintain friendships with active workers because she could not keep up with their spending.

#### **5.4.6. Stigma and Labelling**

Sex-work-no-more participants experienced varying levels of stigmatization by customers. For example, Shannon was frustrated by the way customers expected her to perform sexually:

*[Customers] thought I was some raging nymphomaniac*

She described how the "whore stigma" (Pheterson, 1993) led to her feeling worthless after servicing clients:

*The minute they have their organism and they feel guilty and ashamed and then they take it out on you...like 'how can you do this' ... and how disgusting is it to be a whore?*

Sex-work-no-more participants experienced stigma by way of negative and judgmental comments about their sex work involvement from staff at community and government organizations when accessing services. Many sex work researchers classify stigma as a structural or relational factor that complicates exit. Brown (1991) and Howard (2008) discussed stigma as it relates to role transition and identity (re)formation. The effect of the whore stigma on exit is well documented (Baker et al, 2010; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Brown, 2006; Dalla, 2006; Kooststra, 2010; Law, 2011; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; McIntyre, 2001; Millar, 2002; Rickard, 2001; Sanders, 2007; Shaver, 2005). The information that someone was or is a

sex worker is discrediting (Goffman, 1963). People in the square world may support sex work exit in principle, but they may nonetheless stigmatize sex workers who are attempting to exit.

Sex-work-no-more participants stated that they had carefully controlled who they told about their sex work involvement in order to minimize the level of stigma they experienced. This practice of information management is documented in other research on exit (Brown, 2006; Millar, 2002; Rickard, 2001; Shaver, 2005). However, the effect of 'information management done well' is not discussed in these other studies. Josey best illustrates this point about information management. When she exited she entered an academic environment where people did not know her biography. Her good looks served her well as her past sex work and drug use history was not evident in her appearance, thus she was able to take on the role of the student and build relationships with relative ease. She stated:

*The most harmful part of exiting is like feeling like you know what people are thinking...as I sort of became more you know passable... you start learning that stuff and it's awful...I experienced stigma indirectly I think mostly when I was...at university when people didn't know.*

Josey described the experience of hearing other students talk about sex workers in the most despicable ways, hence her not disclosing to them her involvement in sex work. She described their attitude as a "violence of assumed camaraderie:"

*I had to just watch people think that I was one of them and how that got like that built and built and I sort of exploded out of that and I started telling everybody.*

Ongoing exposure to the negative sentiments about sex workers caused her to disclose her history at every opportunity. Her feelings about her full disclosure ranged from elation to embarrassment.

#### **5.4.7. Reverse Stigmatization**

Like the delabelers in Howard's (2008) study, Amy felt guilty about her decision to exit sex work and to abandon people with whom she previously identified. Amy described being ostracized by sex workers she knew:

*I had far more people push me away than I pushed away. And I think that that happens whenever you change. I don't know that that's exclusive to sex work.*

Amy not only felt guilty about leaving her friends behind, but also experienced reverse stigmatization (Howard, 2008) during her exit because her decision to leave the sex trade caused some of her peers to reject her. Amy may have had conflicting feelings after she made her decision to exit sex work because her friends did not support her choice. In Amy's case, continuing in sex work was not desirable and the lack of support from her friends was information that she dismissed in order to continue on her journey to exit. Equally, Amy's decision to exit may have caused conflict among her friends, who reconciled their feelings about their sex work involvement and Amy's decision to exit by excluding Amy from their lives.

## **5.5. Concluding Comments: Squaring Up Sex-Work-No-More**

With the exception of Jessie, sex-work-no-more participants (n=9) viewed sex work as harmful to varying degrees and as something that they would not return to. They make sense of their exit by describing the meaning they derived through their social interactions. With the elements that supported them, and in spite of the elements that challenged them, these nine participants used the resources and capital at their disposal to move from sex work to the square world. See summary in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Thoughts and Reasons for Exiting and Not Returning**

Participant Name	Thoughts about Exiting	Reasons for Exit	Reasons for Not Returning
Colleen	Elimination of Harm/Liberation	Frustration/Lowered Esteem/ Violence	Lack of Patience for Customers/ Lack of Money in Trade/ Age
Debbie	Elimination of Harm/Liberation	Relationship Breakdown	Sex Work not Empowering/ Lack of Patience for Customers/ Age
Richard	Elimination of Harm/Liberation	Frustration/Lowered Esteem/ Violence	Lack of Patience for Customers/ Fear of Incarceration/ Not Wanting to be Touched/drug use
Amy	A way to Gain Self-worth/Control	Frustration/Lowered Esteem/ Violence/dependent	Sex Work equals Sexual Abuse/ Love for dependent
Jessie	Exit as Progressive Step/Sex Work ran its Course	Relationship Breakdown/Change in Environment	Re-entry would Require Emotional Healing
Josey	A way to Gain Self-worth/Control	New Relationship	Love and Respect for Partner/Husband
Lianne	Elimination of Harm/Liberation	New Relationship	Love and Respect for Partner/Husband
Shannon	Elimination of Harm/Liberation	New Relationship	Love and Respect for Partner/Husband Re-entry would Require Emotional Healing/drug use
Stuart	Exit as Progressive Step/Sex Work ran its course	Relationship Breakdown/ Health	No need for Sex Work/ Needs Fulfilled Elsewhere/drug use

Sex-work-no-more participants described both “in order-to” and “because” motives (Schütz, 1932/1967) to provide reasons and make sense of their exits from sex work. In line with Aronson’s (1997) iteration of dissonance theory, the behaviour of being engaged in sex work conflicted with self-concepts and motivated changes. Although the people with whom these participants interacted sometimes reinforced and sometimes resisted their decision to leave sex work, they all managed to exit.



## **6. Squaring Up: Sex-Work-Maybe...**

Of the seventeen participants who identified themselves as having exited, the remaining eight (47%) who are the focus of chapter 6 are those who plan to return to the sex industry or think that they may. The criterion for membership in the 'sex-work-maybe' subsample is the participant's resolve to re-enter the industry if they experience financial hardship. The chapter begins with a brief description of the participants' thoughts about exit, and then describes their upbringing and experience in the sex industry. I conclude by describing participants' reasons for re-entry and the factors that encourage or thwart their plans.

### **6.1. Thoughts about Exit**

#### **Tammy**

Tammy is a 20 year-old bisexual Caucasian female with no children. She had experienced extreme physical abuse by her mother at a very young age. The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development eventually apprehended her, at which point she was put up for adoption. At age 12 she contacted her birth father, who told her that she and her mother were failures. When she was 14 she was kicked out of her adoptive family's home, an event that devastated her. She vowed to prove her father wrong and make something of her life. While sex working she lived a dual life. Sex work was a means to achieve a better standard of living because it provided her the opportunity to escape abuse by giving her the financial wherewithal to be self-sufficient at an early age. She thought of exiting sex work as a way to take advantage of other opportunities that opened up.

## **Cheryl**

Cheryl is a 38 year-old bisexual Indigenous female with three dependents. She had a stable upbringing but stated that she grew up "poor." For much of her life she felt intimidated by wealthy people. She was involved in performance sex work, which enabled her to overcome this feeling of intimidation. She characterizes herself as an entrepreneurial sex industry worker who has had control over her own destiny while in sex work. Like Tammy, Cheryl spent much of her time while she was a sex worker living a secret dual life. She feels that this is the ideal way to be involved in sex work. She described her past exits as both a process and an event.

