

STIGMATIZED (M)OTHERS:
NAVIGATING STIGMA, SEX WORK AND MOTHERHOOD IN CANADA

by

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In the newspaper I am quoted saying *being a whore*
is less harsh on my feet than being a waitress.
 I keep my high heels on when the men knock at the door
 kiss them on their mouth or cheek
 wait for bills
 and then take them off
 so they are always shiny and new.
 And it is true
 being a whore is less harsh for me
 than picking strawberries in a field
 I made 20 dollars a day picking strawberries
 then came home covered in dirt
 smelling sweat and sweet.
 Being a whore is less harsh for me than waking up at 4
 to write in big bold letters bacon
 The cook made bacon and scrambled eggs and peanut butter toast
 for men coming in Les Princesses d'Hochelaga
 to watch sports and porn and drink coffee.
 They'd ask for bacon and a picture of my tits
 before they struggled to build castles and skyscrapers.
 I was once in a newspaper.
 I wore mermaid eyeshadow.
 I'm not dead yet.
 I do Lego with my kids and cry and say sorry
 too many times or not.
 I'm not dead yet.

- Melodie Nelson "We are the girls who die unnoticed" (2019: 118-119)

Abstract

Despite a large body of research exploring the obstacles sex workers face due to their occupational stigma, little research focuses on how their stigmatized paid work influences their navigation of unpaid care, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. My dissertation examines the narrated and photographic experiences of womxn in Canada who identify as both mothers and sex workers and asks: *how do these womxn navigate and negotiate the daily work of unwaged social reproduction and paid work in stigmatized and precarious conditions?* This dissertation is informed by feminist methodologies, visual methodologies, and contributes to literatures on stigma, sex work stigma, social reproduction, unpaid care work, mothering, and working motherhood. Fourteen participants in this qualitative project engaged in autophotography, capturing their daily routines and surroundings to provide visual insight into their daily lives. Then each participant attended a photo elicitation interview to discuss the meanings, experiences, and feelings being conveyed in their selected photographs. My findings illuminate that sex work stigma operates contextually, influencing these mothers' engagement with and disclosure of their stigmatized paid work, their families' experiences with courtesy stigma, and the structural barriers they face as sex working mothers. This dissertation also explores participants' engagement with mothering practices, crediting their ability to be good, empathetic mothers *because* of their experiences navigating stigmatic occupations and their transferrable skills as sex workers. Womxn's choices to navigate sex work and mothering are acknowledged as being both calculated and meaningful—granting sex workers financial security, flexible working hours, and unique opportunities to invest time into themselves and their families. To uphold the aims of producing accessible research, these images were displayed in public fundraising exhibits, relying on participant observation and anonymous feedback to

further assess the project's ability to co-produce destigmatizing and empathetic knowledges—*by*, *with* and *for* sex workers. All funds raised from these exhibits were donated to various sex worker grassroots organizations in Canada to assist in funding their ongoing mutual aid efforts and to ensure this research possess tangible benefits for sex workers themselves.

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Chapter One: Introduction

When I was a kid, I loved scrapbooking. I always wanted to create elaborate and picturesque collections of our family's memories to preserve my favourite moments of my childhood. I brought a camera with me to document almost every family event, weekend trip, special occasion, and times spent with friends. Most often, I was the person behind the camera. I dictated who and what to photograph and when, showcasing our family's memories from my own artistic perspective. I assumed the responsibility of being the family documenter, so much so that we rarely had photos of me to include in our albums, which later became a running joke in the family. I would spend hours on end sitting at the kitchen table carefully selecting which images to use, what photos should be cropped, what colours to pair together and the perfect layout that would draw attention to select aspects of each photo. I made it my mission to create a piece of art that our family could treasure, something to look back on when days were tough or to pull off the shelf whenever guests came to visit.

Our scrapbook represented the family, childhood, and stories that I *wanted* to remember, leaving behind the moments of struggle and trauma that we had endured. I included only the good memories, displaying our lives through rose-coloured glasses. The pretty photos, the gold star moments, the moments we were most proud of. I didn't take photos of the struggles we faced during the 2008 recession. There are no images of the hours we spent at the laundromat that summer, boiling in the heat because we could not afford to replace our washer or dryer. There are no photos of the times my sisters came home drunk from a bush party, the stress my dad faced being the sole financial provider for our family, or the diets we clung to prior to every school dance. There are no photos that document my family's health struggles, the grief my mom faced losing her eldest daughter, the late-night fights that erupted amongst a house full of teenage

girls ‘borrowing’ each other’s clothes, or the months I spent in a mental health facility seeking treatment for my PTSD. There are no pictures from the day my parents discovered a pack of cigarettes in my 14-year-old sisters’ purse, the nights my mom was too tired to whip up a homemade meal, or the efforts my parents made to make ends meet.

My toss away pile was always filled with odds and ends of the photos I would crop, captions I second-guessed, or the images I decided to discard entirely; these usually offered deeper insight into our life than some of the scrapbook pages themselves. Remnants of our day-to-day lives, the missing puzzle pieces that could taint my work of art. Our scrapbook was maintained as clean cut; it included nothing taboo and nothing to be ashamed of. It disregarded all our family’s issues and secrets. It offered only the golden glimpses we would want to be showcased to others, the identities we worked tirelessly to uphold (Goffman 1963). If “*all the world’s a stage*” (Shakespeare, 2.7.146), our scrapbook was reminiscent of a Disney channel film. We were simply characters in these scrapbooks, building a particular narrative compliant with that of the ideal, Christian, sometimes middle-class family. Our scrapbooks served as a visual representation of the memories, identities, and experiences we strived to cherish—not the ones that most accurately depicted our lives.

I’ve since continued with my love for capturing and sharing images, doing so primarily online. In my late teens, I came across Tumblr—a multimedia blog that encouraged users to express themselves through art and imagery. A virtual diary if you will. Tumblr offered the opportunity for users to celebrate or discuss taboo topics through aesthetic imagery, including sex, sexuality, bodies, substance use, and struggles with mental health. Although not always having a healthy impact on platform users, including myself, Tumblr was a forum I could use to accurately express the struggles I had faced through imagery, under an alias, to an audience with

similar algorithms. It was a space I could reveal and celebrate myself in a completely raw light, revealing my darkest secrets and obstacles on a page that solely catered to my own interests. My profile did not correspond with the idealized image I had curated within our family albums; rather, it consisted of a compilation of photos, quotes, and videos reflective of my personal and sexual desires. With the promise of anonymity, I no longer had to hide or be ashamed of revealing any part of my past or myself. Some days, I had no toss away pile. Instead, I had the freedom to document my journey and growth in all aspects, free of judgment from others, into my late adolescence.

Other social media platforms quickly took center stage, including Facebook and Instagram, but lacked the same anonymity offered on Tumblr. In contrast, my edited and published images on these platforms were visible for all my family, friends, and coworkers to see, a public scrapbook that was largely influenced by how others viewed my images and identity. What I posted, and didn't post, mattered. My profile on Instagram served as a digital narrative of who I was, what my interests were, and how I presented myself to others. This catapulted the idea of a personal scrapbook once kept on the coffee table in the comfort of my home to one that was now available on a public domain, accessible for others to openly criticize. Photography and my online persona have always been kept separate from my studies. For me, photography was an outlet and a hobby, while my academic journey followed more of a conventional approach. However, the more I coloured within the lines of research, the more detached I felt from my work, my colleagues, my research participants, and my own writing. My research didn't feel unique, personal, or purposeful. I felt limited in my capacity to reach audiences outside of my cohort and found it difficult to share my projects with close family members and friends. My master's thesis, focusing on the experiences of mothers who worked as

strippers, took me two years to write, only to be read by a handful of individuals who were paid to evaluate my work. Something I was so passionate about doing seemed to have very little impact on the people and communities around me. Knowing I needed to break free of the constraints and limitations I experienced previously when conducting similar research, but still wanting to prioritize my advocacy efforts for sex workers in Canada, I started exploring the use of visual methodologies for my dissertation. Not long after, I stumbled across the concept of autophotography (Noland 2006; Cabañes 2017; Glaw et al. 2017; Pearson 2017), sparking the initial brainstorming process of my research project to begin.

I'm far from alone when it comes to my interest in photography and scrapbooking. Online personas continue to gain popularity, with most people I know being active on multiple platforms—whether it's using their political voice on Twitter, advertising their professional successes on LinkedIn, depicting their personal lives on Instagram, or uploading their picture-perfect family life to Facebook. We share and consume this media daily, ranging from accessing news, sharing images of weekend getaways, finding new recipes to try out, or even circulating our loved one's obituary notices. What we say, what we post, and how we interact online hold meaning in our lives; we are showcasing who we are, or rather, we are displaying how we want to be perceived.

Reliance on social media to share pictures and milestones is especially popular amongst 21st century moms, with mothers increasingly sharing images and videos of their children online, following sub-communities that impart their parenting advice, and subscribing to influencers who share their experiences navigating motherhood. The rise of social media use amongst mothers is what Gibson (2019) refers to as the momosphere-- reproducing white femininity and ideologies of intensive mothering (Hays 1996), while enacting feelings of either validation or

mother-blaming for those who defy social norms. These platforms play a critical role in constructing maternal and familial identities (Gibson 2019), capturing mothers' values and priorities, family memories, accomplishments and parenting successes, all while being on display and open to criticism (Laird 2012). The normalization of these platforms also influences social expectations for mothers to comply with—so much so that my own sisters have even apologized in their captions for forgetting to upload pictures of their baby on their monthly milestone blanket. Alternately, others have been criticized for exposing their children too much online.

There are, however, a growing number of online communities and influencers who challenge these white, middle-class mothering ideals. Over the past few years, teen parents, blended families, and single parenting social media accounts have gained popularity with the masses, receiving likes, messages of support, earning partnerships with large brands, and even establishing full-time income by sharing their experiences of motherhood online. Of course, these profiles still face criticism and hate regarding their parenting practices, lifestyle choices, and family dynamics. But most importantly, they act as sites for resistance, addressing issues of stigmatization, misogyny, mommy-shaming, racism, and what most parents filter out of their published content head on.

Unfortunately, these spaces of resistance remain exclusive—where 'free passes' are only reserved for white, middle-class parents, and acceptance towards mothers engaging in 'morally deviant' behaviour (Hannem 2012) is simply non-existent. For instance, it's okay to poke fun at your kids online or joke about being a wine mom, but only if you're in a privileged enough position. On the other hand, working-class racialized mothers, mothers who use drugs, mothers who face incarceration, and mothers who work in the sex industry continue to be marginalized—never celebrated, rarely included, over-surveilled, and often excluded from spaces free of

scrutiny. Recognized as being tainted or bad mothers, even in the most virtual spaces, these mothers continue to experience varied forms of mother shaming and mother blaming.

Mother shaming is further reinforced by the social construction of two mutually exclusive categories: the sacred and all-caring Madonna, or the Whore (Bradley 2007). Within this dichotomy, womxn are subject to polarizing perceptions, recognized as being either good, wholesome, and pure womxn, or as a profane, promiscuous, and deviant whores—meaning mothers who also engage in sex work almost become an oxymoron within this social imaginary. This Madonna-Whore Dichotomy is sustained and reinforced by popular culture representations of sex workers in the media, in turn, silencing the actual lived experiences of sex workers from large-scale platforms. Films such as *Hustlers* (2019), *Fifty Shades Darker* (2017), *The Hangover* (2009), *Watchmen* (2006), *Born into Brothels* (2004) and *Striptease* (1996) all uphold the divide between the Madonna and the Whore, portraying mothers who engage in sex work as stupid, lazy, promiscuous, or inherently bad mothers—abandoning their children and causing them psychological distress (*Fifty Shades Darker* 2017); abusing their children for interrupting time with clients (*Watchmen* 2006); stealing, using drugs, or taking advantage of clients (*Hustlers* 2019); marrying complete strangers on a whim in Vegas and leaving their infants with them (*The Hangover* 2009); or having already lost their children, resorting to sex work out of desperation (*Striptease* 1996). These fictional representations perpetuate harmful tropes and misconceptions, and contribute to the occupational stigma of sex work more broadly, reinforcing the notion that a hypersexual womxn is one that has fallen and deserving of being (mis)treated, policed, regulated, and discriminated against. They also assume that she could not possibly be a “good” mother.

Attempting to challenge these fictionalized narratives and recognizing the value imagery has played in capturing my own lived experiences, my dissertation incorporates the use of autophotography as a medium for stigmatized mothers to share their own stories navigating sex work and mothering in accessible and public spheres. Visual methodologies are increasingly being used to platform the experiences of sex workers to mass audiences, including Marie-Eve Carrier Moisan's (2020) graphic story *Gringo Love* portraying sex workers' experiences within the sex tourism industry in Brazil, as well as Juniper Fitzgerald's (2018) children's book *How Mama's Love their Babies*—the first to openly normalize sex work as an occupation that mothers participate in. Inspired by the impact of these visual texts, it is my intent that the images collected in this autophotographic study further contribute to challenging and demystifying the cultural stereotypes sex workers face in mainstream media, opening public discourses around acceptance, inclusive feminism, and decriminalization. As Kacy, a mother who participated in this project shared:

"...these are all photos that I would have in a scrapbook at the back of my closet. But these [photos] are real; they capture our lives. What's the use in hiding that?"

The good, the bad, the ugly-- a collective scrapbook sheds light on each womxn's¹ narrated experiences, but is not representative of a singular, homogenous group. This project, and the corresponding fundraising exhibits, offers the opportunity for sex working parents to be celebrated, understood, and represented in public spheres. In doing so, this project aims to

¹ My choice here in using the term 'womxn' is motivated by the necessity of including trans and/or non-binary individuals into broader discussions surrounding gendered oppression and sex-based inequalities. Typically used by intersectional feminists and decolonial theorists, the term womxn draws attention to the varied experiences of marginalized womxnhood, in turn, confronting exclusionary feminism (Matandela 2017).

support marginalized mothers, destigmatize sex work, produce accessible findings for mass audiences, and contribute to collective efforts towards decriminalization in Canada.

Research Question(s)

Taking up this line of inquiry, my dissertation examines the narrated and photographic experiences of womxn in Canada, who identify as both mothers and sex workers, with the overarching question: *how do these womxn navigate and negotiate the daily work of unwaged social reproduction and paid work in stigmatized and precarious conditions?* To adequately explore this research question and illuminate how stigma operates and influences sex workers' navigation of paid work and unpaid care, this study is guided by four sub-questions:

- i) What are the daily practices associated with navigating stigmatized paid work and unpaid care?
- ii) How do participants negotiate, manage, and or/experience the stigma associated with their paid work?
- iii) How have COVID-19 and health restrictions associated with the pandemic influenced their engagement in paid work, unpaid care, and navigating these dual roles?
- iv) How might the use of autophotography contribute to or challenge cultural stereotypes and stigma associated with sex work?

In examining the ways in which sex workers adapt the management of their stigmatized paid labour and parenting practices, the goal of this research is to identify how macro-level structures influence participants' experiences of both forms of work within the context of capitalist society, under the provincial and federal health restrictions associated with COVID-19, and in relation to gender, class, and racial inequalities. My study aims to deepen a critical theoretical and empirical analysis of the connections between macro-level structures, mothering, and sex work, shifting public debates about sex work and the possible effects these debates have on policy implementations. This research aims to illuminate how stigma operates in participants'

lives, focusing specifically on their access to state and social supports in fulfilling the unwaged demands of social reproduction. Further, I explore how womxn experience varied forms of state, municipal, and moral regulation, in addition to criminalization and state and social surveillance, illuminating how these experiences vary depending on their social location and the type(s) of sex work they participate in. Through this, I aim to apply an intersectional feminist lens to the obstacles sex workers face in navigating the stigmatization and precariousness of their dual roles. By incorporating feminist and visual methodologies into this research specifically, my dissertation also aims to co-construct accessible and multidimensional knowledges (Cabañes 2017) while demystifying cultural images that reproduce stigmas surrounding sex work and broader social inequalities (Sprague 2016).

Justification for my Research Scope

Coined by Carol Leigh in 1978, sex work is an umbrella term “chang[ing] the focus from women being ‘used’ to women who work in a profession” (Barton 2006:168). Recognizing sex work as a form of labour, Shawna Ferris (2015) defines sex work as including the business of sexual services, exchanging these services for financial remuneration or other forms of compensation (xvii). This work is “limited not to the act of ‘sex’, but also to various forms of direct and indirect sexual activities” (Kingston and Sanders 2010:3). Although this rather vague term “has long been subject to intense political struggles over its definition” (Hardy 2010:167), sex work has become more inclusive, incorporating a wider range of precarious occupations both in person and virtually, “from the street prostitute or escort to the phone sex ‘actress,’ stripper, or porn star... all of which involve some degree of interaction between customer and sex worker” (Escoffier 2007:174).

Many sex workers occupy various categories within the sex trade, concurrently or simultaneously. This became more evident due to the restrictions associated with COVID-19, where many indoor workers, whose paid labouring environments were greatly impacted by provincial restrictions, shifted to online or other forms of sex work to support themselves and their families. As such, to best represent the diverse experiences of sex work more broadly, this project includes the lived experiences of womxn engaging in all forms of sex work, demonstrating how varied forms of sex work influence these mothers' ability to support their families while also fulfilling their unwaged responsibilities at home. To further uphold my goals of producing inclusive and intersectional research, this project is inclusive of trans and non-binary participants, whose experiences often remain at the margins of mainstream research on both sex work and mothering in Canada.

Key Contributions

Utilizing the data collected throughout this project and grounding these narratives within contemporary debates, it is my goal that this research enhance current literature and understandings of how mothers manage both forms of gendered work (reproductive and paid), within precarious and stigmatized conditions. In doing so, I critique current sex work legislation and regulations in Canada and demonstrate how said regulations interfere with sex workers' ability to safely engage in their paid work and access necessary resources and benefits to care for their children. This project also explores the obstacles these mothers faced navigating paid work and mothering throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in relation to the lack of support received from the government, and the importance of mutual aid within the sex work community. Using autophotography specifically, this project demystifies cultural stereotypes and images surrounding sex work, advocates for decriminalization, and illuminates how sex work

enables womxn to overcome issues of gender discrimination and inequality prevalent throughout Canada's labour market.

By organizing and hosting fundraising exhibits for the public to attend, and ensuring my dissertation is accessible to fellow sex workers for free, it is my goal that this project's findings reach broader audiences. It is also my goal to ensure the project is beneficial for sex workers themselves—donating all funds raised through the exhibits to sex worker support organizations (including Maggie's, SWAN Vancouver, SWAN Waterloo, SWAP, Butterfly CSW) to use for emergency funds and necessary programs associated with their parent collectives. This project co-constructs data that can potentially be utilized in the demands to challenge the regulation and criminalization of the sale of sexual services. This data will also be useful for my collaboration with Maggie's Toronto in identifying necessary supports for sex workers and their families across Canada, as well as their ongoing attempts to legally challenge the criminalization of sex work in Canada.

Organization of the Dissertation

To uphold these goals and effectively respond to my research questions, this thesis has been divided into the eight chapters that follow.

“Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework” consists of the theoretical framework used in this project and a review of the relevant scholarly literatures, constructed in four distinct sections. To begin, the chapter presents selected research that explores the work of social reproduction, contemporary caregiving, and mothering. I then engage with debates on stigma, later conceptualizing sex work stigma and the repercussions of stigmatization and criminalization. To bridge these fields of scholarship, the chapter concludes by outlining current debates on sex work and mothering, highlighting gaps present in literature, which this project

aims to address on a broader scale.

“Chapter Three: Exploring and Adapting Feminist and Visual Methodologies” outlines my methodological approach to conducting this research. Synthesizing scholarship on feminist theories, feminist methodologies, visual methodologies, autophotography, and participatory photography more generally, the chapter aims to demonstrate how the incorporation of both feminist methodologies and autophotography inform this project’s research practices-- upholding the intent of producing accessible and destigmatizing literature on the experiences of sex workers who are mothers. These discussions help inform the research design for this project, which will be thoroughly outlined in the chapter to follow.

“Chapter Four: Research Design & Chronicles of The Researcher” extends methodological debates on feminist and visual methodologies to demonstrate my rationale for the research design of this project. In doing so, the chapter offers insight into the recruitment and interview processes, analysis of data, the use of reflexivity, the methodological challenges, and limitations this project faced. To conclude, I provide a detailed introduction of each womxn who participated in this project, giving necessary context for the data chapters that follow.

“Chapter Five: Disclosure Dilemmas and Courtesy Stigma” takes up my qualitative study’s sub-question “how do participants negotiate, manage and/or experience the stigma associated with their paid work?” Although mothers’ disclosure of their engagement in sex work was ultimately linked to the privileges they had, this chapter acknowledges that for even the most privileged participants, stigma and courtesy stigma imposed pervasive effects on their everyday lives. To further explore these findings, this chapter is organized into three distinct discussions, focusing on the intersection of i) stigma and disclosure, highlighting each participants’ rationale for being mostly out, out on a selective basis, remaining “*in the closet*” or experiences of being

outed, ii) the impact of courtesy stigma as a deciding factor for disclosure, and finally, iii) examining the structural stigmatic repercussions related to engaging in sex work as mothers.

“Chapter Six: How Sex Work Informs Good Mothering Practices” illuminates how participants define what it means to be a good mother, and the ways in which they negotiate the ideologies of ideal mothering in precarious conditions. In doing so, this chapter argues that these womxn are good mothers, crediting their ability to be good mothers *because* of their experiences navigating stigmatic occupations and their transferrable skills as sex workers. To illuminate how these mothers define what it means to be a good mother, this chapter aims to center maternal empowerment as participants address the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy more broadly. To do so, I begin by examining how participants i) define and identify as good mothers, and ii) further illuminate how they engage with good and empathetic mothering practices.

“Chapter Seven: Sex Work and Mothering in the Context of Choice and Anti-Work Politics” illustrates participants’ choices to navigate sex work and mothering as being both calculated and meaningful—granting sex workers financial security, flexible working hours, and unique opportunities to invest time in themselves and their families. In doing so, this chapter argues that as complexly positioned workers within capitalism, these mothers’ motivations to pursue sex work reflect anti-work tendencies. By this, I mean that participants stress their occupational choice as best enabling them to negotiate their way out of some of the traditional constraints of working motherhood altogether, gaining financial security, greater flexibility in their paid working hours, working fewer hours than traditional full-time occupations and refusing to overwork, and having more leisure time. Though participants do not fully engage in a refusal of domestic and waged work entirely and remain subject to the constraints placed on working mothers in capitalism, their decision to navigate sex work and mothering provides us

with critical vantage points that illuminate how working mothers in capitalist societies are attempting to negotiate the constraints placed on them, to best achieve the motives that coincide with anti-capitalist, anti-work, and post-work ideologies.

“Chapter Eight: Exhibit Endeavors and Reflections” offers insight into the organization and set up of the fundraising exhibits, showcasing the photographic contributions from participants, in addition to the obstacles I faced in upholding this project’s initial goals. Given these reflections, this chapter highlights five main lessons learned from hosting this event and provides critical considerations for future projects and researchers pursuing similar research designs.

“Chapter Nine: Concluding Remarks” provides a summary of my research project’s findings relative to the project’s initial research questions. This chapter also discusses the limitations this project faced, providing critical considerations for addressing research gaps and my plans to expand upon this study’s focus to enhance intersectional analyses relative to the navigation of sex work, mothering, and stigma.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

To construct the theoretical foundation for this project, I've integrated my reading of some of the key writings on mothering and the work of social reproduction (Fox 2001; Bezanson 2006a, 2006b; Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Luxton 2006a, 2006b; Federici 2012), social surveillance of mothers (Braedley 2006; Faircloth and Murray 2015; Henderson, Harmon and Newman 2016) and the intensification of mothering (Hays 1996; Fox 2006). Following this, I also engage with debates on stigma (Goffman 1963), sex work stigma (Bruckert 2002, 2012; Hannem 2012; Lazarus et al. 2012; Benoit et al. 2018; Benoit et al. 2019), the repercussions of stigmatization and criminalization (Fogel and Quinlan 2011; Fritsch et al. 2016; Lyons et al. 2017; Goodall 2019; Roitberg 2021), as well as current debates on sex work and mothering (Bradley 2007; Rivers-Moore 2010; Bromwich and Delong 2015; Annett 2019). As this project explores separate fields of research, this chapter has been organized into four distinct sections:

- i) Social Reproduction, Caregiving, and Mothering
- ii) Conceptualizing Stigma
- iii) Repercussions of Sex Work Stigma
- iv) Sex Work and Mothering

As current research that specifically addresses sex work, stigma, and mothering is still relatively limited, to conclude, this chapter highlights the gaps present in current literature, illustrating how and where this project intervenes and expands current understandings and debates. In doing so, I draw on parallels between these bodies of literature, demonstrating initial intersections between dual responsibilities of stigmatized paid work and unpaid care work in Canada.

I. SOCIAL REPRODUCTION, CAREGIVING, AND MOTHERING

The concept of social reproduction is dynamic (Bezanson and Luxton 2006) and plays a prominent role in the overall structuring of, and relations within, the Canadian federal system (Cameron 2006). According to Isabella Bakker's (2007) analysis, definitions of social reproduction generally relate to three aspects, including "(a) biological reproduction... and the conditions and social constructions of motherhood; (b) the reproduction of the labour force... and (c) the reproduction and provisioning of caring needs" (p. 541). The work of social reproduction, as Bezanson (2006a) contends, refers to the daily practices dedicated to "maintaining and reproducing people and their labour[ing] power" (p. 26); these practices are highly dependent upon the incorporation of generational skills, norms, and identities within the private sphere (Picchio 1992; Elson 1998; Bakker and Gill 2003; Cameron 2006). As performed in, and structured by, economic systems, the work of social reproduction requires the use of fundamental resources and provision of necessities, in addition to constructing and preserving the emotional, social, intellectual, and cultural well-being of "individual and collective identities" (Bezanson and Luxton 2006:3).

Social reproduction is regarded as being dynamic, as these responsibilities of everyday life are met through varying combinations of efforts from individual actors and broader institutions, including "the state, the market, the family/household, and the third sector" (Bezanson and Luxton 2006:3). Providing the example of medical care, Luxton (2006b) demonstrates how multiple parties assume differing responsibilities associated with this work:

Increasingly, formal medical care relies on informal, usually family, caregivers to take care of patients, both during their hospital stay and after. The current organization of health care assumes that informal caregivers will be available and puts pressure on patients and their families and friends to reduce the responsibility of the medical system for patients. (p. 269)

Luxton's example illuminates how state policies and regulations mediate the conditions under which the demands of social reproduction are fulfilled, particularly within capitalist societies. Such regulations play a prominent role in fulfilling this work – “structuring the inputs into, and conditions of, social reproduction” (Bezanson 2006b:176).

Determining the resources made available and practices employed in households, the state influences the means of reproducing people and their labouring power, doing so to secure a cohesive economic and social structure (Sehgal 2005) while simultaneously reproducing gendered, classed, and racialized hierarchies. Accordingly, not only is the work of social reproduction necessary for tending to and maintaining the well-being of members in society, but it is also part of the overall preservation of capitalism and the economic system itself (Bezanson 2006a; Bezanson and Luxton 2006). As a result, the work of social reproduction is fulfilled by a combination of sectors and is regarded as critical for both “the daily and long-term life of capitalist societies” (Luxton 2006b:263).

The work of social reproduction in Canada is, in part, met by state services and supports, including, but not limited to, health care, education, social assistance, pensions, and housing support (Luxton 2006a). These government-funded services fundamentally aim to play “an active role in market regulation and social provisioning” (Bezanson and Luxton 2006:4). However, due to Canada's post 1970's adherence to a neoliberal approach to economic management, Bezanson (2006a) and Bakker (2003) stress that much of the work of social reproduction has shifted away from this realm of direct, state-provided services, and instead is now commodified, fulfilled by the voluntary/non-profit sector, and performed as an unpaid caregiving responsibility within families, extended families, neighbourhoods, and other close social networks.

With the decrease of government-funded supports, an array of community and third-sector organizations have increasingly assumed a critical role in assisting individuals and families to fulfill the demands associated with social reproduction (Bakker 2003). Luxton (2006b) demonstrates the variety of these services, from providing single-issue supports “such as food banks, rape crisis centers, or HIV/AIDS support groups” (p. 263) to moving “beyond the direct provision of services to agitate for changes to existing state and/or employer-based contributions to social reproduction” (Luxton 2006a:38). Despite these supports, the work of social reproduction, especially in capitalist societies, remains heavily dependent on the unpaid work of family and household members, primarily womxn (Luxton 2006b).

Although families generally assume the unpaid responsibilities associated with the work of social reproduction, it is crucial to acknowledge that other informal parties, including friends, co-workers, and neighbors, may also aid in fulfilling these demands (Bakker 2003). In her analysis of informal care work and the unpaid responsibilities of social reproduction, Luxton (2006b) draws attention to accessibility concerns relative to Canada’s dependence on unpaid work, as the reality is “not everyone has family available [or willing/able]” to help” (p. 288). For those who rely on informal and unpaid caregivers to help fulfill the work of social reproduction, the involvement of their caregivers is far more “unpredictable, inconsistent, and precarious than that prompted by kinship and family obligations” (p. 288). This shift in responsibilities to that of non-profit organizations limits families’ access to necessary social reproduction supports, in which “without sufficient support, standards of living drop, the most vulnerable households typically collapse, and a crisis in social reproduction is produced” (Luxton 2006a:38; see also Bakker 2003).

Whether the work of social reproduction is fulfilled through voluntary/non-profit

organizations or as a form of paid or unpaid work, this work is still predominately performed by womxn (Bakker 2003; Bakker and Gill 2003; Bezanson 2006b; Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Braedley 2006) and is characterized as being seen as womxn's work (Federici 2012).

Acknowledging the gendered nature of this work, Bezanson (2006b) explains "while there is nothing inherent in this work that requires it to be done by women, its organization and carrying out is highly gendered" (p. 175) and remains "extensive, undervalued, and largely invisible" (p. 175). The gendered nature of social reproduction, whether achieved through paid or unpaid forms of work, thus plays a fundamental role in producing, reproducing, and reinforcing unequal gendered power relations (Federici 2012).

Social Reproduction and Mothering as Unwaged Labour

Gendered and unpaid responsibilities of care work, including "birthing and socializing the young... caring for the old, maintaining households, [and] building communities" (Fraser 2016:101) play a primary role in fulfilling the work of social reproduction, and, as it is not financially compensated, is considered a natural manifestation of 'love' (Federici 2012). In her analysis of the gendered nature of unpaid work, Federici (2012) stresses that because this labour is maintained as unwaged work, the struggles associated with these responsibilities also go unnoticed. Although wages often do not adequately compensate workers for the labour that they perform, the "wage at least recognizes that you are a worker, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work" (p. 16) – at least, to some extent. As such, without formal compensation for this unwaged labour, which has been seen as a naturalized attribute of a womxn's character, womxn fulfilling unwaged demands are perceived as being "nagging bitches" (p. 16) rather than "workers in struggle" (p. 16). As a result, gendered and unpaid responsibilities of social reproduction are not

recognized as being an actual form of work, and in turn, are devalued within Canada's capitalist society.

Not only are the unwaged and indispensable responsibilities of social reproduction made into invisible labour, they also pose significant issues pertaining to gender inequity within the labour force. Due to unwaged and gendered responsibilities, womxn often lack financial independence (Fraser 2016) from their partners, families, informal supports, state assistance, third sector organizations, and social services. Further, the wagelessness of this work perpetuates "an increase in the gendered division of labour" (Fox 2001:388). In maintaining this divide and the wagelessness of the work of social reproduction, Federici (2012) explains "women will always confront capital and the state with less power than men, and in conditions of extreme social and economic vulnerability" (p. 110).

As much of the unpaid responsibilities of social reproduction are domesticated, families assume a profound role in fulfilling the demands of this work (Fox 2006). With families acting as "products of ideologies... legal practice... and economic organization" (Fox and Luxton 2001:29), the family unit holds the responsibility of producing, protecting, socializing, raising, and caring for those within the dynamic, acting as the primary unit of social reproduction (Fox 2006). Although all family members may participate in fulfilling the demands of unpaid care work, it is mothers who primarily "appear to be the agents of social reproduction" (Reay 1998: 205) within the home.

In her analysis of the responsibilities associated with motherhood, Bonnie Fox (2006) identifies the ideologies and practices of motherhood as the "foundation of social reproduction" (p. 23), and defines mothering as being a socially, historically, and culturally constructed nurturing relationship. This work, which Harriet Rosenberg (2001) classifies as "motherwork,"

(p. 303) plays an integral role in social reproduction, as the responsibilities of mothering are characterized by a series of caring acts, including cooking, cleaning, and caregiving (Rosenblum 2012; Glenn 2016). Positioning womxn as “the angel in the home” (Fraser 2016:106) or “the parent who cares enough to give up herself” (Rosenblum 2012:67), the principal responsibilities of parenting have thus become entangled within this innate image, portraying womxn as naturally best suited as primary caregivers. This gendered divide, “relegate[ing] people with vaginas to ‘motherhood’ and people with penises to ‘fatherhood’” (p. 67) has naturalized housework and unpaid care work as a womxn’s “internal need, an aspiration” (Federici 2012: 16), in turn, maintaining the unpaid work of social reproduction a gendered responsibility. Social reproduction, in both waged and unwaged forms, has thus been produced, reproduced, and reinforced as a gendered responsibility that is also attached to existing gendered, racialized, and classed inequalities within capitalism itself. In turn, the work of social reproduction, when performed as hidden labour, has granted dominance to womxn within the realm of housework and unpaid care, sustaining the divide between social reproduction and economic production.

The work of unwaged social reproduction requires caring labour, which also includes the incorporation of emotional energy (Hays 1996; Luxton 2006; Fox 2006; Federici 2012). This emotional energy, or what Arlie Hochschild (1983) refers to as emotion work or emotion management, is generally associated with womxn and involves the induction or suppression of feelings to protect the mental and emotional well-being of others. Distinguishing emotion work from emotional labour, Hochschild identifies emotion work as including acts performed within the private realm, *without pay*, producing a form of “use value” (p. 7). For instance, in Daphne Pederson’s (2012) analysis of the differences between what constitutes good mothering from good parenting, she distinguishes good mothering as requiring the use of emotion work,

“assuming emotional responsibility for the caregiving and safety of children and acting as pivotal figures in family life” (p. 230). Emotion work thus plays an essential role in fulfilling the contemporary demands and responsibilities of social reproduction and mothering, providing the capacity to “nurture, manage and befriend” (Hochschild 1983:170) those being cared for.

Although emotion management aims to secure the well-being of those being cared for, Hochschild urges that emotion work must be recognized as exacting a high cost for those performing this work. In a similar way, in her analysis on the strains experienced by caregivers participating in this form of work, Hazel Mac Rea (1998) concludes:

Those who are required to perform a lot of emotion work are at risk of losing touch with their feelings. They may even feel the need to mentally detach themselves from their feelings in order to survive the emotional strain of their work. (p. 146)

Despite playing a necessary role in fulfilling the work of social reproduction and protecting the well-being of those being cared for, emotion work may also inflict an emotional toll onto those providing this care-- affecting “the degree to which we listen to feeling and sometimes our very capacity to feel” (Hochschild 1983:28). These costs are further intensified by increased expectations associated with fulfilling these responsibilities, as well as “certain social conditions” (p. 28) that increase one’s vulnerabilities. Emotional strains can thus impose detrimental effects on those participating in both the waged and unwaged work of social reproduction, such as suffering from stress, burnout, “a dimming or numbing of their inner signals” (p. 126) as well as “becom[ing] estranged from the acting itself” (p. 127).

Over the past two decades, unwaged responsibilities of social reproduction and mothering practices have become increasingly intensified and surveilled (Braedley 2006), holding the potential to impose detrimental effects on those who take on this work (Hays 1996; Rosenberg 2001; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Fox 2006; Blum 2007; Lee 2008; Faircloth and Murray 2015;

Henderson et al. 2016). Neoliberal norms pertaining to mothering responsibilities and practices have intensified expectations regarding adequate child-rearing, such that they “have escalated at a dizzying rate: the bar is now sky-high” (Fox 2006:236). Demanding intensive mothering practices be “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays 1996:8), the intensification of unwaged care work holds womxn individually responsible for their children’s well-being and development (Hays 1996; Lee 2008), in turn, expecting mothers to put their “own needs ‘on hold’” (Fox 2006:247). This “all-caring, self-sacrificing” (O’Brien Hallstein 2006:97) engagement of caregiving practices uphold the expectation that “mothers are not supposed to need, nor have the right to need, social services or social funds” (Rosenberg 2001:308) to meet the demands of their mothering responsibilities.

These intensified demands and social norms regarding adequate child-rearing have also profoundly influenced the social construction of the ideal mother – an image that has been tied to perfectionism that assumes classed and other varied forms of privileges. However, Henderson et al. (2016) identifies this expectation of perfectionism as detrimental to the mental health of all mothers, even those “who do not subscribe to these [intensified] ideologies” (p. 512). Contemporary expectations of mothering, which perpetuate escalated “standards of perfection” (Douglas and Michaels 2004:5) produce negative outcomes for mothers, from experiencing “increased stress and anxiety” (Henderson et al. 2016:512) to forms of “depression and reduced self-esteem” (p. 515). Accordingly, as this shift towards intensified norms of mothering subjects all mothers to experiencing “the pressure to be perfect and guilt for not living up to high mothering expectations” (p. 512), some mothers can be considered at-risk for experiencing mental health issues. These adverse effects can also be connected to a failure to fulfill ideologies of ideal mothering, in combination with some womxn’s lack of access to varied resources.

Illuminating how the private responsibilities of motherhood have transformed into “matter[s] of public scrutiny and intervention” (Lee 2008:468), Douglas and Michaels (2004) contend the intensification of mothering practices have also been subjected to increasing social surveillance. In defining social surveillance, Marwick (2012) highlights that unlike state surveillance, “social surveillance takes place between individuals, rather than organizational entities and individuals” (p. 379). This surveillance can occur in varied forms, including face-to-face as well as via social media, and is “distinguished from traditional surveillance along three axes (power, hierarchy, and reciprocity)” (p. 378). The increased social surveillance of mothering practices is regarded as actively exposing mothers to various forms of mommy blame – holding mothers accountable for their children’s lack of well-being, success, and good behaviour (Blum 2007; Faircloth and Murray 2015). Social surveillance of mothering practices, which produces pressures to achieve moral gold-standards of parenting, thus positions mothers’ overall well-being as being at-risk, heightening mothers’ exposure to the detrimental effects associated with the unwaged and intensified demands of care work (Henderson et al. 2016).

Glenn (2016) also identifies the racial division of mothering practices as reproducing inequalities like class hierarchies – permitting “white, middle-class women to enjoy the benefits and status of being mothers, and elevat[ing] them to the position of ‘mother-managers’” (p. 7). As womxn in varying classes, races, and social conditions “experience the ideology of intensive mothering differently” (Taylor 2011:901), their experiences of surveillance, mommy-blame and guilt varies as well (Sutherland 2010; Taylor 2011). Focusing on the experiences of low-income, Black single mothers, Elliot, Powell, and Brenton’s (2015) research demonstrates social surveillance that coincides with intensified child-rearing expectation, “increas[ing] their burdens, stresses, and hardships” (p. 367) as with this intensified ideology, “*mothers* are [subject] to

blame” (p. 367). Accordingly, the ideology of intensive mothering and social surveillance of mothering practices must be regarded as imposing, upholding, and reproducing classed and racial inequalities – as intensified mothering practices are not compatible with constraints placed on working-class and racialized mothers (Sutherland 2010; Elliot et al. 2015).