## **Nicole**

Nicole is a 35 year-old heterosexual Indigenous female with one child. She had to assume adult responsibilities at a very young age. She was raised by a single working mother who, because of her work, was not always at home. Because Nicole left home at a young age, sex work provided the means for self-sufficiency. She had positive and negative experiences in the industry, and believes that she is lucky to be alive. At the time of the interview she considered herself exited, but could imagine herself returning to sex work. She sees sex work exit as a long process wrought with challenges and self-doubt.

## **Kayla**

Kayla is a 61 year-old heterosexual Caucasian female living in a common-law relationship. She grew up poor and had four brothers, two older and two younger. She spent most of her childhood taking care of her sick mother, her alcoholic father, and her brothers. As a result of this environment she began working a straight job at the age of 12.

She began sex work at age 20 and enjoyed it because she earned enough to be her own woman, meet people and travel the world. Sex work involvement was not initially a problem for her, but it became one later in her career when she began using drugs. She described sex work exit as an individual process that requires life skills and an exploration of identity and purpose.

## **Julie**

Julie is a 48 year-old heterosexual 'gay for pay' female of Caribbean descent. She is married and a grandmother. Like Nicole and Kayla, she grew up in a home where her mother was absent much of the time because she was working. She grew up poor but felt that there was a lot of love in her home. She was the oldest female and, as a result, was responsible for all of the household duties in addition to taking care of her younger siblings and older brother. Again, sex work was a means for her to earn money and establish a stable life for herself:

*I view sex work as bought me a house, pays for my vehicle. I view it from that perspective. It put my kid through college.*

As a woman of Caribbean descent, sex work provided Julie with sufficient income to travel to countries that would otherwise have been off-limits or uncomfortable for an impoverished woman of color. For a Black woman in Canada, having money is a means of becoming visible:

*Being a black woman and being able to walk into the fancy stores in town and have people run up and serve you...sex work gave me the ability to do whatever I wanted to do.*

Julie thinks of exit from sex work as a practical decision that allowed her to make money in square work.

## **Dominic**

Dominic is a 29 year-old queer Caucasian male with one child. He left his parent's home at age 17, just one year after his child was born. He did a number of short stints in sex work because he was unemployed and needed income. He became involved in sex work after being injured while working in the construction trade, an injury that prevented him from continuing that kind of work. He felt that he freely chose sex work even during a period of financial hardship. For him exiting was uncomplicated as he had not been involved for long. When an opportunity for square employment became available, Dominic took it.

## **Darla**

Darla is a 46 year-old woman of African descent with one adult child. She is a college graduate and had experienced violence, racism, and sexism throughout her life. Sex work gave her an opportunity to earn money and resist the patriarchy and racism that she believed had negatively influenced her life. As a sex worker she was able to work independently as a “renegade” instead of working for a pimp or crime family. She is a self-assured individual who believes that, although sex work is fraught with exploitation, it served a legitimate function by providing her an income on which she could live. She felt no shame about her involvement in sex work because she saw it as a ‘behavior in a context.’

## **Simone**

Simone is a 27 year-old heterosexual Caucasian female with one dependent. She holds an undergraduate degree. She experienced several traumatic events during her childhood. Her father, who she greatly admired and to whom she attributes much of her intelligence and sense of purpose, passed away when she was 11. After her father’s death she was institutionalized after being diagnosed as mentally ill. As a child she cut herself often. She disclosed that her mother was not a great support to her and that, for the duration of her upbringing, people told her that she was not going to be successful:

*... people always told me that I was gonna be a mother on welfare, which is actually how I ended up in the sex trade in the first place.*

After the birth of her first child when she was 14, Simone entered the sex industry as a way to earn money, gain control over her life, and prove wrong those who suggested that she would not amount to anything. She thinks of sex work exit as a hard process because she had to leave behind a relatively steady source of income and a dynamic lifestyle.

### **6.1.1. Summary of Thoughts about Exit and Re-entry**

These eight participants share some common experiences in their upbringing, and their thoughts about sex work exit. They grew up in poverty and were children who had to take on adult responsibilities. These are what McEwen (2011) refers to as

“dandelion children;” their view of sex work is strongly associated with their desire to be self-reliant, a desire reflecting their childhood experiences. These eight also shared a similar view about sex work and exiting—they both presented opportunities for survival.

## **6.2. Conditions that Supported and Challenged Exit**

Sex-work-maybe participants had exit experiences consistent with the sex-work-no-more participants. Time living in isolation, support from community and state services, sex worker organizations, and clients all facilitated exit. Relationships with consociates, contemporaries, predecessors and successors played a key role in transitioning. Darla was affected by a predecessor—her deceased father—who she states would have wanted more for her than sex work. Simone referred to the memory of a friend who went missing as motivating her to leave the sex trade. Successors influenced Cheryl and Darla as both were pregnant at the time of exit.

The obstacles to exit for these sex-work-maybe participants were similar to those of sex-work-no-more participants, i.e. negative relationships with family members, need for money, negative interactions with community and government agencies, and barriers to employment. A co-worker resisted Tammy’s plans to exit because the two of them had worked together as a sex-worker duo. Simone had provided financial support to her mother, who discouraged her exit:

*I would give her 10% of everything I made...when I told her I wanted to exit she wasn't supporting me at all.*

Simone commented that welfare was not sufficient for her to survive and that there was no financial support for mid-level sex workers who want to exit. Julie discussed the problem of adjusting to lower paying square jobs that many sex workers describe. She was used to having large amounts of cash stashed away at home.

Kayla discussed a time when she tried to exit by taking on square work. Her plan went well initially, but was thwarted by a police officer who called her employers and told them she was an addict and a sex worker:

*The cop told the girl that I was a prostitute and a junkie and she spread it all over the place... When I came into work that day my supervisor said you've got the [omitted] in an uproar. I need to talk to you and I have to get let go.*

The experience of not having job skills or not having any information to put on a resume was a common problem for many of those who exit. In addition, participants had difficulty socializing with people in the square world because they did not have the same frame of reference for conversation and humor. Julie, who is of Caribbean descent, noted that her sex work and cultural background produced a brash sense of humor that many squares do not share.

The experience of stigma is pervasive among those who exit to the square world. When trying to access government support services, Darla withheld information about her sex work involvement to avoid being stigmatized. Her single motherhood, gender, poverty, and application for income assistance were all stigmatizing. The addition of her history in sex work would have been too much for her to bear.

Cheryl obtained employment at a university. After doing some media interviews about her sex work, she found that the practicum opportunities she had previously been offered were withdrawn. She experienced the whole stigma when an employee changed the name plate on her desk from 'public relations' to 'pubic relations.'

*My manager came over and for whatever reason he looked at my tag and he read it and he was like 'what? It says [name of interviewee] Media and Pubic relations.' They were mocking me...that was very hurtful.*

Many of my participants described their resistance to the whore stigma. For example, Simone stated that she had plenty of things in her history that are stigmatized: past addiction, teen parenthood, poverty, mental health issues, and sex work involvement. Any of these could serve as master or auxiliary status-determining traits (Hughes, 1945). Friends of hers had threatened to disclose that she was a former sex worker. Like Josey, in the face of this threat, Simone decided to disclose this information herself:

*There's nothing to be ashamed of if I tell my story and if I'm not ashamed then no one else is going to shame me.*

Becker (1963) describes the way that master and auxiliary traits are ascribed to individuals according to the rules established by larger social groups. Sex workers resist this labelling process. Simone diminished the effects of labeling by being open about

her past. She did not delabel herself in Howard's (2008) terms, but shared discrediting information as a way to emancipate herself from the stigmatizing process.

Lying about sex work involvement was a necessary part of the exit process for three (38%) sex-work-maybe participants. Two participants disclosed that upon employment or while seeking support of sex-worker organizations they lied: they said that they had exited the sex industry although they were still working. Exit was a requirement for employment and support, but several of my sex-work-maybe participants felt that being expected to stop sex work immediately was unreasonable. Instead, they lived secret dual lives to avoid stigma and judgement by staff at these organizations.

Another sex-work-maybe participant stated that they lied in order to obtain resources that would help them avoid re-entry into sex work:

*Yeah I cheated the system a lot, like I applied for assistance when I shouldn't have been eligible for rental assistance.*

Sex-work-maybe participants did not feel good about deceiving others but believed that it was necessary in order to obtain employment or resources needed to exit.

### **6.3. Factors that Encourage Re-entry**

Sex-work-maybe participants would return to some form of sex work if they needed money "in order-to" make their lives easier. Seven sex-work-maybe participants stated that they returned in the past because the work was more dignified than the square jobs they had done, they liked the income sex work provided, or they enjoyed sex work. For example, Tammy re-entered because she needed to fund her new life upon arrival in Vancouver. She had a past experience of doing a job that she considers humiliating—cleaning toilets:

*Cleaning like week's old piss from the toilets from the construction guys and toilets that don't have any running water in them so they're just full of ahhhh! And I couldn't last more than a week and it's like why wouldn't I go back into sex work...that has more dignity.*

Unlike Debbie in the sex-work-no-more group, who would rather clean toilets than re-enter sex work, Tammy viewed sex work as a more dignified option.

The majority of studies of sex work exit have found that financial need is the most significant obstacle to exiting (Dalla, 2006; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; McIntyre, 2002; Rickard, 2001; Sanders, 2007). The primary motivation for returning to sex work is lack of money (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Law, 2011; McIntyre, 2002; Millar, 2002). For instance, almost 67% of the exited workers Millar (2002) interviewed returned to sex work because of financial need. Sanders (2007) suggested that *reactionary* exits tend to cause re-entry because they are “ill thought out and without a conscious plan of how to earn money” (pg. 82).

Dominic is unique among my participants because he is interested in a specific segment of the porn industry and intends to re-enter if an opportunity presents itself. This is not to say that others like Cheryl also would not re-enter, because she likes the work.

Three conditions that encourage re-entry were discussed by sex-work-maybe participants: relationships with intimate partners and clients; emotional support; and duality. Participants shared that having the support of intimate partners was of primary importance to their re-entry. Two sex-work-maybe participants had discussed re-entry with their partners. One of these participants was in a relationship with a person who previously engaged in the buying of sex.

Sex-work-maybe participants suggested that once a person leaves the sex industry, re-establishing contacts with regular clients can be difficult. For those who wish to work as independent sex workers, maintaining contacts with customers was important for re-entry. For those who wanted to re-enter as escorts, having a good rapport and continued contact with those who own or manage sex work businesses was essential for re-entry.

Sex-work-maybe participants suggested that needing to have supports in place in case they find re-entry emotionally disturbing was also important for re-entry. Without support available, two participants suggested that they would not consider re-entry.

Finally, seven sex-work-maybe participants suggested that those who chose to re-enter sex work should lead dual lives. In this way individuals can control their level of sex work involvement and benefit from their square work.



## 6.4. Obstacles to Re-entry

Cheryl and Dominic were planning to re-enter the sex industry at the time I interviewed them. Many considerations blocked the re-entry of the other six. Nicole viewed herself as having two sexualities: one in sex work and the other in her personal life, but she was not able to separate the two at that point in her life. At the time of the interview, Julie was employed at a sex worker organization and was able to live on that income. Like Julie, advancing age and trends in the sex industry, such as the increasing demand for the “girlfriend experience” (GFE) discouraged Darla from returning. Julie explained that the GFE requires sex workers to engage in intimate acts with customers, such as kissing, as well as having intercourse without a condom. She stated that some escort agencies would advertise the GFE and force workers to engage in these practices:

*I would go there [escort agency] and it would be like GFE extra \$100 written on the board. And it's like that's illegal and how dare you tell a girl what she can charge to exchange fluids.*

In addition to not wanting to offer GFE services, Darla was gainfully employed in the non-profit sector and was not in need of income from other sources.

Simone’s love for her boyfriend prevented her from re-entering. If she were to re-enter the sex industry and use it as her only source of income she would need to have debriefing supports in place to prevent self-harming behaviours, such as cutting herself, from recurring.

Like Debbie, Richard, Shannon and Stuart, Kayla left sex work in part because she wanted to end her drug use and begin a new life. What delayed her re-entry was uncertainty about how sex work involvement would affect her sobriety. Drug use is cited in most studies as a reason to exit and an obstacle to exiting (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Brown et al, 2006; Dalla, 2006; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; McIntyre, 2002; Millar, 2002) particularly among street-based workers. Benoit and Millar (2001) reported that 16.3 % of their participants and 5% of McIntyre’s (2002) exited the industry to stop using drugs. They left sex work “in order-to” kick a habit.

## 6.5. Concluding Comments: Squaring Up Sex Work Maybe...

In this Chapter I have described participants who, having exited, contemplate re-entry. Reasons for exit, thoughts about re-entry, and reasons that sex-work-maybe participants gave for not re-entering the sex industry are displayed in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Reasons for Exit and Not Re-entering & Thoughts about Re-entry**

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Reasons for Exit</b>	<b>Thoughts About Re-entry</b>	<b>Reasons for Not Re-entering at This Time</b>
Tammy	New Relationship	Sex work presents opportunity/use as needed	Employment/Stigma/ Love and Respect for Partner/Husband
Cheryl	Pregnancy	Sex work presents opportunity/use as needed	Re-entry planned: Dual Life
Nicole	Frustration/ Disillusionment	Sex work is a last resort/limited involvement as needed	Difficulty separating sexuality: public/private
Kayla	End Drug Use/New life	Re-involvement must be planned and supported	Unsure of how Sex Work would affect sobriety
Julie	Frustration/ Disillusionment/Age/ GFE	Sex work presents opportunity/use as needed	Employment currently sustains family/GFE
Dominic	No Work Available in Sex Industry	Sex work presents opportunity	Re-entry planned
Darla	Stigma/Pregnancy/ Violence	Re-involvement must be planned and supported	Employment/GFE/Age
Simone	Motherhood/Lowered Self-worth/Wasting her Talents	Sex work presents opportunity/use as needed	Love and Respect for Partner/Husband

In the next Chapter I present the experiences of those who chose not to work exclusively in sex work or in traditional employment. Instead they have negotiated a duality.

## 7. Sex Work—Square Work: A Duality

Almost all my participants had lived a dual life during their careers in sex work, i.e. holding a square job while involved in sex work. The ensuing chapter focuses on the five participants (23% of the total sample) who were living a dual work life at the time of interview. I include some biographical information, the participants' thoughts about duality and how it came about, and their reasons for maintaining duality or ending it.

### 7.1. Thoughts about Duality and How It Came About

#### Candy

Candy is a 45 year old bisexual Caucasian woman who has an adult child. She believed that most people think that individuals who engage in sex work do so because they are unable to do anything else. She held that this image is not representative of all individuals who engage in sex work. She suggested that living a duality illustrated her intelligence and capabilities.