Womxn’s Double Duty: Paid Work and Unpaid Care

The intensification and increasing surveillance of mothering practices arose “at a time of profound change in the economy” (Fox 2006:236), including the slow decline of the hegemonic ideal of single earner families, from the mid-1980’s to present day (Cameron 2006). Despite mothers increasing participation in the paid labour force, however, Pedulla and Thébaud (2015) contend that this shift “has not been matched with a corresponding increase in men’s share of unpaid household work” (p. 116). With the expectation for mothers to participate in the paid labour market in addition to fulfilling the intensified and unpaid care practices at home, womxn are thus faced with dual responsibilities – coming home from their paid employment to meet the demands associated with their “‘second shift’ at home” (Hochschild and Machung 2012:4). Due to these dual responsibilities, Budig, Misra and Boeckmann (2012) contend that across many countries, including Canada, womxn are ultimately penalized when they attempt to combine motherhood with employment, thus reinforcing womxn’s second-class status throughout the paid labour force. These motherhood penalties act as a primary “source of inequality among women and between women and men” (p. 165) – imposing forms of discrimination that limits their opportunities of being hired, assuming full-time paid working positions, earning a pay raise, receiving promotions, and gaining more authoritative positions within their workplace.

With lack of state-funded supports and *affordable* childcare services (MacDonald and Friendly 2019; Prentice and White 2019), the responsibilities of domestic work and childcare act as a womxn's second job, subjecting her to the demands and burdens of this double-duty. As a result, womxn's dual responsibilities actively penalize their ability to advance and achieve economic success within the paid labour force since their unwaged responsibilities at home act as a means of sustaining a gendered divide in both employment and wages. For sex working mothers specifically, however, one factor must be further examined to best understand the realities of their daily life—navigating the demands of paid work and unpaid care, all while under stigmatized conditions.

II. CONCEPTUALIZING STIGMA

Reducing individuals “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman 1963:3), stigma acts as discrediting attributes, impacting the stigmatized other's ability to receive acceptance from the ‘normals.’ Defined by the “relationship between attribute and stereotype” (p. 4), stigma requires one's social, physical, or moral attributes (Hannem 2012) to be characterized as possessing unfavorable qualities, as “stigma is not inherent in the individual attribute but is realized in interaction with other non-stigmatized (normal) persons” (p. 15). Depicted as being discreditable outcasts, or in Erving Goffman's (1963) words, “not quite human” (p. 5), stigmatized individuals are thus subject to mistreatment and discriminatory behavior (Hannem 2012), positioning them as being inferior to those who are *perceived*² to be compliant with societal and identity norms.

² Here I stress that those who are *perceived* as containing undesirable attributes are those who are subject to this mistreatment; as aforementioned, stigma does not rely solely on the attribute itself, but the recognition of this negative attribute by those deemed ‘normal’.

The visibility of discredit or the “known-about-ness” (Goffman 1963: 49) of possessing negative attributes is crucial in acknowledging how stigma operates. If one’s negative attributes are relatively concealed, one may be able to engage in practices of passing as normal within a given social interaction—taking on “a ‘normal’ identity[,]... carefully managing the impressions that they give to others” (Hannem 2012:17; see also Goffman 1963). Engaging in practices of passing, however, do not free stigmatized individuals from the threat of having their stigmatic attributes become *visible*. This threat influences the ways in which stigmatized individuals filter or monitor their social interactions accordingly. As a result, possessing stigmatic attributes, whether visible or not, poses the risk of being discredited, and thus “can have the effect of creating a power imbalance within an interaction between the stigmatized and the ‘normal’” (Hannem 2012:17).

Stigma is commonly recognized through three categorizations identified by Goffman (1963), including abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigma transmitted through lineages. In recognizing the impact stigmas have on the stigmatized other, Stacey Hannem (2012) contends that those who possess a blemish of morality and/or character face “the greatest impact in terms of levels of discrimination and acceptance from ‘normals’” (p. 18). Perceived as possessing “weak will” (Goffman 1963: 4) and socially acknowledged as being “a personal failure” (Hannem 2012:18), these stigmas become attached to their personhood, “bring[ing] into question the forthrightness of the individual as well as his or her moral standing” (p. 18). Stigmas discrediting moral character can thus impose pervasive consequences on everyday life, requiring those with spoiled identities to engage in passing and/or revealing strategies to manage their undesirable attributes and protect their relationships with others, as well as negotiate the implications associated with their perceived blemishes (Goffman 1963).

Stigma plays an “under recognized role” (Link and Hatzenbuehler 2016: 653) in producing inequalities throughout society by significantly disadvantaging and hindering stigmatized individuals in accessing fundamental resources. As stigma defines an individual as “mattering less” (p. 653), stigmatized bodies experience varied forms of social exclusion and discrimination— making state and social resources, including “housing, education, jobs, and the opportunity to live a healthy life” (p. 654) less accessible to them. Further, for resources that are available, stigmatized bodies often feel hesitant to utilize these services, as they fear that by doing so, they may face varied forms mistreatment, judgment, and discrimination when doing so (Benoit et al. 2018). Accordingly, this avenue of discrimination, justified by the production, reproduction, and reinforcement of negative stereotypes, is a fundamental cause of social, economic, legal, gender (Bruckert 2002; 2012), workplace, and health inequalities (Lazarus et al. 2012; Benoit et al. 2018; Benoit et al. 2019),³ further positioning the other within the margins of society. These forms of discrimination play a pivotal role in maintaining the power imbalance between the normals and the stigmatized, “through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce [their] life chances” (Goffman 1963:5).

The experiences of stigmatization, however, must be acknowledged as being dependent on the intersection of multiple identities and layering of discreditable attributes, as “one size [of stigma] may not fit all” (Williams and Frederick 2015: 384). Whether *visible* or *invisible*, the experiences of stigma are further impacted by intersections of race, class, gender, sex, sexual orientation, religion, Indigeneity, culture, socio-economic status, residency status, abilities/disabilities, physical appearance, and geographic location. Experiences of both symbolic and structural stigmatization, marginalization, status degradation, prejudice, and discrimination

³ This is just a few of the many inequalities that are linked to stigma.

are thus further fueled, intensified, and legitimized by prevailing micro-aggressions, and must always consider the intersecting identities and repercussions of possessing discreditable attributes more broadly.

Courtesy Stigma

The repercussions of stigma are not only experienced by those who are perceived as possessing the negative attributes, but also, can be extended to those with whom the stigmatized individual associates (Goffman 1963). This transfer of stigma, referred to as courtesy stigma, illustrates “a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one[,]... all obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized” (p. 30) with whom they are associated. This mark by association, contaminating family, friends, co-workers, and partners (Bruckert 2012), thus inflicts the burdens of stigmatization upon those closely related⁴ to the discredited individual, “spread[ing] out in waves, but of diminishing intensity” (Goffman 1963: 30).

Those subject to transferable stigma also engage in practices of passing to further eliminate or resist the repercussions associated with stigma. Like the practices undertaken by those who are discredited, those who have acquired stigma by association may also conceal discrediting information or reducing the visibility of the attributes. As Goffman (1963) identifies, however, treating stigma and *acquired* stigma as a neutral matter fails to challenge the labelling of discrediting attributes and the unquestioned discrimination that continues to prevail for both parties. Those who are unwilling or not yet “ready to carry a burden that is not ‘really’ theirs” (p. 31) may also engage in practices of distancing themselves from those marked by stigma to avoid

⁴ Here, I use the term ‘related’ to signify the close relationships or associations the stigmatized individual has and does not necessarily refer to their direct blood or legal relations.

undergoing socially damaging repercussions of transferable negative attributes (Hannem 2012). This avoidance can be harmful for those marked as discreditable, further contributing to their marginalization and social isolation.

III. REPERCUSSIONS OF SEX WORK STIGMA

Conceptualizing Sex Work Stigma

Being in a “stigma-laden profession” (Barton 2006: 74), sex workers are often characterized by a cluster of stereotypes, portrayed as victims without agency, diseased, morally contaminated womxn (Bruckert 2012). These stereotypes, “depicting [their] sexual character as victimized martyr or conniving slut to judgments about [thei]r education level” (Barton 2006: 73), characterize sex workers as being “stupid, lazy, sex starved, addicted to crack, psychologically disturbed,” (p. 74) and overall, inherently bad womxn. With the assumption that womxn freely ‘choose’ to participate in this ‘deviant’ labour, as opposed to acknowledging the systemic and institutional structures that influence and justify their decision to do so, these occupational stigmas are intensified and transferred to the labourer themselves (Bruckert 2002). By penalizing sex workers’ choice to not comply with performances of being the ‘ideal womxn’, sex workers are held individually accountable for the discrimination that they face-- as it is perceived as being their ‘choice’ to engage in a “‘high-risk lifestyle’” (Benoit et al. 2018: 461; see also Roitberg 2021). The concept of ‘choice’ however is further scrutinized by radical feminist and legal regulations of sex work in Canada, who conceptualize sex workers as possessing no agency, being helpless victims, and requiring an ‘out’ from the ‘inherent exploitation’ of the industry altogether (see Thusi 2018; see also The Canadian Bar Association 2014), detailed in the section to follow.

As the media, journalists, and politicians often depict sex workers as being “one-

dimensional stigmatized other[s]” (Barton 2006: 88; see also Jones 2020), and not as womxn separate from the responsibilities associated with their careers, sex workers can be subject to these occupational stigmas “twenty-four hours a day,” (Barton 2006: 88) seven days a week. These stigmas, branding sex workers “as a threat to self or public” (Benoit et al. 2019) and “a fallen woman” (Barton 2006:133), routinely subject sex workers to varied forms of isolation, marginalization, and discrimination, denying sex workers “social rights enjoyed by other citizens” (Benoit et al. 2018:459). For those who also participate in other forms of paid work, many fear that such discrimination will lead to the termination of their employment if someone finds out about their involvement in the sex-work industry. This occupational stigma, impacting sex workers’ “interactions and constrain[ing] their being-in-the-world” (Bruckert 2012: 63)” demonstrates that the hardest part of their career actually happens outside of their workplace—confronting the inequalities they face due to the stigmatic assumptions about who they are.

Imposing serious implications and invading every aspect of their lives, the stigmas associated with sex work act as unavoidable attributes-- discrediting sex workers’ perceived moral and personal character (Goffman 1963; Barton 2006; Bruckert 2012; Roitberg 2021). Unable to “leave [these stigmas] at the office, put [them] on the back burner, or take a vacation from [them]” (Barton 2006: 74), the stigmas of sex work extend beyond their paid labouring environments, acting as a ‘master label’ that characterizes who they are as individuals in varied areas of their daily life (Bruckert 2012). This master label is further damaging for sex workers facing intersecting layers of stigma, including race, gender, sex, class background, sexuality, and Indigeneity (Lyons et al. 2017). As a result, the stigmas associated with sex-work not only portray sex workers as possessing discrediting attributes, but rather, as being “*discreditable* individuals” (p. 133)—characterizing sex workers as ‘deviant’ womxn, even after leaving this

profession (Couto 2006). These prolonged and pervasive effects of stigma are unique to sex work and blemishes of morality more broadly (Hannem 2012).

Sex work stigma as a collective risk can further be understood in what Stacey Hannem (2012) refers to as symbolic stigma, defined as the negative societal attitudes attached to individuals and groups based on symbolic traits, regardless of one's individual actions. Sex work stigma is thus reflective of cultural, societal, and moral symbolism—which is further concerning when symbolic stigma becomes “symptomatic at a structural level” (p. 23). As symbolic, societal attitudes legitimize, sustain, and reinforce structural forms of discrimination and marginalization, sex workers become collectively perceived as being ‘risky’ and ‘at-risk.’ Perceiving sex workers as a collective risk provides further justification for enforcement of discriminatory practices, interactions, and regulation of sex work more broadly, mobilized and rationalized through “the rhetoric of risk-management” (p. 23). Defining sex workers as being a collective risk to society thus serves to increase stigmas that sex workers face, with the discrimination at the structural level acting as the direct “visible result of symbolic stigma” (p. 24) itself. Symbolic and structural stigma thus serve to produce and maintain social order, further recognized as a form of social control (see also Foucault 1980). As such, resistance to stigma is recognized as being a necessary tactic in challenging sex workers' social interactions at an individual level, as well as the inequalities, marginalization, and forms of discrimination imposed on sex workers at a structural level (Hannem 2012).

Stigma resistance most commonly occurs at the individual level, and refers to “the ‘tactics, strategies and practices’ subordinate groups employ, either to contest the dominant discourse and/or to assert agency” (Tabibi and Hannem 2012: 40). At an individual level, sex workers employ tactics that best enable them to resist stigmas directly correlated with their own

personal identities—challenging unjust, tainted, and/or inaccurate representations of their selves, in attempts to preserve “a sense of self-efficacy” (p. 48). Collective resistance, however, aims to address the consequences of stigma at a structural level, challenging stigmatic policies and inequalities produced by marginalization, resisting broader stereotypes and humanizing sex workers, as well as challenging power dynamics that maintain sex workers as being subordinate to assert sex workers’ agency (Hannem 2012). As symbolic and structural stigma employ rhetoric of risk-management to reinforce and sustain social inequalities more broadly, sex workers engage in stigma resistance to reclaim their identities, demystify stereotypes, mitigate negative societal attitudes, establish supportive collective networks, advocate for the rights of sex workers and challenge the very structures, policies, and regulations which actively oppress them. To best understand these power dynamics, how sex work stigma is structurally embedded in the regulation of sex work in Canada, and the pervasiveness of sex work stigma more broadly, we explore the repercussions of sex work stigma in the section to follow.

Repercussions of Sex Work Stigma: Visibility, Criminalization, and Violence

Cast as discreditable others and stigmatized by the majority, sex workers engaging in ‘in-person’ sex work experience extreme forms of structural stigmatization, further evident in the ways in which sex work is regulated in Canada. As laws and policies continue to be informed by anti-trafficking narratives (Benoit et al. 2019) and stigmatic assumptions that sex workers are “threats to public morality, crime and disease” (Alemzadeh 2013: 248), government regulation enforced to ‘protect’ sex workers actually heightens their exposure to experiencing issues of abuse, violence, poverty, exploitation and/or harassment (Bromwich and DeJong, 2015; Roitberg 2021). These regulations, including federal, legal, provincial, and municipal jurisdictions (Bruckert 2012), thus incorporate the use of “stereotypes and questionable ‘common

knowledge” (p. 68) when constructing policies that impact how these working environments should function. However, by excluding the lived experiences and diverse circumstances for those who engage in this form of paid work, these regulations fail to acknowledge how legal regulations impose social, economic, legal, gender, workplace, and health inequalities for sex workers in Canada (Bruckert 2002; 2012; Benoit et al. 2018; Benoit et al. 2019). These regulations, stigmatization, and discrimination experienced by sex workers soliciting in and occupying social spaces is evident in the passage of The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, further positioning the rights and safety of sex workers at the margins.

The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA), formerly Bill C-36, was introduced in Canada in June 2014 (Department of Justice Canada 2014), and for the first time in Canadian criminal law, criminalized the purchase of sexual services. As indicated in its title, the objective of PCEPA was to legally recognize prostitutes as “victims of sexual exploitation” (The Canadian Bar Association 2014: 6), with the intent of also “protecting communities from the harms caused by prostitution; and reducing the demand for sexual services” (p. 6). Adopting the Nordic model of regulating sex work, PCEPA thus criminalizes those who purchase sex and any advertising of the sale of sexual services (Department of Justice Canada 2014). Under this legislation, not only are sex workers socially constructed as being victims of the sex industry, but so too are their children, broader communities, and society as a whole (Roitberg 2021). The preamble for PCEPA even states that, by introducing this legislation, Parliament encourages those who engage in prostitution “to report incidents of violence and to leave prostitution” (Casavant and Valiquet 2014: 8)—assuming “exploitation is inherent in prostitution and that prostitution leads to the objectification of the human body, thereby causing irreparable harm to society” (p. 8). The introduction of PCEPA thus demonstrates how stigmatic

assumptions about sex workers inform governing structures and how such perceptions further subject sex workers to violence, over-policing, and exploitation (Benoit et al. 2018)⁵, especially for migrant, racialized, working class, and sexual minorities (Lyons et al. 2017).

The repercussions of stigma and PCEPA disproportionately impact Indigenous sex workers, who experience heightened forms of abuse from the criminal justice system (Goodall 2019). Overrepresented in the sex work industry, and generally occupying the lowest-paying jobs in the sector, Indigenous sex workers are also more likely to work under conditions with few forms of protection, as “racism and poverty selects them for the most exploitative forms of prostitution” (NWAC 2014; cited by Goodall 2019: 238). The implementation of PCEPA, which aims to eliminate sex work, thus reinforces Canada’s colonial project by further regulating and criminalizing Indigenous womxn’s sexual autonomy (Roitberg 2021). Eloquently put by Helen Roitberg:

[PCEPA] not only assumes that Indigenous women are incapable of making ‘good’ choices on their own, as if sex work cannot involve a fair contract between consenting adults, but also that Indigenous women’s choices are not constrained by layers of systemic oppression. Knowing that the colonial economy is inherently unequal, with non-white women in Canada as ‘the most poorly paid and precariously employed in the labor force’ (Burman 2019:362), sexual labor offers a path to economic security (Roitberg 2021:4).

Operating within and inseparable from broader structures of oppression, including colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism, PCEPA’s commitment to criminalize sex work, rather than

⁵ Since the implementation of PCEPA, there have also been several attempts to implement anti-human trafficking legislation in Ontario informed by stigmatic assumptions surrounding the sex industry, such as Bill 251 (Legislative Assembly of Ontario 2021), which fails to distinguish consensual sex work from human trafficking. Bill 251 will involve an expansion of police powers and demands a \$307 million investment. This proposed bill is being fought by several sex work organizations, including Maggie’s Toronto and Butterfly, as it heightens the vulnerability and surveillance of consensual sex workers, putting many racialized sex workers at risk. As this Bill has not been formally accepted into legislation, there is little discussion in academic scholarship so far regarding the repercussions of this legislation.

implement protections to reduce sex workers' exposure to violence and abuse, further contributes to public disapproval surrounding sex work more broadly. Framing Indigenous sex workers "as both the victims and perpetrators of the violence they face" (p. 6), PCEPA actively upholds the racialized, colonial stereotypes of Indigenous womxn as being promiscuous, dangerous, and immoral womxn, contributing to the stigmatization of sex work more broadly. Socially constructing sex workers as victims, devaluing their labour within society, and deeming sex workers as unworthy of state protections, PCEPA significantly contributes to the stigmatization and marginalization of sex workers, particularly those facing intersecting layers of stigma (Lyons et al. 2017).

Further, under the legislation of PCEPA most sex workers are actually prohibited from being categorized as employees under existing labour protection legislation; sex workers are categorized as independent contractors, offering them "little physical, emotional or financial security" (Fogel and Quinlan 2011:51) within their paid labouring environments. As independent contractors, sex workers are ineligible for protection under "laws aimed at protecting employees such as employment standards, workers' compensation, unemployment insurance or human rights legislation" (Couto 2006:45). Unqualified for receiving protection under the *Employment Insurance Act*, the *Human Right Codes*, as well as *The Occupational Health and Safety Act* in Canada, sex workers are unable to depend upon these resources and seek assistance "when their [few] rights are infringed upon" (Bruckert 2012:70). Sex workers' employment status thus positions them in a place of vulnerability outside of state protections, depriving them of fundamental rights as workers, denying them basic protections within their working environments, and offering little opportunity to access fundamental supports to improve their working conditions (Couto 2006; Bruckert 2012).

As a form of self-employment, sex work “operates outside of standard labour practices” (Bruckert 2002:106) yet continues to be profoundly influenced by the precarious conditions of the labour market itself (Fogel and Quinlan 2011) as well as intense regulations within Canada. Generally receiving no benefits (e.g. maternity leave or parental leave), opportunities for career advancement (Bruckert 2002), or collective bargaining rights (Couto 2006), sex workers are exposed to many precarious conditions, including but not limited to: “an unsteady income[,],... an unclear employee/ employer relationship, no benefits or compensation, an individualistic and competitive work environment, and physically and emotionally demanding work” (Fogel and Quinlan 2011:55). Such precarious conditions play a fundamental role in marginalizing and depriving sex workers of measures of security—often inflicting mental, physical, and financial tolls that are generally associated with other forms of precarious employment. Without effective legal, employment and economic protections, sex workers are held individually responsible to litigate and advocate for the limited rights they are entitled to, involving significant time, energy, costs, and possible risks of termination within and outside the sex work industry (Couto 2006).

In sum, the evidence demonstrates that sex workers are stigmatized, unprotected, intensely regulated, and precarious labourers; sex workers are subject to immense vulnerabilities, inequalities, and varied forms of oppression. Without such protections, sex workers are consistently positioned as deserving of varied forms of discrimination within society, particularly migrant, racialized, LGBTQ+, Indigenous, and working-class sex workers (Lyons et al. 2017; Roitberg 2021), exposing them “to increased levels of violence because they are unable to exert their legitimate right to protection following victimization” (Benoit et al. 2018:462). Constructed as independent contractors by the state, sex workers are not only responsible for gaining their own access to working environments and earning their own profits, but they are also responsible

for providing themselves with resources to: protect their health and well-being (Rivers-Moore 2014), economic security (Bruckert 2002), rights and working conditions (Couto 2006), physical safety (Bromwich and DeJong, 2015; Benoit et al. 2018), as well as access to fundamental resources, including employment insurance (EI) (Government of Canada 2022a) and Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (Government of Canada 2022b; see also Bouclin 2004). Further, unless sex workers file their income tax return and pay premiums to access extended benefits under the *Fairness for the Self-Employed Act* (Department of Justice Canada 2012), they are not entitled to fundamental supports, including extended healthcare benefits, maternity leave, parental leave, unemployment insurance, vacation pay, bereavement and paid sick leave, to name just a few. This predominantly impacts disabled sex workers, as they face limitations in accessing disability benefits, essential for assisting disabled sex workers in navigating the financial obstacles associated with caring for themselves and/ or their family (Fritsch et al. 2016).

Filing taxes and paying premiums for these protections, however, is not an option for undocumented migrant sex workers without government-issued working permits and can be too risky for sex workers engaging in in-person sex work. Well known sex work activist Valerie Scott, explains:

To be known as a sex worker, to file taxes as a sex worker, to have any information with the government in any form [is] exceedingly dangerous... If you step to the right, you get arrested. If you step to the left, your children can be taken away. If you work at home, a neighbour with a grudge can call the snitch number. If you rent, they can inform your landlord, because you're allowing an illegal act to take place in your apartment. (Peterson 2020).

As a result of the stigmatization and criminalization surrounding sex work more broadly, many sex workers fear disclosing their status and filing their income taxes with the CRA.⁶ Ineligible for accessing state benefits and premium protections, including the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) (Peterson 2020), the government actively subjects sex workers to precarious and marginalized positions in society, as sex workers are unable to access fundamental resources and supports during a global pandemic. Perpetuating inequalities “by treating sex workers as unworthy of protection[s]” (Benoit et al. 2018: 461; see also Roitberg 2021), the social positioning of sex workers in the paid labour market thus demonstrates a lack of social recognition as a legitimate form of paid work (Fudge, Tucker and Vosko 2002), as well as the presence of discriminatory practices driven by the intent of keeping sex workers down, in and/or away (Link and Hatzenbuehler 2016). This is evident when acknowledging how PCEPA also heightens sex workers’ exposure to occupational hazards and increased sexual risk, as disabled and non-disabled sex workers face limitations in accessing necessary healthcare services, including “HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for [both] sex workers and their clients” (Fritsch et al. 2016: 91). When looking at the precariousness of sex work, the implications of PCEPA and other regulations placed upon sex workers engaging in face-to-face sex work, it is evident in contemporary scholarship that these forms of structural stigma interfere with sex workers’ right to safe labouring conditions, access to necessary resources, and necessary protections, all while enduring, at times, intense regulation of their labour.

⁶ 241(1) of Canada’s *Income Tax Act* bars the CRA from disclosing taxpayers’ information to law enforcement, however, subsection 241 (9.5) states a CRA “official may provide to a law enforcement officer of an appropriate police organization (a) taxpayer information, if the official has reasonable grounds to believe that the information will afford evidence of an act or omission in or outside of Canada” (Government of Canada 1985) —including suspicions of human trafficking.

Sex workers offering in-person services are also subject to varied forms of verbal, physical and sexual abuse from the clients (and potential clientele) they engage with. For instance, as strip clubs exist at “the borders of ‘morally correct’ society” (Barton 2006: 60), many patrons have the perception that “normal rules of social etiquette do not apply” (p. 60)—subjecting dancers to various forms of verbal abuse, rejection, and sexual harassment. Since patrons pay a fee to enter this environment, many feel they are “entitled to... or unconsciously assume that this is what they are paying for: their right to treat a naked or nearly naked woman with abuse and contempt” (p. 60). Further, as patrons often disregard strippers’ physical and personal boundaries (Bruckert 2012), as well as “misinterpret the ‘emotional labour’ or ‘counterfeit intimacy’ of a dancer’s job” (Couto 2006:44), strippers often experience unwanted touching or varied forms of sexual harassment while interacting with the club’s audience. These assumptions and misconceptions, largely informed by the stigmatization associated with their career (Thompson and Harred 1992), thus position exotic dancers as being at-risk for experiencing varied forms of physical, verbal, and sexual assault when interacting with patrons, in which, due to their employment status, they receive little to no protection or support to address issues of sexual misconduct. How sex work is classified and criminalized thus sustains their exposure to violence from those purchasing sexual services.

Body rub parlours have also been subject to violence, discrimination, and hatred against racialized sex workers. On February 24th, 2020 The Crown Spa in Toronto, Ontario was the site of a brutal terrorist attack, resulting in two victims suffering stab wounds and one victim, Ashley Noell Arzaga, being murdered. On March 16th, 2021 three massage parlours in Atlanta and Cherokee County, Georgia— Gold Spa, Aromatherapy Spa, Youngs Asian Spa—were targets of white domestic terrorism, taking the lives of eight victims: Daoyou Fend, Delaina Ashley Yaun,

Hyeon Jeong Park, Julie Park, Paul Andre Michels, Xiaojie Tan, Yong A. Yue and Suncha Kim. Of these eight victims, seven are womxn and six are of Asian descent. As body rub spas are sites of visibility in the community, the stigmatization of their sexualized work, misogynist ideologies, xenophobia, and racism more broadly contribute to the violence many racialized sex workers experience within these shared labouring environments.

On January 22nd, 2020 Marylene Levesque also fell victim to the brutal violence sex workers are at risk for under PCEPA, and was killed by her client in a hotel room in Quebec (Valiante 2020). Despite the legality of working as a sex worker, Levesque is one of many sex workers who fail to be protected under Canada's laws, as the criminalization of purchasing sexual services heighten their risk for violence, exploitation, abuse, and isolation inflicted upon them by the clients they engage with. This is clearly demonstrated in Krüsi et al.'s (2014) study with cisgender and transgender womxn street-based sex workers in Vancouver:

Continued criminalisation and policing of clients, even in a context where sex workers no longer represent police targets, did not reduce the prevalence of sex work-related violence and profoundly impacted sex workers' ability to negotiate their working conditions, health and safety, including protections from violence, abuse and HIV/STIs. Sex workers were displaced to isolated areas with few protections from violence and abuse, were forced to rush or forgo screening clients and negotiating the terms of transactions (e.g., fee and condom use) and agree to clients or sexual services they would otherwise refuse. (p. 9; see also Fritsch et al. 2016).

Escorts and street-based sex workers in this study also reported, or rather, *withheld* reporting to legal authorities, the violence and abuse they have experienced from their interactions with clients. For one, sex workers shared that reporting issues of violence and abuse often resulted in a lack of support and attention from the police themselves. Escorts also shared that reporting abusive clients would further heighten their own surveillance or negatively impact the industry itself, further contributing to the stigmatization and criminalization associated with sex work. For

racialized, trans and two-spirit street-based sex workers in Vancouver, the repercussions of stigma, violence by clients, and lack of police protection are heightened and remain a central issue, relative to the layering stigmas of sex work, gender, racism, and for some, drug use (Lyons et al. 2017).

Canadian literature is limited in detailing how Black sex workers experience abuse, over-policing, and violence; however, data in the US illuminates that Black sex workers are disproportionately targets of racial profiling, police surveillance, violence, and arrest (Maynard 2017). The legal enforcement of PCEPA ensures racialized, transgender womxn are publicly shamed, subject to abuse, and criminalized in public spaces—in which the violence racialized sex workers experience comes from both law enforcement and aggressors posing as clients. Racialized, migrant sex workers also experience heightened forms of police surveillance and are targeted for deportation, all of which is framed through stigmatic assumptions that migrant sex workers are victims in the industry. Trans sex workers are disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing transphobic violence, police inaction, criminalization, and heightened forms of health inequities, “due to a complex interplay of socio-structural contexts” (Lyons et al. 2017: 182). Criminalization then, reinforcing racialized and trans sex workers’ vulnerability to violence and marginalization, further sustains the stigmas surrounding sex work more broadly, and exposes sex workers with intersecting layers of stigma to heightened forms of discrimination, abuse, and precarious conditions (Maynard 2017; Lyons et al. 2017).

This is evident when we recognize how Indigenous sex workers are overrepresented in the sex industry itself, in addition to being disproportionately overrepresented amongst sex workers who have faced physical assault and are killed while employed in sex work (Goodall 2019; see also Maynard 2017) -- a direct result of systemic violence and colonialism (Roitberg

2021). Socially constructed as being “less valuable than white women” (Goodall 2019: 239) in the sex industry, Indigenous sex workers face higher exposure to violence by clients, and as the purchase of sexual services remains criminalized, this reduces Indigenous sex workers’ ability to implement necessary screening measures and protections against aggressors. When acknowledging the detrimental impact colonialism and anti-trafficking narratives have on Indigenous sex workers, Sara Hunt (2016) stresses:

Even strategies that attempt to draw attention to violence against Indigenous women, such as publicizing the large numbers of women who have ‘gone missing,’ generally fail to raise the humanity of sex workers themselves among the Canadian public. (p. 33).

Stigmatic assumptions regarding Indigenous womxn, PCEPA and criminalization as a punitive and colonial political agenda, as well as law enforcement’s unwillingness to protect Indigenous womxn when reporting abuse, assault, rape threats, and work-related violence altogether (Bailey and Shayan 2016) thus contributes to the ever-present Missing and Murdered Indigenous womxn crisis in Canada (Hunt 2016; Goodall 2019; Roitberg 2021).

Family, Friends, and Courtesy Stigma

Socially devaluing sex workers’ personhood and portraying them as being inherently bad womxn (Barton 2006; Bruckert 2012), the stigmas sex workers shoulder also impact their personal relationships (Barton 2006; Bradley 2006) and subject them to varied forms of discrimination in their personal lives (Bruckert 2002; Barton 2006; Bruckert 2012). In analyzing courtesy stigma through a patriarchal lens, Hannem (2012) argues that womxn are more vulnerable and susceptible to the repercussions of acquired stigma, particularly in relation to their identities being historically linked to their male partners’ social status and public identities. On the other hand, men obtain autonomous identities, and thus “are more likely to be insulated from transferrable stigma by an independent social status” (p. 98). As a gendered phenomenon,

courtesy stigma thus disproportionately affects “wives, female partners, and mothers” (p. 99).⁷

This analysis, however, poses the question of whether this gendered phenomenon can also be applied to the transferrable stigma onto male partners of female sex workers. For instance, Bruckert and Parent’s (2018) work illustrates that female sex workers’ relationships with male partners are typically assumed to be violent, exploitative, and abusive, upholding the stigmatic assumption that sex workers are “oppressed and enslaved by ‘johns’ and ‘pimps’” (Benoit et al. 2018: 461).

In recognizing patriarchy’s role in policing and regulating womxn’s sexual agency throughout history, men have also been perceived as obtaining exclusive sexual ownership of their female partner. Although sexual monogamy is a cultural expectation for both men and womxn, Mindy Bradley’s (2007) study found that the stigmas associated with stripping significantly influence strippers’ personal relationships, as exotic dancing is only conceptualized as being an acceptable career for “particular ‘types’ of women” (p. 399). For those who also assume highly sacred identities, such as being a wife, girlfriend, and/ or mother, exotic dancing is perceived as being an inappropriate profession due to the profane nature of stripping in relation to the sacredness of their personal relationships. Some dancers reported issues of jealousy, possessiveness, control, manipulation, isolation, abandonment, shame, emotional, physical, psychological, and verbal abuse within their heterosexual, romantic partnerships—meaning “the dichotomous gender role of ‘sluts versus wives’ still persists” (p. 403; see also Annett 2019). Due to this perception, sex workers are not only faced with managing “the negative image of their occupations,” (p. 379) but also the difficulties involved in negotiating the

⁷ It is important to note that this analysis does not offer insight into queer relationships and the gendered effects of transferable stigma.

conventional norms associated with their other socially constructed and sacred identities (Dewey 2011).

Of all the personal relationships that could be affected by stigma, Barton's (2006) research indicates, "the one that causes them the most anguish is [their relationship] with their children" (p. 81). For womxn who juggle the roles of both mother and stripper, the fear that their children's upbringing may be negatively impacted is an ever-present issue in their day-to-day lives. Whether it is the possibility that their child may "be teased by classmates, ostracized from peer activities, or simply feel ashamed of their mothers for stripping" (p. 81), mothers who engage in this form of paid work often worry about how their occupational stigma will impact their children's overall well-being (see also Annett 2019). Due to this perception, sex workers are faced with managing "the negative image of their occupations" (Bradley 2007:379) and protecting the image of those with whom they hold personal relationships. As a result, to protect themselves from the repercussions of stigma in their personal relationships, and "protect those with whom they interact from courtesy stigma" (Benoit et al 2018:464), sex workers commonly engage in practices of secrecy to conceal their involvement in the sex work industry.

IV. SEX WORK AND MOTHERING

Mothers and sex workers have long been categorized within the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy, "in which mothering and birth-giving are valorized (but subordinated) activities engaging women's bodies that involve the use of their embodied agency by women and by others, and in many contexts for a long period of time, while sex work has been stigmatized as an illegitimate use of women's embodiment" (Bromwich and DeJong, 2015:13). Despite being treated as mutually exclusive and opposing labels and utilized as "mechanism[s] of social control, sorting and stigmatizing women who do not conform to socially sanctioned gender

norms” (Levey and Pinsky 2015:349), there are in fact similarities between the two roles. For instance, both mothering and sex work are forms of gendered labour that play an essential role in the economy itself yet are not socially recognized as forms of work (Bromwich and DeJong, 2015). Further, both mothering and sex work undergo a significant amount of social surveillance and state regulation.

Bromwich and Dejong (2015) identify the work of mothering and sex work as being common roles, as both forms of work are structured by socio-economic contexts that impose challenges on the womxn fulfilling the demands of their respective roles. For instance, a mother’s choice to engage in practices of social reproduction is largely influenced by the labour market, structuring the conditions in which a mother can fulfill the demands of this work (Bezanson 2006; Bakker 2007; Glenn 2016). Capital acts as a means of power (Bakker 2007; Federici 2012; Fraser 2016), dictating the options that mothers have for obtaining help or assistance with domestic work (Bezanson 2006; Federici 2012). Consequently, mothers are often unable to reduce their unpaid responsibilities, such as childcare and domestic tasks, resulting in more personal and economic costs to fulfill the demands of their mothering role.

Comparatively, sex workers’ choice to engage in a stigmatized form of paid work is also influenced by the labour market (Fogel and Quinlan 2011; Rivers-Moore 2010), structuring the conditions impacting womxn’s ability to earn a sustainable income even where they do not have high educational levels (Barton 2006; Fogel and Quinlan 2011). As the gender wage gap continues to reproduce gender inequalities throughout the labour force, there remains a lack of opportunities available for womxn to earn a suitable income, making sex work an appealing and strategic option for some (Bruckert 2002; Barton 2006; Hardy 2010; Rivers-Moore 2010; Fogel and Quinlan 2011). This choice, structured by macro-level contexts, subjects womxn to adverse

effects and repercussions of stigmatization for engaging in deviant labour (Barton 2006).

Focusing on sex workers' narratives of consumption, relative to the stigmatization of their paid work, Megan Rivers-Moore's (2016) research on sex workers in Costa Rica explores how these women understand the economic advantages of their jobs as a way for their families to get ahead. In comparison to other gendered forms of employment in the tourism industry, sex work allowed participants to increase their income, which for mothers specifically, directly influences the resources available to their children and families. Their ability to financially provide for their children somewhat assuaged the social stigma associated with their involvement in sex work—allowing participants “to think of themselves as particularly good mothers, able to provide for their kids and spend more quality time with them” (p. 112). Unfortunately, their personal understanding of the value of their work has little power to challenge broader social stigma and negative stereotypes associated with sex workers. As put by Ana, a participant in Rivers-Moore's study: “they think we're bad women, that we're bad mothers, that we're the worst, that we're drug addicts” (p. 90).

Sex workers' ability to utilize their income to assist in fulfilling their mothering responsibilities thus plays a central role in mitigating the stigmas they face; however, this rationale may also impose stigmatic forms of othering amongst sex workers themselves. For instance, Rivers-Moore's (2010) interviews with sex workers in Costa Rica demonstrates that “entering sex work in order to feed and shelter children was widely considered to be understandable and legitimate... [while] sex work for unnecessary consumption was derided as selfish and worthy of contempt” (p. 724). Irresponsible consumption practices, including luxury material items, plastic surgery, alcohol, or drugs, were thus regarded as wrong or immoral reasons to pursue sex work. More importantly, however, the distinction between responsible and

irresponsible consumption practices from Rivers-Moore's participants may serve as a form of stigma management, refuting prevailing stigmas surrounding sex work, drug use, and addiction in the context of motherhood to attain social mobility (Nestadt et al. 2021).

While their choice to pursue sex work may be linked to their ability to financially care for their children, like other forms of paid work, sex workers' approach to their paid labouring practices is also highly influenced and informed by their mothering roles (Sloss and Harper 2004; Rivers-Moore 2016). For many, their responsibilities at home resulted in an increase or decrease of their time spent working, being more selective of their paid labouring environments and clients, restricting the hours they worked and adopting further practices to remain discreet and keep their involvement in the industry a secret from family and friends (Sloss and Harper 2004). Although sex workers' parenting practices are also influenced by the nature of their paid work and the stigmas they face, including negotiating socially constructed notions of what good mothering entails (Rivers-Moore 2010; Basu and Dutta 2011; Bromwich and DeJong 2015),⁸ little substantive research explores how their occupational stigma and the nature of their paid work influences sex workers' approaches to parenting, as well as their access (or lack thereof) to necessary resources within Canada in fulfilling the work of their unwaged labour at home.

With respect to these gaps, this project aims to engage with current research on working mothers, and more specifically, sex working mothers, to demonstrate how their stigmatized and precarious conditions of sex work impact or heighten their capacity to navigate these dual responsibilities. As mothering has become increasingly intensified and surveilled, the chapters that follow will demonstrate how lived experiences and anticipated repercussions of stigma inform mothers' approach to fulfilling the gendered, intensified demands of mothering. In doing

⁸ Definitions of good mothering throughout these studies are locally specific.

so, this project aims to nuance current understandings of sex work and mothering, demonstrating how contrary to stereotypes surrounding their paid labour, sex work enables mothers to be good mothers, by engaging in good mothering practices and maintaining financial security. As little research discusses the navigation of mothering and sex work from a post-work and anti-work lens, this project also expands current literature on the obstacles sex working mothers face and contributes to efforts to theorize sex work as a form of anti-work resistance, while acknowledging the tensions and complexities of sex workers' relationships to capitalism. Acknowledging how stigma influences their access to state and social supports in fulfilling the unwaged and gendered demands of social reproduction, this project explores unpaid and waged labour as being both productive and necessary in the overall functioning of capitalism (Klotz 2006; Federici 2012).

Chapter Three: Exploring and Adapting Feminist and Visual Methodologies

The lived experiences of womxn and other marginalized individuals have been studied and interpreted through exclusionary, hegemonic lenses within white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal societies for centuries. As a result, intersectional feminist researchers⁹ have adopted various methodological approaches capable of recognizing the very nature of conventional knowledge as having been constructed based on power, representation, and exploitation (Smith 1999; Doucet and Mauthner 2006; Sprague 2016). Although there is no distinct all-encompassing feminist method itself, feminist researchers attempt to challenge hegemonic assumptions and theories of womxn's experiences by constructing their own approaches to conducting research (Smith 1999; Doucet and Mauthner 2003; Sprague 2016). Through embracing characteristics of collecting, interpreting, and presenting data that challenge existing and overlapping power relations present in all stages of knowledge production, feminist scholars are thus driven by the intent of providing "voice, representation, and, ultimately, power, to those whose interests, needs, and perspectives were occluded by traditional gendered norms" (Avishai et al. 2013: 400).