As a young adult, Candy was forced into a situation that required her to lie about her involvement in sex work.<sup>3</sup> She stated that this past experience prepared her for a dual life:

*I became so good at pretending...I wouldn't have said shit if I had a mouth full of it... it's taught me how to fit in.*

Candy understood her reluctance to disclose her sex work as being caused by social stigma. She saw society judging sex workers and sex work negatively, making it unsafe to view sex work as work or to assert that some people enjoy it. As a result she

<sup>3</sup> Details of this incident and Candy's upbringing are omitted to ensure her safety.

lived a secret dual life and managed information about herself in ways discussed by Goffman (1963):

*I just learned to pick and choose who I tell...*

Candy is not ashamed about her sex work involvement but shares this information only with people she trusts.

## **Teresa**

Teresa is a 36 year-old Caucasian heterosexual divorced female with bi-sexual tendencies. She was raised by well-educated parents and had a privileged upbringing. She viewed herself as a creative person able to think on her feet. She thought that living a dual life is a way to take advantage of opportunities in both worlds. This means that, at times, she is fully involved in sex work, but when there are work shortages, she takes square work, and vice versa. She has spent periods living a dual life, but at other times was engaged in either sex work or square work:

*I would do porn when I was laid off with my other job...so it has always been one foot in and one foot out.*

As a result she does not see sex work as something that a person is either in or out, but as a gradation based on levels of involvement.

## **Donna**

Donna is a 35 year-old heterosexual Caucasian female with no dependents. She is a graduate student and had spent many years living a dual life while pursuing her post secondary education. She stated that the transition from square work or school to sex work and back could be challenging but she was able to do it because she gets bored easily. She grew up in boarding schools among very wealthy children while her parents were pursuing other interests. She quickly learned to stand up for herself and became very independent as a result. She viewed living a dual life as essential to her involvement in sex work because she experienced a level of frustration in sex work due to customer demands:

*In the bar scene and in the clubs...you're just a piece of meat.*

When Donna is not dancing she misses the stage. Equally, she puts a lot of value on education but sex work forces her to ‘dumb herself down,’ so it could never be a full-time occupation. Duality makes the most sense.

## **Jolene**

Jolene is a 43 year-old Caucasian heterosexual female in a common-law relationship. She described her parents as academics who helped her develop heightened communication skills. She was able to live a dual life because, as a youth, she regularly lied to her parents about her activities. She described herself as being engaged in social justice issues, and sometimes open about her sex-work involvement. She viewed the ability to exist in both worlds as a skill that not everyone has. She has many years of experience in sex work and square work alternately and simultaneously. Her dual life began when she became engaged in social justice issues.

## **Veronica**

Veronica is a 37 year-old queer Asian female with one dependent. She is a college graduate. During her childhood she maintained friendships with two different groups of people; those deemed ‘good’ and those who were ‘bad.’ She thus experienced two very different life styles. Having two groups of friends enabled her to express different parts of her personality:

*I was smart and I was good in school but I also liked to party and do bad things with the bad kids so I sort of kept them very separate.*

This desire to be ‘good’ and also hang out with the ‘bad’ crowd extended into Veronica’s adult life. As a result, she felt that duality is a natural way of living. She works in health care and believes that she thrives in both sex work and square work.

## **7.2. Reasons for Duality**

These five dual-life participants provided reasons for engaging in both sex work and square work simultaneously. Most significantly, living a dual life provides income from more than one source. Some of my participants could live on income solely from sex work or solely from square work, but they choose not to end their work in either field.

Instead, they “perform both shows” (Goffman, 1963). They negotiated open or secret dual lives. Aside from being motivated by money, these five participants made sense of their duality in two ways: 1) they believed that their sex work involvement does not need to be distinguished from square work; and 2) duality is the best way to be involved in sex work.

### **7.2.1. Sex Work Involvement Not Distinguished from Square Work**

Dual-life participants do not view sex work as being something a person has to be in or out. As Veronica explained:

*It's not as cut and dry as I'm in or I'm out and there's even debate about like... if somebody identifies as a sex worker and they're not working does that mean they have to be an exited sex worker?*

This duality is consistent with the observations of intersectional theorists like Hill-Collins (1990) about a person's social location; in a sense, a person can be both in and out of sex work. These individuals do not find value or meaning in identifying as active or former sex workers. Some of Howard's (2008) participants who exited a disordered identity expressed similar feelings. Howard described how some people who delabel feel confined by old identities and chose not to take on new ones. They forfeit an identity source. I prefer to view this refusal to make a distinction between sex work and square work as an act of resistance to the limited binary categorizations related to sex work involvement.

### **7.2.2. Duality Is the Best Way to Engage in Sex Work**

Dual-life participants stated that living a dual life is the best way for them to be engaged in sex work. This assertion is based on their experiences in sex work and their desire to be active in the square world. Because Jolene is an activist, she must limit her sex work in order to allow her passion for a form of square work to be satisfied. Candy enjoys her square job and relationships even though she feels that she would be stigmatized by the square people she works with if they knew she was involved in sex work. Teresa held that engaging in sex work alone would be boring and frustrating. She did not understand how others can be involved only in sex work:

*Like how does someone just wanna do one thing? ...if I was an escort my entire life I would be bored out of my mind and probably be burnt out and tired of dealing with men's penises.*

Teresa experienced work shortages in the square world, which led to her intermittent involvement in sex work. Her duality allows her to take advantage of opportunities in either sex work or square work as they arise. She noted that because sex workers are denied employment benefits, she needs to retain employment in the square world in order to access those benefits.

Donna also thought that full-time involvement in sex work would be frustrating and make it unbearable. Living a duality provided the balance that she needs to satisfy her desire to perform and her intellectual goals. Veronica rejected being categorized as in or out and saw life, identity, and sexuality as fluid. She is an educated woman who lives a dual life, and moves in and out of sex work as she pleases. In this respect, she believed that she is not alone:

*I'm certainly not the only one, there's tons of us that have different experiences...whether it's being involved as a support as well as a sex worker, as an academic, as a researcher as a health care worker, all of these different kinds of roles that we can play...We've been on all sides we've been in and out of it...and we're still making that same choice...to continue as a sex worker.*

Dual-life participants view their simultaneous involvement in sex work and square work as an ideal way of being in the world. Just as sex-work-no-more and sex-work-maybe participants, dual-life participants have identified factors that support and challenge them.

### **7.3. Factors that Support Duality**

Factors that support duality are grounded in a person's disposition, life-world, their skills and their outlook on personal factors such as their age.

#### **7.3.1. Relationships: Consociates and Contemporaries**

All five dual-life participants felt their duality was supported by individuals who had full knowledge of their sex work involvement. Participants accessed sex worker organizations for support when problems arose in their sex work or in their square lives.

Sex work organizations provide opportunities for people to debrief and speak openly about all aspects of their lives.

Donna and Jolene lived completely open dual lives. Candy and Veronica live clandestine dual lives because of fear of stigmatization; only small groups of consociates were aware of their duality:

*I have one or two people that know...I trust them explicitly and they're not going to tell anybody. (Candy)*

Teresa had a 'you ask, I tell' attitude toward sharing information about her sex work involvement. In some of her square life she was not able to be open about her involvement in sex work because of her fear of being stigmatized as a result. Some of her problems included her work at a sex worker organization, where she was humiliated and ostracized for her participation in sex work while in its employ. Donna stated that living a double life is an expectation of those who engage in exotic dancing. Most dancers also hold square jobs, a characteristic that encourages her continued duality. Donna and Veronica were explicit about eliminating partners and friends from their lives who did not support their sex-industry involvement. As Donna put it:

*If people don't support me or if they have issues with it [sex work] then they go.*

These dual-life participants engage in varying degrees of information management based on their desires to mitigate the effects of stigma and their willingness to be open about their sex work involvement.