Often credited as being motivated by the goals of feminist methodologies, some feminist scholars favour the use of visual methodologies to combat conventional approaches to producing knowledge (Holliday 2000). Visual methodologies interpret visual representations, offering visual insight into the everyday lived experiences of research subjects. The choice to pursue

⁹ Said intersectional feminist scholars include post-structural, queer, Marxist, postmodern, critical race, third world and postcolonial feminists, to name just a few (Avishai et al. 2013). As "feminism cannot be reduced to a unified theoretical program" (p, 400), not all self-identified feminist scholars/ researchers implement the goals of feminist methodologies into their research approaches, such as those whose work is racist, misogynistic, classed, ableist, conservative, homophobic and/or right wing.

visual methodologies amongst marginalized populations is increasingly encouraged by disability and linguistic scholars (Pearson 2017), as visual methodologies can often provide the option of collecting qualitative data through nonverbal means. Despite being motivated by feminist methodologies, little scholarship utilizes feminist epistemology to overcome the challenges and ethical considerations associated with visual methods. There also remains a lack of discussions on how the incorporation of feminist methodologies can further enhance visual researchers' ability to engage in critical analyses of lived experiences of marginalized populations.

Synthesizing scholarship on feminist theories, feminist methodologies, visual methodologies, autophotography, and participatory photography more generally, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the incorporation of both feminist methodologies and autophotography inform this project's research practices-- upholding the intent of producing accessible destigmatizing literature on the experiences of sex workers who are mothers. In doing so, this chapter will focus on; i) conceptualizing the priorities, benefits, and challenges of feminist methodologies, ii) visual methodologies and autophotography, and finally, iii) the combination of feminist and visual methodologies as a form of stigma resistance. These discussions help inform the research design for this project, which will be thoroughly outlined in the chapter to follow.

Conceptualizing Feminist Methodologies

Prior to womxn's entry into academia, mainstream research was shaped and motivated by conventions that encouraged "researcher[s] (presumptively male)... to be 'cool, distant and rational'" (Harding 2018:138) throughout all stages of the research process. Regarding the credibility of a study as directly correlated with the researcher's ability to assume a "powerful, authoritative, distanced, impartial and above all objective" (p. 138) position, mainstream

knowledge sustained, naturalized, and prioritized dominant experiences and understandings of the social world (Sprague 2016). In doing so, research was conducted through a white, privileged, cis-male lens, solely categorizing research topics pertaining to straight, white, able-bodied men and the space they inhabit within the public sphere as being worthy of study (Clover 2011; Harding 2018). Feminism played a crucial role in ensuring that the “prevailing presumptions of the universality and objectivity of the (masculine) physical and social sciences” (Harding 2018:140) began to be challenged and dismantled.

Emerging in late nineteenth century, first-wave feminism was driven by the suffrage associated with womxn’s lack of opportunities in the paid workforce and limitations associated with women’s rights, such as the right to vote and right to property ownership. Broadening discussions to include prevailing cultural and gender inequalities women experience in their personal lives, second-wave feminism, which arose in the 1960s, utilized “consciousness raising as a means of change...and facilitated the entry of women into academia” (Harding 2018: 139). Despite drawing attention to issues of gendered inequality, this wave of feminism is generally understood as catering to a monolithic understanding of “‘the woman’- white, middle class, heterosexual” (p. 139). Recognizing second-wave feminism as producing an essentialist understanding of women and silencing the experiences of those who do not fit this privileged definition, third-wave feminists focused on acknowledging intersecting forms of oppression when analyzing womxn’s lives, which began during the early 1990s. The so-called fourth-wave of feminism, emerging out of the digital age, continues to prioritize and empower the voices of

marginalized womxn, while also advocating for equal representation of intersecting voices within positions of political and economic power.¹⁰

The introduction of feminism to academia transformed the ways in which social research was previously conducted. Demanding a political commitment to social justice and constructing anti-patriarchal knowledge, “feminism calls researchers to think critically about aspects of research that tend to go unexamined in discussions of methodology: whose questions we are asking and who is benefiting from the answers we discover through our research” (Sprague 2016: 195). Acknowledging the limitations associated with conventional epistemologies, methodologies, and methods embedded in social research, feminist scholars thus embrace theories that align with feminist goals, in turn, challenging conventional approaches to knowledge and representation (Smith 1999; Sprague 2016). Accordingly, contemporary feminist researchers assume the responsibility of developing political projects “that [are] not only anti-patriarchal[,] but against all forms of abjection and abuse” (Harding 2018:139).

Guided by theory and feminist principles, feminist methodologies strive to eradicate traditional ways of collecting, analyzing, and producing knowledge by critically reflecting on the decisions throughout the entirety of their research process (Smith 1999; Doucet and Mauthner 2003; Sprague 2016). As there is no singular methodology itself, scholars construct feminist methodological approaches dependent on the theories guiding their research, their capacities, their access to resources and, most importantly, what is in the best interest of their participants.

¹⁰ Although these ‘waves’ of feminism have traditionally been constructed into four uncomplicated categorizations, it is crucial to acknowledge that feminism did not remain idle in-between each wave, the progression of feminism is far more complex than what is presented, and importantly, this simplified and historical account of feminism does not translate globally.

Some researchers, including Dorothy Smith (1999), encourage scholars to develop their feminist methodological approach by studying womxn's everyday lived experiences as being "situated in the matrix of the everyday/ overnight world" (p. 46)— striving to identify the relations and social structures which shape our realities. Other scholars, such as Joey Sprague (2016), encourage feminist scholars to develop methodological approaches that "work from the standpoint of the disadvantaged, ground interpretations in interests and experience, maintain a strategically diverse discourse, [and] create knowledge that empowers the disadvantaged" (p. 233). Nancy Harding (2018) proposes that the best feminist methodological approach is one that is reflexive and adaptive, ensuring "women (and other participants) are incorporated into every stage of the research process, from design of the research to its dissemination" (p. 144). These feminist methodologies, aimed at legitimizing womxn's knowledge and experiences, thus play a significant role in combatting "the production and distribution of [patriarchal] knowledge... that keeps sociology [and related disciplines] from fulfilling its promise" (Sprague 2016:6).

With the rise of anti-racist and post-colonial critiques of the womxn as a singular, monolithic subject, Black feminist and other feminist scholars of colour insist "gender should be theorized as intersectional" (Lykke 2010:67). Intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s, highlighting "how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice" (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013: 787). In practice, intersectionality is a key analytical tool, addressing varied experiences of marginalization and the contextual dynamics of social power—highlighting the importance of contextual layers within society, while also accounting for individual and institutional power relations. Enabling scholars to challenge one-dimensional understandings of gendered inequality, intersectionality prioritizes the understanding of gender and sex in relationship to other socio-cultural categories, "such as

gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/ generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on” (Lykke 2010: 51). An intersectional approach to feminist methodologies considers the entanglement of gendered, classed, racialized, sexualized, and abled understandings of knowers’ social worlds, as well as the power relations that co-construct their respective experiences (Lykke 2010; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013; Pearson 2017).

Since feminist methodologies do not offer a singular approach to collecting, analyzing, and presenting data, feminist scholars embrace the characteristics of various research methods to address potential biases and influences in their co-construction of knowledge (Doucet and Mauthner 2006; Lykke 2010). One approach many scholars take to ensure their research design, research questions, research approaches, and methods align with feminist methodologies is the implementation of feminist participatory action research (PAR) (McIntyre and Lykes 2004; Clover 2011; Blackbeard and Lindeger 2014; Gustafson and Brunger 2014). In PAR, researchers work collaboratively with knowers at every stage of the research process, “working with people who are most disadvantaged to give them voice in the production of knowledge about their oppression” (Sprague 2016:208) to provoke social change (Clover 2011). Driven by the intent of granting space to voices that have traditionally been silenced or marginalized, PAR is also seen as holding value for feminist methodology as it provides researchers the opportunity to challenge conventional approaches to producing, analyzing, and presenting knowledge through “democratic group processes, new ways of relating, and co-constructing knowledge from-the-bottom-up” (McIntyre and Lykes 2004:57). Although beneficial, PAR may not be a suitable technique for all feminist research, in which case feminist scholars actively reflect on the questions being posed, the methods implemented, and the power relations present between themselves and the knowers at all stages of the research process.

This use of reflexivity allows researchers to be self-conscious of the role that they play in conducting qualitative research, in which “locating themselves socially, emotionally and intellectually allows [researchers] to retain some grasp over the blurred boundary between the respondent’s narrative and [their] interpretation” (Doucet and Mauthner 2003:419). In doing so, researchers can reflect upon the types of knowledge being produced and address potential reasonings behind the data they have (or have not) collected, and the findings they have (or have not) interpreted. Despite its significance, however, reflexivity can also pose dangers to feminist research, as speaking of “one’s own privilege can draw the reader’s attention to the [researcher] more than to the subjects of the research” (Sprague 2016:212). Excessive practice of reflexivity offering “a step-by-step account of the researcher’s trials and errors” (p. 212) may also shift the reader’s focus away from the project itself. Accordingly, although it is crucial for feminist scholars to position themselves within their research and their role in the co-production of knowledge, these discussions should not divert from the knowers’ own presence throughout the text.

The researcher’s interpretation of data and presentation of findings also remains a prominent focus for feminist researchers, specifically because “the analysis and interpretation of others’ narratives usually take place ‘back in the office’” (Doucet and Mauthner 2006:41), in complete isolation from those being studied. In acknowledging the potential challenges associated with data analysis, especially concerns related to “power, exploitation, knowing and representation” (p. 41), feminist methodologies encourage researchers to indicate how their positionality influences this phase of the research process. In addition to prioritizing reflexivity, feminist scholars also go beyond interpreting the transcripts or firm data that is retrieved, as they also attempt to analyze the silences, hesitations, what is half-said, incompletely said and not-said

(Harding 2018). Physical, verbal, and emotional responses are thus prioritized as holding significance throughout the research process, heightening researchers' ability to write in relational spaces that "give birth to understanding" (p. 149). To do so, however, requires researchers to ensure that feminist theories and principals guide all stages of the research process, recognizing the complexities that arise in attempting to uphold their respective goals.

Although feminist methodologies are valuable in addressing power relations, exploitation, and representation throughout the research process, feminist methodologies must also be recognized as being "far from fail safe" (Sprague 2016:159). Beyond common concerns associated with qualitative research-- such as trust, validity of data, and potential risks -- feminist methodologies introduce complexities of their own into the research process, relative to the goals of each project. From the limitations associated with a researcher's subjectivity, ignorance, and biases (Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Lykke 2010; Sprague 2016;), the researcher's status as an insider or outsider (Mullings 1999; Sprague 2016), the transfer of power to those being researched, as well as the accessibility of writing, sharing, and publishing (Harding 2018), adopting a feminist methodological approach does not simply produce knowledge free from abjection or abuse (Sprague 2016; Harding 2018). Nonetheless, adopting feminist methodological approaches must be regarded as complex and, to uphold the goals of feminist epistemologies, demand researchers to reflect deeply on the ethical issues associated with their methodological choices and position in relation to their feminist agenda.

Feminist scholars are encouraged to be aware of possible subjectivities, biases, and/or gaps in knowledge that may arise throughout the research process (Harding 2018); however, researchers' biases still unknowingly interfere with the overall production of knowledge, as feminist research, like all research, "is a continual process of subjective judgement" (Sprague

2016:33). Subjectivities, biases, and gaps in knowledge may be best understood by looking at the researchers' relationship to those they are studying-- classifying researchers as either outsiders or insiders. Outsider researchers possess differing positions of social power than their research participants, shaping researchers' experiences, preconceptions, and role within the research process— potentially “mak[ing] the relatively powerless even more visible to observation” (Sprague 2016: 15; see also Oliveira 2016). Despite these pitfalls, the avoidance of conducting research from an outsider's perspective does not serve as a solution, as doing so “serves to sustain [researchers'] own hegemony” (p. 77).

Conducting feminist research as an insider also poses challenges, as researchers' own subjectivities may guide the focus of the study and interpretation of data, relative to their own experiences. Although insider researchers are sometimes able to collect data that is more complete,¹¹ “insiders to any group, marginalized or not, face specific obstacles precisely ‘because of their connections to the group they are studying’” (Sprague 2016:75). As an insider, researchers may experience challenges distancing their subjective experiences, opinions, and/or feelings throughout the research stages, while also failing to acknowledge intersectional experiences from the members of the group being researched. Obtaining insider status thus does not relieve the challenges associated with adapting feminist methodologies to address issues of power, exploitation, and representation, but rather imposes new sets of complexities upon which the researcher must reflect.

However, as the spaces we inhabit are “simultaneous, fluid, ambiguous, blurred and renegotiated” (Adeniyi-Ogunyankin 2019:1389), the outsider/ insider dichotomy is far more

¹¹ Despite their insider status, researchers may actually collect data that is less complete.

complex than my discussion above may lead one to think. Reflecting on the temporal, positional spaces she assumes in her own research, Mullings (1999) shares:

The ‘insider/outsider’ debate...seeks to freeze positionalities in place, and assumes that being an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ is a fixed attribute. The ‘insider/ outsider’ binary in reality is a boundary that is not only highly unstable but also one that ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space. No individual can consistently remain an insider and few ever remain complete outsiders. Endeavours to be either one or the other reflect elements of the dualistic thinking that structures much of Western thought. (p. 340)

Recognition and reflection of the temporal spaces feminist researchers inhabit must then take place at all stages of the research process, acknowledging how, at varied levels, their temporal positions influence the overall production of knowledge. This is further echoed by Khan (2005), who recognizes their positionality as a researcher as being both multilayered and situational—shaping their debates and products of knowledge, while also recognizing we as researchers all share intertwined histories, “products of colonial and neocolonial education and complicit in the production of knowledge” (p. 2025). Feminist scholars must then acknowledge the layering social-political positionalities they assume as being complex, temporal, and situational throughout all stages of their research (see also Adeniyi-Ogunyankin 2019) to adequately address the ethical and empirical challenges associated with their relational positional spaces.

The transfer of power/authority to research participants also imposes challenges for feminist scholars in their attempts to challenge conventional research (Packard 2008). For instance, although feminist PAR does aim to work collaboratively with knowers to address power imbalances between the researcher and groups being researched at every, if not most, stages of the research process, “the simple transfer of authority to research subjects is simply not possible empirically” (Sprague 2016: 71). Since researchers possess power over the decision of which group they study, including the qualifications in which their project seeks applicable

candidates, researchers assume the position of prioritizing which “members to whom they will listen—that is, identify which members of a category are the ‘best’ spokespersons” (p. 71). Romanticizing and obscuring how power relations operate between researchers and those being researched, PAR thus can fail to address the extent to which participants are granted authority at each stage of the research, as well as accounts in which researchers may hold less social power than those being studied (Packard 2008). This careful consideration of the relationship between the researcher and participants, although crucial, imposes its own complexities, as “it is even more important *not to idealize*” (p. 167) the relationship itself throughout the analysis process. Nevertheless, awareness of the limitations associated with the transfer of authority/ power to research subjects is critical for feminist scholars to consider when adopting feminist methodologies as the relationship between the researcher and participants’ social power influences the entirety of the research process and cannot be fully overcome through PAR collaborations.

Feminist methodologies are far from fail-safe in challenging conventional and patriarchal knowledge(s), especially through examining the ways in which data is interpreted, written, published, and distributed. Aiming to produce empathetic research motivated by a commitment to social justice, feminist methodologies hold the capacity of co-constructing knowledge that can be used as a vehicle for combatting and addressing social inequalities (Sprague 2016). This capacity, however, can only be achieved if research findings are accessible to broader audiences, both through the language that is used and the avenues in which the findings are distributed, inviting a broader “circle of perspectives from which our work can be open to critique and forcing us to communicate in more accessible ways” (p. 227). In addition, as feminist scholars are dedicated to fulfilling the goals associated with feminist methodologies and actively

challenging conventional assumptions of womxn's everyday lived experiences, they are thus obligated to ensure that their research is accessible for "those on whom we rely for our data" (p. 227). Accordingly, the ways in which data is interpreted, written, presented, and distributed can introduce complexities in feminist scholars' attempt to produce knowledge, and thus demands researchers be conscious of the accessibility of their publications for marginalized communities.

Critical feminist scholarship, from start to end, must then be acknowledged as being both effective and complex in and of itself, as issues pertaining to power, exploitation and representation manifest throughout every stage of the research process in several ways, including processes of racialization, class, gender, sexualities, and so on (Sprague 2016; Harding 2018). Although feminist methodologies are driven by the intent of challenging mainstream and conventional approaches to research, applying feminist methodologies to research does not free researchers from the context in which conventional knowledges are produced. In doing so, feminist scholars assume the responsibility of recognizing the limitations associated with their research, as well as the limitations associated with their ability to frame, conduct, co-construct, interpret, produce, and present their research findings. As a result, feminist scholars must actively adapt, reconsider, and reflect upon conventional norms of research to align with the goals of feminist methodologies, and the goals of their designated research projects, at all stages of the research process (Lykke 2010; Clover 2011; Harding 2018).

Visual Methodologies and Autophotography

One approach feminist scholars adapt to challenge conventional norms associated with qualitative research and avoid producing patriarchal and oppressive knowledge includes the incorporation of visual methodologies into their research process (Holliday 2000; Clover 2011; Oliveira 2016). Visual methodologies, as outlined by Glaw et al. (2017), utilize one or a

combination of means of visual methods, such as “photography, film, video, painting, drawing, collage, sculpture, artwork, graffiti, advertising, and cartoons” (p. 2) to co-construct multidimensional knowledges that illuminate “valuable insights into the everyday worlds of participants” (p. 2). By asking participants to provide visual insights into their daily lives, participants actively engage in a process of thinking more “critically about their communities and reveal the everyday social and political realities that influence their lives” (Desyllas 2014: 479; see also Hammond 2004).

Inviting participants to express their experiences in nonverbal ways, visual methodologies have been credited as playing an essential role in overcoming *some* obstacles associated with conventional verbal and written approaches to collecting data (Clover 2011), enhancing the overall “richness of data by discovering additional layers of meaning, adding validity and depth, and creating knowledge” (Glaw et al. 2017:1). Offering participants art-based outlets to share their experiences and construct their identities has also been credited as being an empowering practice for some populations, providing participants the opportunity to utilize visual representations as an extension of themselves and their stories (Holliday 2000; Clover 2011; Desyllas 2014; Bryne et al. 2016; Oliveira 2016; Murray and Nash 2017; Pearson 2017). The use and incorporation of visual and art-based methods is thus perceived as being essential for many feminist scholars in their pursuit of obtaining richer data, challenging conventional approaches to conducting research, and overcoming barriers associated with communication and power relations (Clover 2011; Blackbeard and Lindegger 2014; Oliveira 2016; Pearson 2017).

Autophotography is one of many visual research methods favoured by feminist scholars, capturing participants’ daily routines, experiences, and environments using photography. This visual insight into participants’ everyday worlds, displayed “through the participant’s [own]

eyes” (Glaw et al. 2017:1), is a commonly used practice by anthropologists and sociologists as it can invoke valuable “dialogue between researcher[s] and participant[s] in productive ways” (Blackbeard and Lindegger 2014:1469). This dialogue, primarily had through photo-elicitation interviews, bases discussions around the symbolic representations in the photographs, ensuring both participants and researchers can achieve a common understanding in the meanings, experiences, and feelings captured visually (Oliveira 2016; Glaw et al. 2017). Photo-elicitation, which can act as both a form of data collection and analysis, further illuminates the context in which the photographs are captured, drawing out “additional validity and depth, new opportunities, and new viewpoints” (p. 3).

Some researchers regard the incorporation of autophotography as being particularly useful in inviting participants to open up, while also affording participants greater autonomy throughout the research process (Corcoran 2015). Other scholars utilize this research method to overcome cultural and language barriers to further mediate participants’ voices throughout the research process (Noland 2006; Cabañes 2017; Glaw et al. 2017). Autophotography has also been utilized to overcome challenges pertaining to some disabilities (Pearson 2017), not only those of research participants, but also for researchers and broader audiences. The benefits and value of autophotography as a visual research method are thus extensive, yet relative to the focus of each research project. These benefits, however, must also be understood in relation to the limitations, challenges and ethical implications that may arise.

Reflecting on their previous use of autophotography as a research practice for conducting identity and self-esteem research with racialized womxn in the United States, Noland (2006) acknowledges autophotography as producing more “authentic data” (p. 2), while challenging conventional norms and approaches to knowledge. Capable of “building bridges between

marginalized groups in research because it does not rely on participants having to speak for themselves” (p. 1), autophotography grants their participants freedom in deciding, framing, and capturing images that they feel are most important in constructing their own identities. In discussing the images they’ve captured, participants are also granted authority over which photographs they want to share, discuss, and further explain—increasing participants’ involvement in the research process and enhancing the validity of findings. Despite these benefits, Noland acknowledges that “although the photographs gave women ‘space’ to be less intimate, they also greatly reduced anonymity” (p. 11), thus increasing the potential risks associated with implementing this research method. Aware that their anonymity may be compromised when partaking in this research method, participants may also limit what they feel comfortable photographing for the research project, in turn, limiting the photographic data available for researchers to analyze. Further, the analysis of photographic evidence provided also poses challenges for researchers, since although “a picture may be worth a thousand words, it is only worth a thousand words when subject to proper analysis” (p. 5). Without a fail-proof recipe for analyzing photographs, the stage of data analysis requires researchers to perform a range of approaches to interpret the themes, identities, and narratives being represented in each photo

Utilizing autophotography to better understand how HIV positive adolescent boys identify and construct their masculinity through a collaborative and reflexive approach to research, Blackbeard and Lindegger (2014) argue that autophotography enables researchers to co-construct effective dialogues with research participants. Granting participants the opportunity “in ‘opening up’ interview narratives and location interviewees’ accounts within contexts of time, space and movement” (p. 1469), autophotography invited participants to become active

collaborators throughout the research process, enhancing the credibility of data presented and allowing participants to have agency in deciding what data is and is not included (Oliveira 2016).

Recognizing photography as holding the potential of acting as a symbolic and iconic medium for marginalized communities to express themselves through visual language (Sitter et al. 2022), Cabañes (2017) acknowledges participatory photography as capable of overcoming some of the obstacles associated with cultural and language barriers. With the rise of social media and photo sharing, the practice of photography as a research practice has also become a less daunting approach to expressing one's feelings, in comparison to other art-based and/or conventional ways of collecting data. However, visual representations may hinder mediating marginalized voices, as visual data does not inherently secure the ability to be heard. For instance, one observer Cabañes interviewed struggled to understand the contextual background of some of the photographic representations, stating that even the captions below each image did not offer substantial enough information for the narratives to be intelligible. Interviews with other observers demonstrated that since photographs are interpreted inter-textually, typically through circulated visually privileged perspectives within society, "photographs cannot really pin down meanings with finality... at best, they can only privilege certain interpretations" (p. 36) that simplify the voices and experiences captured in the image. As a result, audience interpretation generally did not align with the original intent of the image—as only "certain aspects of a photographers' narrative [were] heard... while other aspects of their stories [were] heard less, if at all" (p. 43).

This same message was echoed throughout Blackbeard and Lindegger's (2014) study, as they suggest possessing an "[']outsider['] perspective of photographs and interview narratives sometimes positioned the viewer or interviewer outside contexts" (p. 1473) – posing challenges

in understanding the meanings associated with the images. Researchers employing participatory photography as a research method must then acknowledge that images do not serve as a universal language capable of overcoming communication barriers, as viewers may not possess the ability to accurately interpret the meanings or properly contextualize its significance.

In critiquing the documentary *Born into Brothels*, which utilizes auto photographic practices to document the lived experiences of children whose mothers work as sex workers in Calcutta, Basu and Dutta (2010) draw attention to how one-sided portrayals can contribute to and heighten the stigmatization and mistreatment that sex workers face. Without situating these experiences within the context of the economy, patriarchy, colonialism, and other over-arching structures of power, rather than drawing attention to the ways in which these womxn attempt to provide for and protect their children, the white British director presents the mothers as incompetent and hopeless. Distributing this one-sided and stigmatized portrayal to mass audiences, so much so that the film received an Academy Award, sex workers are further recognized as being incapable of caring for their children, thus shadowing sex workers' voices and lived experiences through this white, Eurocentric lens. The incorporation of autophotographic practices must then be recognized as holding the potential of sustaining and contributing to the stigmatized images and understandings of marginalized communities, as the researcher's own analysis of the images captured can be ignorant of the context which shapes experiences, opportunities, or life choices.

As photo-elicitation interviews grant researchers insight into the meaning and significance behind the photographs captured and selected, providing sufficient context for data analysis processes, Corcoran (2015) and other researchers (Noland 2006; Packard 2008; Clover 2011; Blackbeard and Lindegger 2014; Cabañes 2017; Glaw et al. 2017; Murray and Nash 2017;

Pearson 2017) contend that in order for autophotography to be an effective research practice, autophotography must always be employed in combination with photo-elicitation interviews. Eloquently put by Holly Pearson (2017), “while the camera is a method of capturing images that preserve a static moment, the dialogue around the images is pivotal as it presents access to one’s biography, worldview, biases, intentions, and interpretations” (p. 46). Without employing photo-elicitation interviews, the benefits of autophotography thus fall short in co-constructing valid interpretations of the narratives captured in each image.

Arts-based and participatory photographic research has also been incorporated into disability studies to address and disrupt the objectification of racial and ethnic minorities with disabilities in traditional approaches to research (Pearson 2017). As autophotography is a collaborative approach to research that offers participants agency in the ways in which they narrate and present their lived experiences, the use of photographs as data fosters “empowerment, liberation, and ownership in the narratives of those with disabilities” (p. 48). This empowerment, however, remains limited if researchers do not incorporate autophotography with a hybrid of other formats, including oral data, as visual data alone poses challenges for many, including individuals who are visually impaired. To achieve greater accessibility for participants, researchers and broader audiences, researchers must then acknowledge accessibility as encompassing a combination of accessible, inclusive, and alternative means to knowing, engaging, constructing, and presenting knowledge (see also Cabañes 2017). In doing so, autophotography can be employed in a manner that is “*with* rather than *on* those with disabilities” (Pearson 2017:48). As little research explores the relationship between accessibility and the reliance on autophotography, researchers employing this method must assume the responsibility themselves in ensuring they adapt and acknowledge how this approach may

interfere with the accessibility of the research at all stages and for all involved, specific to the focus of their study.

This was particularly evident in Desyllas' (2014) use of participatory photography *with* sex workers, acting as a means for “activism and a form of resistance to sex work-related stigma” (Desyllas 2014:490) through self-captured images. Offering sex workers the opportunity to mediate their experiences, subjectivities, and voices through their own artistic self-representations, the use of photographs enables sex workers to capture “important issues relevant to their lives, bringing awareness about these experiences and perspectives through the political act of photographing them” (p. 490). Affirming their agency and voices throughout the research process, the use of self-captured photographs holds the potential of presenting deeper, more complex understandings of sex workers' narrated experiences and can be utilized to challenge fixed ideologies and stereotypes surrounding sex work (Desyllas 2014).

Although there are benefits to utilizing photographic methods in qualitative research, Bryne et al. (2016) conclude that researchers “may not be using photographic data to its best potential” (p. 2). The publications reviewed offered limited reporting on “how the methods were used in relation to data analysis and relatively little critical discussion of the limitations” (p. 2) associated with the research approach. Data analyses varied across studies, from utilizing thematic categorizations such as “coding, sorting, creating lists, or a combination of these methods” (p. 5) to alternative approaches to data analysis informed by cultural or aesthetic frameworks; however, they offered little detail regarding the processes involved in their analysis. Researchers also rarely noted the practice of reflexivity throughout the stages of analysis, hindering the validity of their findings and failing to address how their interpretation of these photographs has been limited or influenced by their own positionality. These critiques do not

mean to portray autophotography as a limited research approach, but rather draw attention to the necessity of documenting and reflecting upon the analytical techniques employed when presenting the interpretation of the project's photographic data.

The incorporation of autophotography has thus been regarded as holding value for many researchers, especially in their attempts to adapt conventional qualitative approaches to knowing, representing, and presenting marginalized understandings, feelings, and experiences in the social world. The value and intentions associated with this research method, however, can be easily compromised by the various limitations, ethical challenges, biases, and complexities that may arise throughout various stages of the research process. As these limitations may interfere with the goals of visual methodologies, the credibility of findings, and the ability to demystify cultural images that reproduce stigmas attached to various marginalized groups, it is crucial to consider how the use of this method can be further adapted to enhance a researcher's ability to collaboratively produce and present accessible, empathetic, and visual representations of the everyday world.

(iii) Stigma Resistance: Adopting Feminist Methodological Approaches in Autophotography

Implementing feminist methodologies into the practice of autophotography and photo-elicitation may overcome some of the primary limitations and ethical challenges associated with autophotography, offering visual methodologists' insight into addressing common concerns that arise throughout all stages of the research process. To illustrate the benefits of combining feminist methodologies, autophotography, and photo-elicitation interviews for qualitative inquiry, I apply this methodological approach to my research's attempt to produce destigmatizing research *with* sex working mothers. To demonstrate the advantages of combining practices of both feminist methodologies and autophotography to my own project, I first explore

how, in combination with each other, these methodological approaches may mediate some of the major challenges associated with feminist methodologies and visual methodologies.

As the researcher's social and political power influences the ways in which data is (or is not) collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented, the researcher's social position remains a prominent issue that both feminist methodologists (Doucet 2008; Harding 2018) and visual methodologists (Holliday 2000) center their attention around. Despite extensive efforts however, neither feminist nor visual methodologists independently have been able to adequately address the extent to which their social position influences the research process. Participatory photography and photo-elicitation may assist feminist methodologists in producing anti-patriarchal, intersectional understandings of the social world by inviting participants to play a collaborative role in all stages in the research project-- heightening knowers' presence within the production of knowledge (Noland 2006; Desyllas 2014; Pearson 2017). Encompassing both visual and oral representations of their everyday lives, autophotography might also be useful for feminist scholars in addressing existing power relations by conducting inclusive research *with* those who have certain disabilities or face language barriers (Noland 2006; Bryne et al. 2016; Pearson 2017). In addition, the creative data becomes more accessible for broader audiences. Applying a feminist methodological framework can further assist visual methodologists in addressing these prevailing power relations by locating, to some degree, researchers' positionality within the production of knowledges. The claim of mediating voice can then be further addressed by visual methodological scholars, drawing attention to the limitations associated with their research, in addition to their inability to produce universal truths (Holliday 2000). In combining the goals and practices associated with feminist and visual methodologies, researchers can further address issues pertaining to power and representation, thus advancing

their capacity for capturing rich, accurate, empathetic, and multimodal narratives.

This combined methodological approach is applicable for my research specifically as it ensures sex working mothers possess agency in constructing their narratives and identities and heightens participants' presence in feminist research, while overcoming some of the ethical concerns associated with misinterpretation and misrepresentation. Visual and oral means of collecting data also enable participants to distance themselves from their own narrated experiences, which can be particularly useful for individuals in discussing sensitive, taboo, or difficult topics in less invasive manners (Noland 2006; Bryne et al. 2016). These practices can also act as a form of resistance, challenging and demystifying cultural images that reproduce stigmas and stereotypes attached to sex workers specifically (Desyllas 2014; Oliveira 2016).

Additionally, the implementation of feminist methodologies is particularly useful for my research in overcoming some of the challenges visual methodologists experience when attempting to mediate marginalized voices. Upholding the intent of producing research free from abjection and abuse (Harding 2018), as well as from the standpoint of the knower (Smith 1999; Sprague 2016), the incorporation of feminist methodologies can enhance my own epistemological and ontological assumptions that inform my role and approaches as the researcher, specifically when collecting, interpreting, analyzing, and presenting data (see Doucet and Mauthner 2003). The use of autophotography, photo-elicitation, and feminist methodologies thus supports my intent of producing empathetic, accessible, destigmatizing, and anti-patriarchal knowledge(s), and my experiences employing these practices can be found in detail throughout the chapter that follows.

Chapter Four: Research Design & Chronicles of The Researcher

The previous chapter details my methodological approach to combining feminist and visual methodologies to demystify cultural images that reproduce stigmas experienced first-hand by sex working mothers. It was crucial for me to explore these methodologies individually, to best provide my own rationale behind bridging these perspectives together. This chapter acts as an extension of these debates, and provides further details regarding i) the recruitment and interview processes of my project; ii) the procedures involved in analyzing and distributing my findings; iii) the use of reflexivity and recognizing my own social location as the sole researcher; iv) the importance of recognizing my emotional location and reflections throughout the project; v) the methodological challenges that this study encountered and the changes I would make in the future to address these challenges; as well as the vi) research limitations I faced. This chapter also provides vii) a brief introduction to each womxn who participated in this study, while highlighting my experiences recruiting, corresponding with, and interviewing each participant individually. A thorough summary and reflection of the effectiveness of the exhibits displaying the findings of this research will be discussed later in a chapter of its own, “Chapter Eight: Exhibit Endeavors and Reflections.”

i) Recruitment and Interview Processes

To adequately conduct this small qualitative study, this project focused on the experiences of 14 womxn in Canada who identify as both mothers and sex workers. By focusing on a limited number of womxn, this research was able to address each womxn’s narrated experiences, focusing on the quality of the data being collected as opposed to the quantity of participants being studied. Further, by focusing on a limited number of participants, each womxn’s autophotographic contributions were showcased in my exhibit, as opposed to only

prioritizing a select few. To uphold the aims of my research, this study welcomed the participation of womxn of all ages, social classes, citizenship status, racial backgrounds, and ethnicities who either currently navigate, or had previously navigated, the roles of mothering and sex work in Canada simultaneously.

Motivated by the goals of feminist methodologies and the benefits associated with the incorporation of autophotography and photo-elicitation interviews as a means of stigma resistance, the data collection for this research consisted of multiple phases. First, to establish initial connections with potential research participants, I reached out to a few sex workers I have met previously from being involved with Maggie's and POWER.¹² Following this, I also heavily relied on the use of online sex worker forums and message boards (such as Reddit), social media platforms including Twitter, and snowball sampling to promote my recruitment and establish further connections with potential participants (Appendix B).

Prior to each interview, participants received an invitation to participate (Appendix C) highlighting the purpose of the study, their involvement in the research, their rights as participants, and the potential benefits and risks associated with participating. In addition, each womxn received a copy of the consent form (Appendix D) prior to the time of the interview, providing those interested with information about what their consent would entail. Participants also received nine suggested prompts to assist them in their practice of autophotography prior to our interview (Appendix E) and were encouraged to capture 4-10 images they felt were

¹² Maggie's and POWER are both *by and for sex worker* support organizations in Canada. As of July 2022, POWER disbanded and reallocated their resources to other Canadian-based sex worker organizations.

necessary for the project's findings.¹³ If after reviewing these documents participants still expressed interest in my project, each participant was given time to capture their images they would like the interviews to be based on, and were provided the opportunity to choose the time, date, and format of their interview (phone-call or video-calling). Participants were also encouraged to edit these photos to their liking prior to our scheduled interview, such as applying filters, text, cropping the images, or adjusting the image itself. For those unfamiliar with editing platforms, they could request I edit their images on their behalf, receiving approval for these edits prior to including their edited images in my data collection. These practices strengthened my approach to confidentiality, as participants were highly aware of the personal details they wished to be excluded from each photo, granting participants greater agency in their photographic narratives.

Each interview was semi-structured, audio recorded, and focused on discussing the symbolic representations and narrated experiences captured in each photograph participants contributed to the project-- coming to a common understanding of the context behind the meanings, experiences, and feelings being conveyed (Glaw et al. 2017). At the beginning of each interview, participants emailed me the images they wanted to incorporate into this project, in the order they preferred. Interviews lasted between 1-2 hours in length, with each interview beginning with a brief explanation of the study itself, and addressing any comments or concerns expressed by the participant. In addition, each participant was informed that, when indicated, they may "share information [kept] 'off the record'" (Creswell 2013:174). The interviews then

¹³ Although each participant's participation varied, each womxn provided an average of 3-7 photographs to the project's data collection, capturing their daily routines and surroundings through images and providing visual insight into their daily lives to address the project's overarching research questions

began with participants briefly introducing themselves, followed by unstructured discussions on the photos participants selected to provide further context on this visual data. In these interviews, I also requested feedback on the suggested prompts I had provided, and asked whether participants came up with prompts of their own instead. By offering the option for interviews to take place via telephone or video-calling, I was able to broaden my scope nation-wide and overcome some of the challenges associated with conducting in-person research during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants received \$50 compensation via e-transfer for participating in this study, which was sent to them at the beginning of our interview.

ii) Data Analysis and Distribution of Findings

Once all data was collected, transcripts and photographs underwent extensive measures to enhance the confidentiality of all participants and any subjects they referenced. Participants' transcripts and edited images were then sent to them for approval before their data entered the data analysis stages. Member-checking was an essential component to prioritize in this project, providing participants with additional opportunities to validate confidentiality measures and granting participants greater agency over what data they wanted to be included in the project's findings. Participants were given fourteen days to voluntarily member-check their transcribed data, after it had been sent to them. Only one participant decided to engage in member-checking, with others expressing interest but providing no feedback upon follow-up.

After the fourteen days participants had to review and approve their respective transcripts and censored images, I then pursued an intersectional and reflexive analysis process guided by feminist epistemologies (Smith 1999; Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Sprague 2016). Although intersectionality does not inform *all* feminist methodological approaches to research, intersectionality acts as a valuable theoretical and methodological tool informing many feminist

methodological approaches—presenting “opportunities and biases in knowledge” (Sprague 2016: 61) that are capable of challenging conventional approaches to research. Catering to a broader feminist agenda, intersectional scholarship can also assist feminist methodological approaches in addressing the gaps in knowledge present in various intersecting positions of power and inequality throughout the research processes (Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Lykke 2010). To further address said biases, I also engaged in varied practices of reflexivity throughout the research process.

Adopting some of the approaches outlined in Doucet and Mauthner’s (2008) ‘Listening Guide,’ the coding of my transcripts and photographs began with a relational and reflexive reading, tracing my participants’ story lines and drawing attention to my own reflexivity when analyzing this data. In doing so, I constructed a worksheet listing participants’ responses in one column, images in another column, and dedicating a third column to highlighting my initial responses as the researcher to each narrative and photograph. Being conscious of my own biases and reactions I have to the data collected enabled me to fully “examine how and where some of [my] own assumptions and views... might affect [my] interpretation” (p. 405) of the data and presentation of the participants overall. These reflections also include acknowledging my social and emotional location during every stage of the research process. Following this, I conducted a reading focused on how each subject spoke about themselves and their positions within their social world. To do so, this reading focused on the active ‘I’ throughout my participants’ narrated experiences, drawing attention to the subject’s presence throughout their transcript and within the images themselves. The most powerful aspect of this approach is that such a reading acts as a reminder to the researcher “to listen to how narrators speak about themselves before we speak of them” (Brown and Gilligan 1992:27-8; cited in Doucet and Mauthner 2008:406). This,

in turn, recognizes the ways in which the subjects perceive and present themselves within their own narrations.

My final reading of the data, which the Listening Guide (Doucet and Mauthner 2008) refers to as a “reading for structured subjects” (p. 406), focused on the role that social structures and dominant ideologies play in framing my participant’s narratives. Guided by selected previous scholarship focusing on mothering, sex work, and navigating paid work and unpaid care, this reading provides me the unique opportunity to expand these micro-level narratives into the larger “web of narratives” (p. 407) and to make sense of the individual narratives within macro-level contexts. This reading also plays a crucial role in this study, acting as a primary avenue for these narratives to relate to broader discussions, such as gender and class inequalities, especially through an intersectional lens. After following the listening guide, all narrated experiences and images were compared exhaustively. From here, I drew upon common themes present in the visual and verbal data collected, analyzing these themes with the support of existing literature on sex work, mothering, feminist political economy, and stigma.