### **7.3.2. Skills**

Individuals who live dual lives feel that they are versatile and can adapt to changing social environments. Dual-life participants feel that they acquired these social skills prior to sex work involvement, and that these skills were honed in sex work and could be transferred to square work. Veronica worked in health services and stated that much of the knowledge she obtained in one realm transferred to the other. Teresa spoke about the ease she experienced moving back and forth from sex work to square work:

*I think it's just engrained in my person that, you know, being able to be myself but still being able to be a bit of a chameleon I mixed company.*



Engagement in both sex work and square work at the same time may require flexibility on the part of the individual; however, the type of square work a person does has an effect on their ability to live a dual life.

### **7.3.3. Employment**

Being employed at a sex work organization or other community group that wants its employees to have experienced the challenges faced by marginalized or stigmatized groups supports duality. Teresa, Donna, Jolene, and Veronica have all been employed by such organizations or performed contract work for them. Participants stated they could be more open about their past and, in some cases, discuss their current involvement in sex work with members of these organizations. Candy is a car salesperson who is able to utilize her skills in sex work to excel in her square job despite the fact that she has to conceal her sex work involvement:

*I'm really good at selling cars and trucks... You know guy walks on the lawn and it's like it's all about the sex. Like... 'aren't you going to look good in it and that's a pussy-catcher' ...I mean there's no difference.*

Donna's duality means that she does not have to be completely invested in sex work. She is working a square job part time, doing her Master's degree, and engages in sex work one day a week.

### **7.3.4. Age**

A participant's perception about the effect of their age on their continued sex work involvement appears to affect their decision. Candy, Teresa and Jolene talked about their advancing age as some of their clients age as motivation to continue dual lives. Jolene commented:

*It's about the demographic...there's more old guys than there is young guys and they don't want to do their great granddaughter...I think it's older workers that do well.*

Unlike sex-work-no-more and sex-work-maybe participants who perceived aging as a reason to exit or not to return to sex work, some dual-life participants saw ageing as an opportunity to maintain duality by marketing their services to an older demographic of customers.

### **7.3.5. Stigma**

Candy, Teresa, and Veronica lived secret dual lives to avoid being stigmatized. Veronica had a daughter and had to carefully manage information about her sex work. Candy stated that because most people do not view sex work as legitimate work she hid her involvement to avoid repercussions. Howard (2008) argued that stigma and labelling cause role exit, but in the case of Candy, social stigma encouraged her duality.

Living a dual life is a demonstration of savvy game-play of the sort that Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe—dual-life participants have changed their fields of interaction by locating themselves at the intersection of sex work and square work. Dual-life participants also shape their life-world by deciding who they interact with and how much the people in their lives know about their sex work involvement.

### **7.3.6. Money**

All dual-life participants discussed the benefit of being able to earn money in both sex work and square work. Money is the primary motivation for duality. Candy stated that, although square work does not provide the same remuneration as sex work, working a square job at the same time has its benefits. It provides a paper trail that allows a person to start a bank account, negotiate a loan, and provides employment benefits while enjoying a much higher rate of pay from sex work.

## **7.4. Factors that Challenge Duality**

Factors that pose challenges to duality are related to: personal relationships; ability to fulfil role expectations; money management; employment issues; and stigma.

### **7.4.1. Relationships: Consociates**

None of the participants who lived dual lives had told their families about their sex work involvement for fear of being judged and rejected by them. Further, their employment in square settings makes disclosure of their sex-work involvement less necessary. Although many participants discussed the possibility of ending relationships with intimate partners and friends who did not support their sex work involvement, this process is still painful. Veronica described ending her relationship with a woman

because that woman had previous experience dating sex workers, and did not want Veronica to be involved in sex work.

#### **7.4.2. Switching: Sex Work/Square Work**

Dual-life participants noted that switching back and forth between sex work and square work requires skill, because of the differing role expectations in the two worlds.

Donna commented:

*... at work or at school you are expected to be intelligent and on the ball and articulate...If I take the smart intelligent person into the bar I'm not gonna make any money. But if I dumb myself down and get drunk I'm gonna make some fuckin money.*

Donna valued education and had a hard time not sharing her experiences as a graduate student with customers she encountered in sex work. Jolene also described the difficulty of not being able to be completely open about her sex work in square settings:

*I'm in those meetings [social justice work] you know you have to put on the façade and speak the language...when I'm in [location] you know I'm rubbing my boobs on little old guys and laughing...we're all smoking a big joint and it's totally a different culture.*

Dual-life participants felt that living a dual life means that they are never able to fully be themselves in either work environment.

#### **7.4.3. Money**

Many of Jolene's roles in the square world involve short-term paid contracts or are unpaid. The demands of duality cause stress, as Jolene must balance her time between the activism she loves and her sex work, which provides the bulk of her income. She is interested in maintaining both forms of work, but must make financial compromises in order to do so. Teresa noted that the remuneration for sex work and square work differ so much that she has to be careful not spending at the rate she would if she was involved in sex work fulltime:

*If I had \$200 [from square work] I have to really think about how I would spend that money. But if I go work an hour and make \$200 [in sex work] it would be easy come, easy go.*

Dual-life participants may be motivated to live a duality because of the money they are able to earn in sex work while benefiting from square employment, but they remain concerned about managing their time and money effectively.

#### **7.4.4. Problems with Dual Employment**

Candy had difficulty with square work because it does not have the same flexibility as she had in sex work; she was not used to working according to deadlines. Teresa described how the boom and bust flow of sex work income coupled with lay-offs and job insecurity in square work sometimes made it difficult to manage her finances. Teresa's duality allowed her to respond to the ebb and flow of income in both sex work and square work; she had to manage her resources and her relationships accordingly.

#### **7.4.5. Race, Stigma, and Labelling**

Jolene was a sex worker and an activist. Normally her sex work experience enhanced and informed her social justice work; however, being a Caucasian sex worker has had a negative effect on her community organizing work. She stated that she was subject to the “white-wealthy-privileged-heterosexual-able-bodied-high-end-whore-stigma” by other community activists who do not accept her experience in sex work as being representative of other non-white sex workers, which is why they do not support the position she espouses.

Although a broader discussion about racism in sex work activism is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is clear that race and sex-work experience combine to influence the position individuals occupy in square work if they are open about their sex work. In this case Jolene carried the “sex worker” master status-determining trait (Hughes, 1945) that makes her an outsider to mainstream society, but she did not possess the auxiliary traits—the appropriate race and socioeconomic level of involvement in sex work—to grant her full membership in the community of sex worker activists either. Jolene was able to live an open dual life because of her square role as sex worker activist. Her race and class circumscribed her ability to thrive as an activist.

#### **7.4.6. Deception**

In the case of four of the five dual-life participants, having to lie about their involvement in sex work generated stress. Veronica reflected:

*[It's] just hard to kind of like live in the shroud of secrecy.*

Candy described how lying about what she does created a feeling of isolation. She wanted to network with others who live dual lives:

*I think that you will find that many people live sex work like me...in secret. I would like to know more about people who live this because I would love to live openly.*

Lying and withholding information about sex work involvement negatively affects dual-life participants because they cannot be fully open about what they do— a secrecy that may lead to feeling isolated.

### **7.5. Concluding Comments: Sex Work—Square Work a Duality**

Similar to the sex-work-maybe participants, dual-life participants consider both sex work and square work to be viable ways of making a living. Dual-life participants experienced some level of financial flexibility because they can obtain employment in both sex work and square work; they feel they have the skills to adapt in both environments. They have figured out that if they depend on a single source of income they may have to compromise to maintain that income. If their bread is buttered on more than one side, or if they have more than one slice, they are less likely take a particular kind of work out of desperation.