Since the combination of feminist and visual methodologies hold the capacity of co-constructing destigmatizing knowledges, this project prioritized the accessibility and availability of data findings. My priority was ensuring that the findings would be accessible to sex workers specifically. This dissertation, once uploaded to Carleton University’s Dissertation depository, will also be shared with various sex worker grassroots organizations to upload onto their own research depositories. As this project also attempts to demystify cultural images that reproduce stigmas surrounding sex work and broader social inequalities, I prioritized making the findings of this research accessible to participants and the general population through hosting fundraising exhibits. My experiences organizing and hosting these exhibits play a central role in evaluating

the effectiveness of hosting public exhibits for destigmatizing research more broadly and are explained in greater detail in “Chapter Eight: Exhibit Endeavors and Reflections.”

Chronicles of the Researcher

iii) Use of Reflexivity and Social Location

While the data collection process plays a key role in upholding the values of feminist methodologies, “reflexivity has come to be regarded as one of the pivotal themes in discussions of feminist research” (Doucet and Mauthner 2006:41). Insisting that knowledge about womxn “must begin in women’s ‘everyday/every night’ world” (Smith 1999:5; cited in Doucet and Mauthner 2006:37) and is typically “concerned with issues of broader social change and social justice” (p. 40), many draw attention to how their “social location shapes his or her identity, experiences, and perspectives” (Gubrium and Holstein 2001:203), which in turn, influences the processes of research. To account for this influence, researchers are often expected to take their own race, ethnicity, class, sex, age, abilities/disabilities, and sexual orientation into account, acknowledging their social location as part of the research encounter. In doing so, researchers can reflect upon the types of knowledge being produced and address potential reasonings behind the data they have (or have not) collected (Sanders 2006).

As a cis-gender, white, heterosexual, working-class graduate student with full Canadian citizenship, I am conscious of the privileges I have. Despite my invisible physical and mental disabilities, I have had limited experiences of discrimination granted my social position. Growing up in a devout Christian household, I was raised to characterize promiscuous behaviour as nothing short of sin – sex was for marriage, sexuality was private, showing cleavage was sleazy, and wearing short shorts was a public display of immorality. Like many, I was conditioned to believe sex workers were individuals who got involved with the wrong crowd

wanted to make some quick money, used their means to purchase drugs or alcohol and had little respect for themselves and their families. My previous, less informed perspective had me perceiving sex work as antithetical to working hard, being educated, and establishing a respectable reputation. My family, school, church, and mainstream media instilled these values into me, in addition to the ideals associated with dominant ideologies of capitalist work ethic and economic success (see Weber 2001).

I never questioned my adolescent beliefs; frankly, I didn't even know you could. I was ignorant of the repercussions of these ideologies, which was likely the agenda upheld by my religious education. Yet, there were so many teachings that contradicted each other, which made it difficult to understand how to be a good Christian. For example, the conservative Catholic Church interprets *1 Corinthians 6:13* as expressing disapproval of engaging in premarital sex, queer sex, and sex work (see also Browne 2014): "the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." In the story *Jesus and the Adulterous Woman* (John 7:53-8:11), however, Jesus addresses the crowd shaming the womxn by saying "let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Despite being taught that immodesty and lust are some of the biggest sins, however, we are also taught to "judge not, lest you be judged" (Matthew 7:1). These paradoxical teachings never made much sense to me, *but what good, Christian girl, dares to question the 'Almighty' Word of God?*

Fortunately, as I grew older, I questioned all the bullshit I had been fed by my religious upbringing for 18+ years. I started to evolve and develop my own morals, ethics, values, and beliefs, valuing my own critical thinking and empathetic outlooks on life. From there, my journey into inclusive feminism began, and my curiosity about the sex work industry and sex worker rights more broadly became central to my efforts in academia and beyond.

iv) *'Emotional Location' and Personal Reflections*

When constructing my research proposal, I was keen on outlining a rigorous timeline to complete my interviews and finish my dissertation by my fourth year. Although my original timeline to complete my project was tight, it seemed manageable at the time. *I've put myself on tight deadlines before, what could possibly go wrong? Surely, I'll be able to push through any challenges to meet these due dates. That's just what grad school is!* Life, however, presents us with challenges and hardships that we never expect to face. It was with this mindset that I quickly learned the importance of separating dominant ideologies of capitalist work ethic from that of producing effective, empathetic research.

My project first received REB clearance the day before Russia invaded Ukraine (Appendix A). I spent hours online reading how the invasion was impacting civilians (including Ukrainian sex workers) and ways I could support those seeking refuge or in need of resources. My social media feeds were filled with news articles, first-hand experiences, and efforts implemented to financially support Ukrainians. Although my project was set to begin recruitment efforts, all I could think was *how could I occupy space on these platforms during such a critical time?* It was truly a no brainer to prioritize my attention to supporting Ukraine over that of the timeline I had set out for myself. I could not fathom putting my needs as a student to complete this project over that of those who are experiencing the beginning of this war.

As we neared March 3rd, International Sex Workers Rights Day, I started to consider how my project could contribute to the ongoing fight for decriminalization and destigmatization more broadly. It seemed like a necessary window for me to draw attention to my project and begin recruiting sex workers to partake in this study. I became excited again for the ways in which I

could make an impact on my own community. I had the support of some of my closest friends, and I felt ready to take on the emotional labour involved in pursuit of this project. My recruitment tweets were drafted and ready to make public; all I had to do was click on that big blue button '*Tweet*'. But just as I gained the courage to do so, I received an unexpected text informing me that one of my closest friends, Sheena, had unexpectedly passed away.

Sheena was the brightest and most creative person I had ever met. She was loyal, she was kind, she was trustworthy, and in so many ways she was an old soul. She was one of the few people I have met who never let me question my worth. She knew all my secrets and all my passwords. She supported me through everything. She brought laughter into my life during the most stressful and difficult moments. She was courageous and had the ability to make every single person in her life feel special. My words cannot convey just how amazing she was. Sheena was the person we all aspire to be.

I had the privilege of doing my Master's Degree with Sheena, which consisted of many late night work sessions and hours on end rooting each other on. We spent many afternoons in our office, at Mahtay Cafe, or at Merchant Ale House where we'd be working away at our theses over a pint of blueberry beer (of course). If we needed a serotonin boost, we would make the drive out to The Watering Can, a little café nestled into the most serene nursery, to sip on lattes and just talk about life—excluding the chaos of graduate school. After the most stressful of presentations and conferences, we would celebrate our perseverance by spending endless hours playing Rack-O (arguably the greatest card game to exist) and sharing a few cans of our favourite local cider, Rood Apples. On days that I missed her presence most, I would take the bus down to Lock Street Brewery in Port Dalhousie just to work on my thesis while she worked behind the bar. She mastered the ability to work hard but play harder. I cherished her company,

the memories we shared, and the feisty Scorpio that she was. Our friendship had a profound impact on who I am today and losing her has been the most difficult thing I have ever faced.

Grief has taken its toll on me. For the past few months, I've been in a constant state of being in survivor mode, yet rarely feeling like I'm surviving. Grief is all encompassing. It numbs you. It shocks you. It isolates you. It makes you feel afraid. For months, I've felt the anxiety of losing somebody else unexpectedly. Whenever my parents left the house to drive to the grocery store or one of my friends fell sick, all I could think of was the possibility of losing them. Yet, grief kept me in a fog, which prohibited me from having the capacity to connect to the people I feared losing most. I could barely maintain conversations with my Dad sitting across from me at the kitchen table. I struggled responding to friends who were reaching out to check in on me. My emotions would uncontrollably spill out of me just walking to and from our mailbox. While riding these emotions, those very recruitment tweets sitting in my draft folder were taunting me to 'do better'. The guilt of not doing research, of not being 'productive', amplified my inability to care of myself and focus on adjusting to a new world, my new reality, absent of Sheena's kind soul.

During this adjustment period, I tried to push myself to get back on track and relieve myself from some of the built-up guilt I had for putting my research aside entirely. I reached out to some previous womxn I had interviewed for my Masters project and ended up conducting two separate interviews. Needless to say, these interactions did not go well. As a researcher, I was distant and spacey. At times, it almost seemed like I wasn't even part of the conversation. My emotional capacity was cloudy; I lacked the ability to express empathy, support, and care in ways I intended to. It was evident-- even to my participants-- I was not in a state where I could focus on anything but mourning. I was trying to conduct qualitative research, but the quality of

my role as the researcher was lacking. I was not the same researcher these womxn had come to know just three years ago. Fortunately for me, these womxn were kind, compassionate, empathetic, and caring, allowing me to postpone the rest of our interviews to a later date to encourage me to focus on my healing. Despite my grief impacting my ability to conduct this research, it has left me with one of the most valuable lessons—just as qualitative, feminist researchers want to acknowledge each participant as a multi-faceted individual with their own experiences, we as scholars must also recognize our own individuality, and how our emotional well-being influences our connections with participants in the overall production of knowledge.

As feminist scholars, we are encouraged to reflect on our social location to recognize how our race, ethnicity, class, sex, age, gender, abilities/disabilities, and sexual orientation plays a role in the overall research process (Doucet 2008; Sprague 2016; Harding 2018). *But what about our emotional location? Does a researcher's emotional capacity not influence their ability to be empathetic, present, caring, or supportive towards their research participants? How does a researcher's emotional and mental health influence their capacity in conducting effective or critical research? How do our emotions influence our own performance as researchers?*

Emotions are dynamic and constantly changing—profoundly influencing our behavior, well-being and how we interpret our daily interactions. Emotions can be both effective and detrimental, productive, and counterproductive. Emotions can influence our ability to connect with others within and outside our communities. Emotions can even alter how we respond to those we are most comfortable with. Researchers aren't stoic; we are human beings with our own personal hardships, intertwined and influencing our academic endeavors. *So why don't more feminist scholars encourage researchers to reflect on our emotional spaces throughout the research process, when needed?*

Do I think every researcher, every project, and every emotion should be taken into consideration throughout the reflexivity process? No, of course not. There is such a thing as being *too* reflexive (Sprague 2016). But for scholars who find their emotions influencing their interactions with research participants or interfering with the quality of their work as a researcher, reflexivity of their emotional/ mental capacity is essential. For myself, separating my emotions and personal troubles from that of my research was just not possible. My life altered the course of the project and affected my capacity to engage in emotional labour. Research never goes according to plan, and neither does life. When those two intertwine, it's useful to dissect the influence they have on one another.

v) Methodological Challenges and Proposed Solutions

I was fortunate to receive an overwhelming supportive response from the sex work community when I initially shared my research online, receiving dozens of encouraging messages and expressions of interest in supporting the project's fundraising exhibits. To receive this amount of support felt incredible as a self-funded endeavor, helping alleviate some of the imposter syndrome I had been facing as a graduate student. My elation, however, quickly dissolved as trolls, impersonators, sexually suggestive messages and images began to flood my inbox to harass me and take advantage of the project's financial compensation.

On three separate occasions, individuals falsely claimed they were eligible for this project, and received the \$50 compensation that should have been allocated to sex workers or the organizations my exhibits aimed to support. The first individual sent me their photos and spoke with me for 40 minutes about the images they had shared. Not only were they unaware of what sex work really is, but they had no understanding of how sex work was governed in Canada. I of course had some doubts, but I did not want to invalidate this individuals' narrated experience or

question the legitimacy of what their story entailed. *My approach to this project was to remain empathetic, so how could I uphold those goals if I questioned an individual's responses?* At the end of the interview, they had accepted the e-transfer and then disclosed that being a sex worker was sinful, “*disgusting*” and that they “*could never, would never*” stoop to the level of selling their body for sex, calling me and everyone involved in this project “*stupid whores.*”

Following this, I had a similar incident with an impersonator who claimed racism did not exist and provided images that were all taken in a different country. This individual disclosed that they had not been to Canada after receiving the compensation, despite clearly agreeing to all eligibility requirements for the project multiple times. This individual also created a few more false email accounts, harassing me to allow them to participate, signing off each email with their original email account's name, and copying and pasting their interest in participating for each email. Aware of the similarities between their messages, I simply responded by saying all participants had been recruited for the study but that I would be happy to send them exhibit information and any publications if they wished to follow the project.

Finally, the third participant had sent me images, confirmed their eligibility, accepted the e-transfer upon consenting to the project, but as we began the interview over Zoom, turned on the camera to reveal themselves as a cis-man, masturbating on camera while making vulgar comments towards me. I immediately ended the video call, blocked their account, as well as all other email addresses and Twitter profiles that had sent me sexually explicit messages. Again, however, this project was left with \$50 less out of my pocket that could have gone towards recruiting participants and hosting the fundraising exhibits.

Within a span of just a few days, the support my project had received from the sex work community had become tainted by my interactions with these imposters. I had to cope with the

emotional repercussions affiliated with the hate, stigmatization, and sexual harassment I had experienced first-hand *as a researcher*—let alone, a researcher who entrusted these individuals with my own involvement in the industry. I felt ashamed for having been put in that position on multiple accounts and questioned whether I should even mention these experiences in my dissertation. At times, I even considered taking a break from my interviews, brainstorming alternative approaches to conducting this research altogether. I was left questioning-- *is this an issue other sex work researchers experience, but prefer not to disclose? Or is it just me?*

To continue working on this project, I had to constantly remind myself that only a small handful of individuals, out of hundreds, had seen me and this project as something worth exploiting. I couldn't rely on family to seek comfort or advice, as I knew I'd be met with the response of "*what else did you expect studying this topic?*".

Following these incidents, I had to take time away from my work and regain the confidence to jump back into my data collection. I blocked DM's and emails that appeared suspicious or were inappropriate, muting all notifications on my computer to help grant me a bit more space away from my work. I allowed myself to be more selective of potential participants, as I feared the goals of this project might become compromised if I continued to lose funds. I tried to view these incidents as clear indicators as to why my research was so critical to pursue and remind myself that whatever repercussions may come from this were beyond my control. None of these solutions were easy, but what else was I to do? Up until this point, I had no direction or preparation on how to approach online trolling and sexual harassment as a researcher. *Isn't it ironic how the research ethics board was so concerned with my well-being interacting with sex workers, but not the interactions I'd experience with online hate, sexual harassment and dealing with sex worker exclusionary radical feminists (SWERFS)?* If only the

Research Ethics Boards would address their own stigmatic assumptions about sex work to acknowledge the actual risks researchers are exposed to by those perpetuating the violence onto the sex work industry to best prepare and protect their research community.

Notable tensions I encountered pursuing this research include my obligation to comply with Carleton University's research ethics boards and their proceedings, prioritizing participant's agency and wishes for this collaborative research project, while also confronting the concerns raised by my committee in terms of incorporating additional censorship to the images participants provided. The REB requires graduate students to follow strict guidelines and utilize specifically worded consent forms when conducting research within the social sciences—including a statement that indicates my obligation as the researcher “to report any potential instances of child abuse or neglect to legal authorities, which in turn, would breach measures of confidentiality” (refer to Appendix C and D). Breaching confidentiality, however, positions research subjects and their families at potential risk, counterproductive to establishing trust with participants. As a graduate student, I obtained little political power in refuting these guidelines put forth by the REB and attempted to only retain anonymized data to mitigate potential consequences. For future research endeavours, however, I intend to confront and challenge the ethics board on the risks inherent in relying on these rigid consent forms, ensuring to omit any potential opportunities where my data collection could be used as ‘evidence’ to legal authorities.

Secondly was the tension I faced between prioritizing participants (and non-participants) safety and anonymity, while also trying to respect their agency as sex workers to submit more identifiable images for this research. Most participants who were face out requested their images not undergo additional censorship—wanting to challenge the stigmas of sex work directly and not demonstrate any shame for their navigation of sex work and motherhood. I completely

empathized with participants and wanted to respect their agency as sex working mothers. However, given participants submitted images and collages that included photographs of other family members, friends, and colleagues who did not formally consent to their images being included in this project, these images required additional censorship to protect non-participants' identities—even if participants affirmed this was not necessary. Fortunately, my committee and examiners provided ample advice on how to navigate these tensions and adapt images to comply with my obligations as a researcher at my defence, while not compromising my intent of producing co-constructed, destigmatizing knowledges with research participants. In pursuit of future participatory action research, I will ensure to prioritize collaboration with scholars and researchers in navigating these tensions and ensuring that my ethics application best reflects my intent of protecting research subjects, and non-participants, from all potential risks.

vi) Research Limitations

This research encountered several limitations, including my sample size, which was primarily influenced by my capacity to offer adequate compensation to each participant out of pocket, and further impacted by the three occasions where compensation was awarded to individuals who lied about their eligibility. Further, none of my participants identified as being Indigenous, transgender, or were parents via adoption. Although having fewer participants did limit the scope of this project, I felt confident that my sample size would still be credible, as it enabled me to engage more critically and more deeply with each participant's unique narrated experiences, and provide more context to each participants' circumstances, especially within the physical constraints of my fundraising exhibits.

My finances also reduced how many exhibits I could host out of pocket, as the printing fees were costly, and it was difficult to secure free, accessible spaces that were available during

the Winter and Summer terms. This is something I struggled with the most— it was my intention to host multiple exhibits to maximize my fundraising efforts and use public spaces to share the co-constructed knowledges. Limiting the number of exhibits meant I was limiting the project's bandwidth; but without adequate funding, I had to be realistic about my own financial limitations as a graduate student, especially at an institution that clawed back 15% of our wages in retaliation for TAs exercising their legal right to strike. Having only hosted one exhibit, I collected fewer anonymous responses than I hoped to collect, hindering my ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the exhibit itself. The limitations my exhibits faced are explained in greater detail in "Chapter Eight: Exhibit Endeavors and Reflections."

vii) Meet the Participants

Liz, Victoria, Sarah, Jamie, Kyra, Kathryn, Kacy, Alina, Natalie, JJ, Marie, Stacey, Julie & Zara

My very first interview was with Liz, a 36-year-old Black full-service sex worker living in Montreal, who had been working in the sex industry for 14 years. Liz was beyond kind and patient with me as I navigated the nerves of beginning a new project amid grief, allowing me to step back a bit from our initial interview to regroup my focus and prioritize my mental health. When we had a follow-up interview, Liz shared her own experiences of having to prioritize her well-being while engaging in emotional labour, sharing "*a lot of sex workers take periods of time off because we can't pour from an empty cup; life happens, and we just need a moment to digest it all.*" Liz first became a stripper to help pay her way through her journalism degree, and shortly after began working for an agency as an escort in Montreal. She currently earns a living as an independent escort and relies on freelance writing during "*quiet months*", working out of a studio apartment she rents specifically as an office space for both forms of paid work. Her daughter, Macy, lives with her and her partner, Jason, who has become a key support and primary father

figure in Macy's life. Liz was particularly interested in participating in this project to showcase how, despite misconceptions, sex workers can maintain monogamous, loyal relationships, and how "*truly mundane and normal*" her life really is. Liz's narrative plays a key role in producing destigmatizing knowledge, as her contributions aim to show that "*you can't pick us out in a crowd, and even if you can, you can never really judge a book by its cover*".

My next two interviews were with Victoria and Sarah, two sex workers that previously participated in my master's thesis, which focused on the experiences of strippers navigating the demands of motherhood. Victoria, now a 26-year-old single mother to her daughter, Ivy, lives in the GTA and shares an apartment with her mother Sandra, who helps Victoria co-parent her daughter. At the age of fifteen, like her mother, Victoria got pregnant and was faced with raising a child without the support of her child's father. When Sandra was raising Victoria, her own mother stepped in to help raise Victoria, while Sandra worked two to three jobs at a time to make financial ends meet. When Victoria had Ivy, Sandra stepped in just as her own mother did, allowing Victoria to graduate from college. Spending little time at home with Ivy, Victoria decided to apply to a strip club as a dancer and continue her studies online. Once graduated, Victoria began working in healthcare, and continued to work a few shifts a month at the club to help save up for a new car. When the pandemic hit, Victoria was both grateful she could continue to work, yet was also overwhelmed with under-staffing and social distancing from her family. Once clubs re-opened and Victoria felt safe to return to her part-time work, Victoria went back to stripping on evenings and weekends, using this income to maximize her savings. Due to the upcoming recession and earning fewer tips at the club, Victoria is debating taking a break from her 5-year long career stripping and investing that time into making content and selling it online, which may also involve the decision to become face-out as a sex worker. As she

considers the consequences and impact of this decision, her contributions to this project illustrate why it is difficult for sex working mothers to be out as sex workers, despite receiving acceptance from her mother and daughter in engaging in this work.