Living a dual life has its challenges. Dual-life participants experienced issues with relationships, employment, and the pressures of having to lie to people. To maintain their duality they had to control who they associated with or limit disclosure of their sex-work involvement. Table 4 below summarizes their thoughts and reasons for duality.

**Table 4. Thoughts and Reasons for Duality**

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Thoughts About Duality</b>	<b>Reasons for Living a Secret or Open Dual Life</b>
<b>Candy</b>	Opportunity: A way to take advantage of sex work and square work	Money/Flexibility/ Enjoys sex work/ A secret dual life came about due to stigma
<b>Teresa</b>	Opportunity: A way to take advantage of sex work and square work	Money/Reduces the effect of work shortages
<b>Donna</b>	Necessity: A way to take advantage of sex work in a limited way and pursue education	Money/Reduces the level of frustration or burnt out in sex work
<b>Joleen</b>	Necessity: due to activism interests in square world	Money/Interested in pursuing activities outside of sex work
<b>Veronica</b>	Opportunity: A way to take advantage of sex work and square work	Money/Feels sex work is fluid and enjoys roles in both worlds/ necessary due to stigma

In the next chapter by way of conclusion, I make some general observations about sex work exit, re-entry across my three subsamples.

## **8. Making Sense of Transition**

In this final Chapter I discuss more general points about the thoughts, reasons, and factors that influence decision-making about sex work involvement. I highlight some key findings within and across the three subsamples, and conclude with suggestions for future studies examining sex work exit, re-entry and duality.

### **8.1. Summary of Findings within Subsamples**

Highlights of exit, re-entry and dual life experiences for each of the three study subsamples are discussed first.

#### **8.1.1. Squaring Up: Sex Work No More**

The nine sex-work-no-more participants clearly distinguished sex work from square work. From their perspective, they were either in sex work or out of it. In Bourdieu and Wacquant's terms, they viewed sex work and square work as separate "fields." They used a mirror metaphor to describe their inner dialogue about their sex-work involvement. Colleen, Josey, Shannon and Stuart had someone "hold a mirror" up to them so that they could see themselves as others see them, or they talked about "looking in the mirror." Seeing themselves from the perspective of another exemplifies the process of symbolic interaction—that process through which individuals become subjects unto themselves, and objects in the eyes of others. Blumer (1969) builds his explication of symbolic interaction on Mead's "triadic nature of meaning." As Mead (1929) explained, "the individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group" (quoted in Lemert, 2004, p. 221). Similarly, Cooley's (1902) concept of a "self-idea"—the image of how we appear to others and the judgement of others about our appearance—captures the "self-feeling" derived from this process. Sex-work-no-more

participants evaluated their behaviour as sex workers in response to the feedback they received from others in a process that motivated them to exit the sex industry. By exiting, participants eliminated any inner conflicts they may have experienced when their engagement in sex work was inconsistent with their self-concepts.

Aronson (1997) suggested that cognitive dissonance is most acute when it involves one's self concept, which was the case with sex-work-no-more participants. For example, Colleen and Stuart did not recognize themselves when other people held a metaphorical mirror up to them so that they could see how others viewed them.

While she was in an abusive relationship with one man, Josey dated another man who she ended up marrying. Before they married, Josey's new lover drew a picture of her as he saw her: sad and helpless. She was so disturbed by this image she resolved to leave the abusive relationship and quit sex work.

Shannon explained that her relationship with a new love was *like* having a mirror held up to her. She did not like how he saw her and, in turn, she did not like how she viewed herself as a result of her interaction with him. However, her new lover also saw in her a potential that she did not see in herself. As a result, she had the desire to change her life. She exited sex work and strove to become the person that she believed she could be.

For Colleen, Stuart, Josey, Shannon and other sex-work-no-more participants, engagement in sex work and their thoughts about it conflicted with their self concept and their thoughts about who they really were or could be. They sought to exit sex work "in order to" change how other people see them. To reduce the psychological discomfort that came about from their decision to leave, participants opted to change their behaviour—a response to dissonance that Kassirjian and Cohen (1965) highlight. Sex-work-no-more participants were unhappy doing sex work. They perceived their continuing involvement to represent regression, stagnation and failure. They were motivated to leave "because of" past experiences and "in order-to" pursue new relationships, put an end to harmful behaviour, or end the lowered self-esteem they experienced while engaging in sex work. These same reasons for exit are reported in numerous other studies (Benoit & Millar 2001; Dalla, 2006; Koostra, 2010; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; McIntyre, 2002; Millar, 2002; Rickard, 2001; Sanders, 2007). By



interacting with themselves, with intimate partners and with other consociates, they were able to envision themselves leaving sex work and engaging in square labour.

Obstacles to exit for the sex-work-no-more group included difficulties experienced in the transition to square employment, the need for money, and the effect of stigma. In order to exit, the sex-work-no-more participants variously accessed government income supports, sex worker organizations, skill development programs, or received assistance from customers, partners and other loved ones. Participants were innovative game-players who would tell lies in order to avoid stigmatization and to qualify for the government and community resources they needed to achieve exit.

My findings support Wacquant's (1990) suggestion that a person's belief in the stakes and profits associated with a role and their disposition have a great effect on the way they position themselves within a field. Participants who had exited utilized cultural capital—know-how derived from their upbringings and the social capital of their life-world— to transition out of sex work into square employment. They utilized their “stock of experiences” and social skills honed in sex work to adjust to new square roles.

### **8.1.2. Squaring Up: Sex Work Maybe...**

The eight sex-work-maybe participants were also confronted with challenges to exiting well-known in the literature. All but one of these participants disclosed adverse upbringings. They grew up in poverty and had to take on adult care-giving responsibilities for their parents and/or siblings. These participants had to become self-sufficient and responsible at early ages. They are the “dandelion children” that McEwen (2011) describes; their experience of adversity may expand the cognitive categories through which they understand the world and cope. Their biography, history in sex work, experience with exiting, and experiences of poverty within capitalism influence the way they make sense of their exit from sex work and potential re-entry.

Sex-work-maybe participants who contemplate re-entry had interactions with others in their life-worlds that were similar to sex-work-no-more participants. They exited sex work “in order to” pursue new relationships, end harmful behaviours, or due to pregnancy and motherhood. They differ in that from the sex-work-no-more to the extent that, for them, sex work remains a possibility. They are engaging in the day-to-day work

of constantly matching their “realities” with their “convictions” (Wacquant, 1990) and may chose sex work involvement if it serves their purpose.

Sex-work-maybe participants view re-entry into sex work as a means to an end, financial or otherwise. Dominic was the only person in the sample who would abandon square work all together if he found lucrative employment in pornography. Five of the eight sex-work-maybe participants suggested that their return to sex work would involve certain limits, either in terms of the services they would be prepared to offer or the amount time they would invest. These five participants discussed getting “just enough” money to address a cash flow issue and then exiting or periodically engaging in sex work to supplement a square income in times of need. All sex-work-maybe participants would continue involvement in square employment if they were to return to sex work.

Participants talked about their desire to always keeping part of their lives square in order to engage in the square world and in sex work in a healthy way. They believed that full-time sex work would isolate them from relationships in the square world and that they would have to lie about their source of income. This deception would lead to trouble functioning financially in the square world if they could not account for their earnings. Further, they understood that full-time sex work excludes them from employment insurance, pensions and other labour benefits, and they were not willing to live lives completely ‘off the grid.’

Law (2011) suggests that, for off-street workers, the exit process may include a “parallel trajectory” where individuals continue sporadic involvement in sex work while seeking a square job. This is similar to my concept of “sexiting” (Bowen, 2011) that describes the process by which a person supplements their sex work income with earnings from a square job while attempting to transition completely out of sex work. Sexiting differs from Sanders (2007) description of “yo-yoing,” which involves off-street workers taking breaks from sex work to relieve stress or re-entering because they cannot find a square job that pays well.

Because most studies of exit focus on street-level workers, re-entry has generally been seen as unplanned and undesirable. Upon re-entry, sex-work-maybe participants would either dabble in sex work—enter for short periods to obtain enough money to address cash flow issues or one-off expenses—or they would lead dual lives in which sex work became part of a broader financial life plan. Ultimately sex work re-entry may

be an undesired outcome of failed exit attempts (Baker et al, 2010; Benoit & Millar, 2002; Dalla, 2006; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; McIntyre, 2001; Millar, 2001; Prochaska et al, 1998) or the result of being ‘trapped’ in sex work (Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Sanders, 2007), but as demonstrated here, re-entry can also involve a well-considered and researched option to achieve one’s financial and personal goals. A person returns to sex work because of negative experiences in the square world or “in order to” achieve some desired end-state.

Sex-work-maybe participants suggest that supportive personal relationships, access to regular customers, and their social capital in sex work are factors that support re-entry. These participants are thoughtful about possible re-entry; they weigh the risks and benefits of sex industry involvement. The sex-work-maybe participants did not describe re-entry as the result of them being confronted by barriers or as a relapse, which are the two ways the extant literature portrays re-entry (Baker et al, 2010; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Prochaska et al, 1998). Instead they make sense of re-entry by seeing it as an opportunity, a means to an end. Their involvement represents resourcefulness, because they use the capital at their disposal to negotiate short or longer-term involvement in sex work to meet their needs.

We do a disservice to those who would consider re-entering the sex industry when we disregard the considerations, the social capital, and the agency that their decisions involve. Researchers limit the ways in which re-entry can be discussed and understood if they treat it only as a relapse, as Mansson and Hedin (1999) and Baker et al (2010) do, or like Sanders (2007) present sex workers as falling victim to structural forces that ‘trap’ them in sex work or cause them to re-enter. This is not to suggest that social structures do not challenge sex workers, or that the experiences of stigmatization, racism, sexism, classism, and/or ‘sizism’ do not create barriers to exit. They do. However, my findings suggest that a person’s disposition—their categories of perception, their ways of understanding the world and the knowledge acquired through socialization—should not be ignored. A considered return to engage in part-time sex work may not reflect being ‘trapped’ by social structural forces, but can be seen as a way of resisting the combined forces of patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism, and other structural factors.

Through use of the constructionist concept of intersectionality (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006) I have come to understand re-entry as both an act in response to how individuals are affected by social structures, and as an act of agency, where participants take stock of their environments, their capital, and their goals in order to negotiate a level of sex work and square work involvement that suits their needs. Sex-work-maybe participants distinguish the fields of sex work and square work just as sex-work-no-more participants did, but they view the boundary between the fields as permeable.

### **8.1.3. Sex Work—Square Work: A Duality**

The five dual-life participants are reminiscent of Westerlik's (2009) 'instrumental' group of sex workers who used their knowledge from sex work and the square world to inform their decisions and structure their lives. By living dual lives they position themselves in a way that allows them to take advantage of opportunities in both worlds. There is little said about individuals like these in the literature on exit, although Law (2011) does briefly discuss the overlap between sex work and square work, thus recognizing what I have termed "duality."

Duality is a common experience among participants across subsamples but remains an under-researched element of sex work transitioning. Duality represents resistance to dichotomized ways in which sex work involvement is conceptualized—one is either in, or out, successful or defeated. Dual-life participants may possess an entrepreneurial skill-set representing a form of symbolic capital that is lucrative across fields, and may be a form of cultural capital that originates in a person's upbringing. This characteristic may have allowed participants to benefit from engagement in both worlds.

Most studies of exiting identify the whore stigma as one of the principle obstacles to exit (Baker et al, 2010; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Brown et al, 2006; Crago & Arnott, 2009; Law, 2011; Mansson & Hedin, 1999; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; McIntyre, 2002; Millar, 2002). My participants reinforce the importance of the role of stigma in exiting and its lasting long effect after exit. For dual-life participants, their desire to avoid stigmatization or to benefit from income in both square work and sex work caused them to construct dual lives. They engage in square work and carefully control the extent to which other people know about their sex work involvement. Two of my dual-life participants live openly; two live in secrecy to avoid stigmatization, and one only shares information

about her dual life with those she trusts and, at times, those who ask. Although duality is shaped by the fear of stigmatization, some individuals who live dual lives nevertheless make choices about the level and ways in which they are involved in sex work. How individuals manage to live relatively stable dual lives is important for understanding how structure, agency, and interactional factors such as stigma combine to produce duality. Since there is no set way to live an identity (Dhamoon, 2011)—and, by extension, no set way to be a sex worker—future studies about sex work transition should avoid prejudging sex work re-entry as an index of failure, and make further enquiries into how this kind of duality is formed and maintained.

## **8.2. Summary of Findings across Subsamples**

Overall, my participants (n=22) made sense of their transition in or out of sex work, or their dual lives in both sex work and square work through their self-perceptions, which were based on their interpretations of their social interactions. Generally, my participants provided similar views about the intersection of race, class and gender in shaping the factors that supported or created barriers to their movement in and out of sex work. The 17 participants who had exited—those comprising the sex-work-no-more (n=9) and sex-work-maybe (n=8) subsamples— did not think that race, class and gender had much of an influence on their decisions, but not too much should be drawn from this finding given my small sample size. The factors that promoted exit included: intimate relationships; time living in isolation; financial support from regulars and access to clients for income; employment and support from sex worker organizations; and deception or lying.

### **8.2.1. Relationships**

Eleven of the 17 exited participants (65%) left due in part to interactions with consociates (intimate partners and acquaintances), predecessors (deceased friends or relatives), and successors (participants who left due to pregnancy). Five participants (29%) of the 17 who exited stated that their relationships with intimate partners prevented their re-entry.

### **8.2.2. Time Living in Isolation**

Nine of the exited participants (53%) entered an isolation period so that they could withdraw themselves from both sex work and the square world, decompress, and decide the direction of their lives. Of these, five were able to withdraw by way of drug and alcohol treatment program that included provision of housing.

### **8.2.3. Clients**

Twelve (71%) exited participants continued to see regular clients as part of their exit strategy. Eleven participants (65%) worked independently, and one negotiated with an owner of an escort agency to work there as part of her exit strategy. Of these 12, two had regular customers finance their withdrawal period, providing what amounted to tens of thousands to support their transition out of sex work. Clients helped three participants access social services and find square employment. Little is said in the literature about how clients and escort service owners supported exit.

### **8.2.4. Employment**

Twenty-one of the 22 study participants (95%) were employed at the time I interviewed them. Sex worker organizations became a site of support and employment for 16 (73%) of those participants. Employment in these organizations may involve a duality, where exiting and exited individuals move out of sex work and into the square world via a network of already exited individuals. These folks may not only avoid the “whore stigma” having exited, but also may avoid reverse-stigmatization by sex workers, because they continue to identify as part of the sex-working community. In this way, sex worker organizations provide a segregated form of employment where individuals can professionalize their experience in sex work and achieve exit. The remaining five participants, who moved to square jobs outside of sex work support organizations, and/or enrolled in universities and colleges, withheld discrediting information about themselves to avoid stigmatization (Goffman, 1963). Two of these five participants disclosed their sex work history as a way to confront stigmatization. They did not delabel but labelled themselves in an act of resistance.

The primary barrier for those who planned to exit was the difficulty finding and keeping a square job. All seventeen participants who had exited stated that their exit

had been made more difficult by their inability to find a square job that offered a comparable income to sex work. This finding gives weight to Sanders' (2007) suggestion that off-street workers may bounce in and out of sex work due to challenges finding employment. All eight sex-work-maybe participants stated that financial need would cause their re-entry. Money was the central reason dual-life participants (n=5) gave for continued involvement in sex work.

Challenges obtaining and retaining employment, as well as experiences of stigmatization in square jobs was a common experience for 12 (55%) of my study participants.

### **8.2.5. Lying and Deception**

Managing discrediting information (Goffman, 1963) to qualify for government supports access community resources services, and to avoid the effects of stigmatization in order to exit sex work or live a dual life was experienced by 11 participants (50%). Sex work involvement is a master status-determining trait similar to race or ascribed deviance. Participants across subsamples disclosed having to withhold information about their sex work involvement or lie about various aspects of their lives and their whereabouts to family members, friends and associates. They were very careful to withhold discrediting information from most people. To be clear, participants were not proud of lying, but saw it as necessary to survive transition out of sex work or to live a duality.

## **8.3. They Walk Among Us**

Study participants achieved exit from sex work or established dual lives in spite of the barriers they experienced. Interactions with people in their life-world influenced their decisions about sex work involvement. They utilized various combinations of capital to achieve exit, re-entry, or duality—a position that traverses both fields. It would appear that Wacquant's (1990) suggestion that role transition has much to do a person's disposition—one's practiced or preferred way of being in the world—has merit. A participant's disposition derived from the cognitive categories acquired through their habitus helped them to envision a dual life or a life outside of sex work. Significant others often encouraged my participants' belief that they could do something other than

sex work. Study participants set their exit goal or decided to live dual lives and then shaped their interactions with others to achieve those goals. They decided what level of sex work they desired, who was going to be in their lives, how they would present themselves to those people, what information they would share, and so forth. This ability to influence who becomes a member of one's life-world, what information they are privy to, and to negotiate various sex work and square roles can be understood in terms of Bourdieu's analogy: social interaction is like a game in which players utilize financial, social, cultural, and symbolic capital to attain their desired goal in or out of sex work.

Regardless of what people think about sex work, examination of how people enter, exit, and re-enter the sex trade, construct their identities, manage information and capital, and perform sex work and square work presents opportunities for interdisciplinary investigations in early childhood development, gender studies, sociology, economics, psychology and more. I urge sex work researchers to continue to gather information across diverse populations of sex workers, utilizing progressive and blended theoretical approaches to understand human action in this domain. Conducting research with off-street workers in particular means that researchers will meet individuals who hold relatively 'stronger' positions in terms of their race, class and gender, education, and income than many street sex workers. I hope this forces more democratic empirical approaches to developing knowledge about how people choose to be involved in both sex work and square work, and how they navigate their walk among us.



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# Appendix.

## Interview Guide

### Theme 1:

#### Exit Process (personal attributes, agency, self concept)

##### General demographics

1. How old are you?
2. How do you identify in terms of race, gender, culture, sexuality?
3. Do you identify as having any disabilities?
4. Do you have children? How many? Ages? Did they reside with you while you were a sex worker?
5. What is your marital status? What was your status during sex work?
6. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?
7. What is your current occupation?
8. How would you identify in terms of class?

##### Section Two: Sex work related demographics

1. How old were you when you entered the sex industry?
2. How long were you involved in the sex industry overall?
3. How old were you upon your most recent exit/re-entrance from/to the sex industry?
4. What area of the industry did/do you work in? What is/was your role?
5. Do you have any special skills, talents or attributes that you benefited from as a sex industry worker?
6. What did you enjoy most about sex work?

**Central Research Question:** How do people describe and make sense of their experiences of movement in and out of the sex industry?

**Interview Question:** Describe what was going on for you when you first started thinking about leaving the sex industry?

##### Prompts

- What motivated you to exit?
- How did your (age, race, class, gender) play into your decision?
- Is there anything about you or your background that inspired your thoughts to exit or that helped you leave?
- How did you exit the sex industry?

Based on responses from these questions, I will ask a series of questions under each of the following themes:

## **Theme 2:**

### **Exit Process (life-world, relationships and interactions)**

How do the relationships that people have and the reactions from others affect exiting decisions?

**Interview Question:** Who was around you during your exit? What role did they play?

#### **Prompts**

- Who helped you exit? describe
- How were your costumers or regulars involved?
- Who worked to prevent you from exiting? describe
- Why do you think they behaved in this way?
- Describe the roles of services and agencies in your exit

## **Theme 3:**

### **Exit Process (field, position, capital)**

How do people describe sex work as a field and where are/were they located in that space? What capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) did they have as sex workers? Was this transferred into new fields? How do people describe the field that they were entering into? What roles/positions were they planning to take or did they take on in new fields?

**Interview Question:** Describe the role/position you held in the sex industry. Describe the role/position held in the square world.

#### **Prompts**

When you were a (sex worker /working in XX Job):

- What did you like about your work? What did you dislike?
- Did you have to answer to anyone? Who? Why?
- How much money would you make on average?
- Could you turn away customers? describe
- How did other sex workers treat you generally? Why do you think that was?
- How did people you encountered treat you? why? How did you treat other workers? Why?
- How did square people treat you? Why do you think that was?
- What did you take with you from sex work/ square work when you left (material, skills etc)

## **Theme 4:**

### **Exit Process (experiences of Structure, external constraints or opportunities)**

What aspects of social structure were manifest through interactions with others?

**Interview Question:** did you experience racism, sexism or economic insecurity before, during or after your exit?

#### **Prompts**

- What was the source of the X that you experienced?
- Why do you think this was happening to you?
- How did you respond to X? How did X affect your decision to exit?
- Did you experience stigma? When? Describe. How did you respond?

## Theme 5:

### Exit Process (projections, goals)

What did people envision as their end-state? How did they work to achieve it?

**Interview Question:** when you left the sex industry, did you have a plan in mind for what you would do and who you would become? Tell me more about this

#### Prompts

- How did you know you had exited? What marked this for you?
- Did your vision come true? Why/why not?
- What factors, people or situations came into play to make this so?
- What was it about you that made your plans a reality/non reality?
- What adjustments did you have to make?

## Theme 6:

### Thoughts of Re-entry, re-entry and Duality

Did people consider returning to sex work or negotiating a half-life (duality)? If so, what personal, interactional or structural elements were at play? If not, why not

**Interview Question:** Since you've been out of sex work for XX, was there ever a time that you thought about returning? Tell me about this

#### Prompts

- What was going on for you then?
- Who was around you at the time? Who did you talk to?
- Who supported/challenged your choices?
- How did your (race, class, gender, age) play into your contemplation?
- Did you re-enter? Why/why not?
- What skills/experience did you take with you from (sex work/square work)? How do you now apply these in your role as X?
- Were you ever *live* and *square* at the same time?<sup>4</sup> Why/why not? Tell me about this
- How did this happen--how long did you do this for--who knows that you do this?

<sup>4</sup> Sex worker jargon: 'live' = being an active sex worker and 'square'=being a former or non sex worker.