It was so lovely to chat with Sarah again, and we began our interview playing catch-up with one another, filling in the details as to how life has been since we last spoke three years ago. Sarah, a 30-year-old mother to her daughter, Isabel, has been a face-out stripper since she was eighteen years old. Sarah met Isabel's father, Andrew, at the first club she worked at as a stripper. Although they never were in an exclusive relationship, Sarah and Andrew decided to keep their daughter and have worked out a healthy co-parenting schedule, where Sarah has Isabel during the week and Andrew takes care of Isabel on the weekends. Although Andrew helps as much as he can, as well as Sarah's partner Cam, Sarah identifies herself as the primary caregiver for Isabel, and says she takes on the bulk of the domestic work.

Sarah and Andrew have maintained a strong friendship, attending Isabel's extracurricular activities together, and have arranged all the financial responsibilities and custody schedule outside of the legal system. When explaining their family dynamic, Sarah shared:

She always comes first. We will always show up for whatever soccer practice or ballet recital she has. And #2, we always reassure her that she comes first... You know, we are upfront with her about what her week will look like. Who picks her up after school, who will be there on the sidelines for her... Whenever we can, we let her choose who she's with, where she's staying... We aren't the ones going back and forth from house to house, she is. So she gets as much say in that as possible... That's what we, as her team of parents, represent."



As her paid labouring environment was impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns, Sarah supplemented her income working a “civvy”¹⁴ 9-5 work from home job in addition to camming and selling nudes to regular clientele. Over the past year or so, Sarah has continued to navigate her ‘civvy’ job part-time, in addition to stripping, to avoid the stress of not being able to earn a stable living if COVID-19 restrictions were put back into place. Sarah was particularly interested in being a part of this project to reflect on how her life has changed since we last spoke, while also showcasing the pride she has in being a good mother, one who *“always find[s] a way to make life work, against all odds.”*

Jamie and I became Reddit acquaintances at the beginning of the pandemic, where we brainstormed ways Canadian sex workers could shift some of their services online and gave advice to those unfamiliar with how to gain a following without getting banned from social media platforms. Jamie, a 23-year-old mother to her son Jack, began working as a cam girl a few months after her son was born. An avid gamer, Jamie initially used Twitch to stream herself

¹⁴ This term was commonly used by participants to refer to mainstream, legal forms of paid work.

playing video games as a hobby, to supplement her income and to help cope with her postpartum depression— quickly realizing her revenue increased significantly any time she wore more revealing clothing and flirted with her audience. As a single, teen parent and part-time student with no access to affordable childcare, Jamie saw the economic value affiliated with camming and began streaming any chance she could, in addition to producing nude content for her OnlyFans followers. A former victim of revenge porn as a minor, Jamie stresses that her experiences as a sex worker have been empowering: *“now I’m the one posting these images. I’m the one in control. I’m consenting to it... And I’m the one reaping the benefits of it because it’s paying our bills... It’s my choice, so go ahead, call me a whore. You called me one when I was a minor, a victim, how could calling me that hurt me now?”*

Kyra, 28-years-old, also works as an online sex worker by selling self-produced content; however, she is not face-out in her work. Maintaining her OnlyFans account a secret from everyone in her personal life, Kyra began producing content after she lost her job in retail and was navigating a recent separation from her son’s father, Simon. Since EI barely covered the rent of her new apartment, and she was now having to adjust to one income opposed to two, Kyra struggled to find full-time work that would cover the costs of childcare, rent, utilities, necessities, and transportation. Curious whether she could make any money on the website, Kyra made an OnlyFans account and promoted herself to potential subscribers via a corresponding Twitter profile. Knowing very little about sex work other than her own accounts, Kyra asked we meet multiple times after the interview so she could gain more insight on the community itself and learn more about the resources grassroots organizations can offer her and Simon. We spoke openly about the shame we’ve experienced asking for help, accessing food banks, and at times, the internalized stigma affiliated with survival sex work. Although she struggles to earn enough

income to cover the costs of all their needs, online sex work and the support of Maggie's Toronto have enabled Kyra to overcome some of the gaps in resources readily accessible to single, unemployed parents.

I met with Kathryn in late August on a rainy, cold day and within just a few moments of talking to one another, I felt her immediate warmth and maternal kindness. Kathryn, age 37, has worked openly in the sex work industry for almost two decades, identifying with a variety of jobs within the industry: stripping, sugaring, a professional girlfriend, a retired Madam and at the time of our interview, an independent escort in Ottawa. Kathryn has a son, Alex, who she shares with her ex-partner Cory and has established a healthy and active co-parenting relationship with her son's stepmother, Kelly. Throughout the pandemic, Kathryn also worked at a safe injection site, where she coupled her own lived experiences as an addict in recovery for the past four years, along with her innate desire to help others in her community. Kathryn's partner Jesse supports her choice to pursue sex work and cares deeply about establishing a strong relationship with her son, Alex. Eloquently put by Kathryn herself, "*children can never have too many people who love them.*" Her invaluable insights are essential in this project's exploration of how co-parenting relationships can have a healthy impact on children's well-being, and the navigation of unpaid care and paid work more broadly.

Kacy and I met over Zoom shortly after connecting on Twitter and instantly bonded. Our Zoom call lasted 3 hours, going off-topic several times, which we blamed, in part, on being over-caffeinated and at times feeling disconnected from the sex work community itself. Kacy is 36 years old, married, and a mother to two children: Zack and Becca. Kacy and her family currently reside in the GTA region, where she has worked as an in-call, face-in dominatrix out of her dungeon, for the past 13 years. During our call, Kacy gave me a tour of her exquisite "*home*

office” and shared all the perks she experiences from working from home: having a work environment she feels comfortable in, having lunches at home with her kids, having access to heightened security measures and having more flexibility in navigating her work/life balance. Kacy’s *dungeon* is something she is extremely proud of as this space is not only representative of the financial security, she has been able to provide for her family, but more importantly, represents her paid work as being just as valued as her husband, Darian’s, who also has his own work-from-home office space. Kacy stresses that she comes from a very privileged position within the industry itself as a white, cis womxn earning around \$140k per year, yet she continues to experience the “*stickiness of stigma*” on a personal level— “*we’ve learned that friends and family just don’t accept this, and frankly, there’s just nothing we can do about that. But if your child is able to work independently, support her family, purchase a fucking home in Toronto and is happy, why the fuck would you look down on them?*” Raising their children in a very open, judgment-free household continues to be a priority for Kacy and Darian, where they want to reassure their children that no matter who they choose to love or what they consent to, they will still be just as loved and cared for as they’ve always been. This was constantly echoed throughout our call, and a reoccurring empathetic approach to parenting amongst all participants.

My next interview was with Alina. We began our interview with an open conversation about what this project entailed, as she wanted to ensure that participating in this research would not compromise the safety and well-being of herself and her daughter. Right from the beginning, safety was a primary concern. Having moved to Canada only a few months ago from Ukraine with refugee status, Alina and her daughter Ella currently reside in Southern Ontario, with all their relatives including her husband still living in Eastern Europe. Coping with the aftermath of trauma and all the changes that have occurred over these past 4 months, Ella struggles to be

without her mother for long periods of time, so finding employment has been difficult for Alina. Not wanting to abandon her daughter while at a traditional 9-5 job yet needing to support herself, her daughter, and her family abroad, Alina currently works as a street sex worker when she is able to secure brief periods of childcare. Alina has only been working in the industry for a few months, and fears that she may get deported or face legal consequences should anyone find out how she is financially supporting her family. Given her circumstances, Alina stresses that sex work was a choice she made, but only because she had so few options available. As she puts it *“any mother would do whatever they could to protect their children and support them, even if that makes them unhappy, right? Children always come first, and my entire family makes sacrifices to make sure [their children] will be okay.”* Her experiences are pivotal in understanding how criminalization and stigmatization surrounding sex work further marginalize migrant sex workers and broader vulnerable populations, and sheds light on the importance of implementing better supports for families seeking refuge in Canada.

Natalie is a 34-year-old, mostly face-out, white, cis, and queer Ottawa-based escort with 11 years’ experience in the industry. When Natalie and her partner Sam became pregnant with her daughter, Nellie, and she continued working as an escort until she was 8 ½ months pregnant, self-funding her 18 month long maternity leave. In addition to escorting, Natalie supplemented her income during the pandemic by self-producing online content for her regular clients. Now working as a therapist, primarily with sex workers, Natalie stresses *“being a sex worker doesn’t foreclose the possibility of being a good mother.”* The fruitful conversations Natalie contributed to this project are truly pivotal in addressing whorephobia and patriarchy more broadly, shedding light on how being well-resourced plays a crucial role in navigating stigma *“head-on”*.

I had such a lovely conversation with my next participant, J.J., who joined our video-call

from their favourite cozy café, on a very gloomy and rainy Tuesday. J.J. is Punjabi-Guyanese and identifies as a disabled, non-binary sex worker in the Greater Toronto Area, who has “*pretty much done everything*” when it comes to working in the industry. While pregnant with daughter Elsa, J.J. experienced the violence of being outed, which had lasting consequences on their career, finances, emotional and mental well-being, and fears of losing their daughter. As a direct result, J.J. lost years of their labour, including podcasts, photos, and videos, to provide themselves with immediate protection from legal consequences. Recognizing the need for further supports to be in place for sex workers, especially sex working parents, J.J. has dedicated themselves to playing an active role in Canadian sex worker advocacy. J.J. is the epitome of an empathetic, community-focused, compassionate human being—ensuring that they recognize the complex and intersectional experiences of all sex workers in their advocacy work. This commitment is also echoed in J.J.’s approach to raising Elsa, prioritizing social justice conversations, teaching Elsa to accept others, including herself, and identifying the harms of fascism, in an age-appropriate fashion.

My next participant, Marie, is 35 years old and now works as a full-time escort based out of Saskatchewan for the past year or so and is out on a selective basis. Marie worked part-time as an escort for several years, while also assuming her “*civvy job*” and made the financial decision to put her full attention towards escorting, as she was making more income as an escort and preferred the flexibility associated with working as an independent contractor. This flexibility also granted her more time to spend with her daughter, Lydia, and continue her post-secondary studies. Since ending her relationship with Lydia’s biological father, Marie has re-partnered with Peter, who has a strong relationship with her daughter and helps take care of Lydia while Marie is away on work trips. Marie was interested in combatting stigmas by capturing her own daily

routines with her daughter Lydia, showcasing how sex working parents' home life *"looks just the same as anybody else's"*. Marie was not only gracious enough to spend her Sunday afternoon speaking with me, but also donated her entire compensation towards this project's fundraising initiatives.

Stacey reached out to me with pure enthusiasm for this project, scheduling our interview for the very next day and staying up until 11pm selecting and brainstorming which images she wanted to contribute to the project. Stacey, 32 years old, is in a polyamorous relationship with her partner, Nick. Stacey has been working as an escort on and off for 7 years now, dabbling with online sex work during the peak of the pandemic, and currently resides in the greater Vancouver area with her partner and daughter, Claire. As a polyamorous and bi-racial couple, Stacey and Nick faced a significant amount of criticism from their families, but when Stacey shared that she was an escort, their relationships with their families quickly dissolved. Establishing strong, loving relationships with their friends who accept their relationship dynamic as well as Stacey's occupation has been critical for Stacey and Nick, as she shares *"Our friends who love us no matter what, who teach us that we deserve that kind of love, that's our family. Because they see us for us, and I know they'll always do the same for my daughter. It's about unconditional love, and you know what sometimes that doesn't come from blood. Sometimes it comes from complete strangers, who turn into your idea of what a perfect aunt or uncle would be for your kid."* *"Building community"* and *"living authentically"* is essential for Stacey and Nick in navigating the stigma they have experienced, and Stacey's contributions to this project uphold the message that good parenting is not inherently linked to a mother's consensual sex life, or how a mother earns a living to support her family.

At only 21 years old, Julie is wise beyond her years. I met Julie on Reddit, where she

spends a lot of her time trying to connect with other sugar babies and make connections with womxn in the industry. Julie is a part-time student and a single mother to her son, Matthew, whose father is not involved in his son's life. Julie and Matthew are emotionally and physically supported by her own father, David, who is "*the most kind and accepting man to walk this earth—whenever, wherever I need him, he's there for us.*" Julie began sugaring two years ago, after dating an older man who suggested she should consider earning a living from her companionship. Julie's schooling, rent, and income is primarily supported by two long-term relationships, earning additional income from live camming and OnlyFans. Julie is the only sugar baby who participated in this project, and knowing this, she really wanted to address the stigmas sugar babies experience within the industry, as well as the assumption that "*she's just a gold digger that's being controlled by some old, rich asshole.*" For Julie, sugaring and online sex work provide resources that would be unattainable in any other industry, assisting her in her pursuit of her bachelor's degree, providing stable housing and childcare, securing her independence, and granting her the freedom and flexibility of dictating her own availability throughout the week.

Finally, I met with Zara in early October, a 41-year-old escort and "*sometimes cam-MILF*" who has been in the industry on and off for the past 10 years. She began her career in sex work shortly after her divorce was finalized with her ex-partner and son's father, George, and since, has fully accepted her sexuality as a queer womxn and is open about her involvement in the industry. Seeing the confidence and growth Zara has gained since beginning her career, her teenage son Josh has been extremely accepting of her occupational choice, and often defends her character to his father, who disapproves entirely. As her son nears adulthood, Zara's contributions are unique to this project as her responsibilities as Josh's primary guardian are

“*much less hands on*” than other participants, shed light on how she has approached the topic of work with Josh at various stages of his life, and most importantly, how sex work has offered her family long-term financial security for most of her son’s life. Zara hopes she can showcase to others how empowering sex work has been for her specifically as a queer, divorced and single mother.

Concluding Remarks

Having discussed the methodological approach to my research in the previous chapter, this chapter provided details on the research design of this project, with reference to my experiences and influences as the sole researcher. This chapter summarized the key challenges and limitations affiliated with this project, which serves to enhance and inform future research pursuits, which will be discussed further in “Chapter Nine: Concluding Remarks.” Most importantly, this chapter introduces you to the fourteen womxn who participated in my qualitative study-- whose narratives, lived experiences, and self-captured images aimed to provide further insight into their navigation of mothering, sex work, and stigma in Canada. These images, narratives, interpretations, and analysis of all participants’ contributions to this project will be discussed in the next three chapters to follow.

Chapter Five: Disclosure Dilemmas and Courtesy Stigma

Stigma remains complex and plays a pivotal role in sex workers' navigation of their personal and professional lives, influenced by intersections of race, age, gender, class, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, abilities/ disabilities, and residency status (Koken et al. 2004; Williams and Frederick 2015; Jones 2020). For some of the womxn who participated in this project, stigma was something they had the privilege to mitigate and reduce its impact, while for others, stigma was a primary barrier that impacted their daily lives, personal relationships, and interfered with their ability to access necessary supports, protections, and fundamental services. Having reflected on her own experiences navigating stigma, in connection to other sex workers' experiences she's come across online, Liz shared: *"it's like comparing apples to oranges; you just can't generalize every [sex worker's] experience with stigma and say, 'that's how it is.' That's the difficulty of it; we take a gamble every time we come out to someone. Advice has to be taken with a grain of salt... Even if it's someone we don't see often or know well, like a doctor or my financial advisor. It, it can feel like the end of the world taking that risk."*

Given the variation of experiences of stigma, acceptance, and discrimination for each womxn, this chapter argues that where stigma operates contextually-- influencing these mothers' engagement with and disclosure of their stigmatized paid work, their families' experiences with courtesy stigma (see also Barton 2006), and the structural barriers they face as sex working mothers. Although mothers' disclosure of their engagement in sex work was ultimately linked to the privileges they had, this chapter acknowledges that for even the most privileged participants, stigma and courtesy stigma imposed pervasive effects on their everyday lives. To further explore these claims, this chapter is organized into three distinct discussions, focusing on the intersection of i) stigma and disclosure, highlighting each participant's rationale for being mostly out, out on

a selective basis, remaining “*in the closet*,” or experiences being outed; ii) the impact of courtesy stigma as a deciding factor for disclosure; and finally, iii) examining the structural stigmatic repercussions related to engaging in sex work as mothers. In doing so, this chapter aims to acknowledge how stigma is individually experienced by these womxn, and further, highlights the importance for these womxn to engage with stigma management tactics to best reduce or avoid the repercussions of courtesy stigma, experienced by their children and family members (see also Barton 2006). These findings aim to enhance understandings on how stigma informs, impacts, and penalizes not just sex workers, but sex working mothers specifically (see also Maynard 2017)—a gap in contemporary debates on management tactics and the pervasive effects of whore stigma altogether (see Barton 2006; Koken 2011; Benoit et al. 2019).

Stigma and Disclosure

Disclosing one’s status as a sex worker is often influenced by concerns with the anticipated stigma one may experience (Koken 2011), especially from closest family members. For the womxn in this study, disclosing their status as sex workers was directly linked to the privileges they had, anticipated stigmatic assumptions from disclosing their involvement in the industry, avoidance of racial stereotyping they would experience, potential legal repercussions they may face, in addition to managing the repercussions of having been outed in the past. Given the variation of experiences of stigma, disclosure, acceptance, and discrimination, I incorporate each participant’s individualized narrative to demonstrate that sex workers’ experiences of stigma cannot be homogenized.

‘Mostly Out’

Natalie is “*fairly out*” as a sex worker and a mother, including to her mom, dad, and stepfather who have all been “*very supportive of [her] throughout [her] journey*”. Natalie is also

out as a sex working mother, working throughout her pregnancy, and even celebrating her pregnancy with clients via a virtual baby shower. She is also out in her work as a clinician, providing therapy services to many current and former sex workers. As a licenced psychologist in Ontario, however, it is critical she identifies as being a “*former*” sex worker, despite the stigma the term former carries for the sex work community. She explains:

I don't feel comfortable in terms of my own values and ethics, identifying as a former sex worker in the sense that...now I can access all this privilege now because I'm a 'former' sex worker. So as much as possible, I'm continuing to self-identify as a sex worker and not say current or former... In the world of psychology, where it's very white and conservative and this regulatory body; it's pretty scary. Uh, with them sometimes I'm like, maybe former... but for the most part, I'm just saying, you know, I'm a sex worker and you know, I might mention that I've stopped sex work in 2021.

Identifying as a former sex worker distances Natalie from the stigmas affiliated with sex work, granting her privileges not allotted to current sex workers, as others perceive her engagement in sexualized labour as something of her past. Although crucial for her safety, well-being, and job security as a psychologist, the label of being a former sex worker also contributes to the ongoing stigmas faced by sex workers, allotting value to those who intentionally transition out of the industry, and alleviating the stigmatization select individuals face. This privilege, however, is not afforded to all former sex workers; some still face discrimination and stigmatization for having engaged in sex work, years after transitioning out of the industry (Burgmann 2016).

Kathryn also openly identifies as a sex worker in both her personal and professional life, in addition to being an addict in recovery, using her previous employment on her resume to demonstrate her transferable skills to jobs that prioritize workers with lived experiences. Although limited in terms of who values these skills, due to the stigmatic perceptions of sex work and drug-use more broadly, Kathryn remains committed to work that values her skills, utilizing her own privilege to embrace any opportunity to “*give back*”:

I worked actually downtown at the safe injection site for six months...And um, knowing that you could be an escort, you could put that on your resume. 'Cause they wanna hire people with lived experience, you know? Which is a neat kind of, and different thing... Uh, and I helped run an international ADHD support group on Facebook. And one of my Co-admins said she would definitely hire me considering the experiences I've had running an agency and working at the safe injection sites. And she's like, 'you know you can probably deal with anything that happens.' There's so many, great skills in that, and you know it sucks that there's so much stigma.

Kathryn's privilege allows her, just as Natalie expressed, to utilize her former experiences as an addict to distance herself from the severity of stigma affiliated with an active addiction. Both womxn, however, acknowledged that they were in a privileged enough position to disclose their status as sex workers on their resume, to forms of "civvy employment" (Kathryn) that valued their lived experiences. This would likely not be the case for Kathryn if she applied to other forms of traditional employment-- as active and former addicts experience high rates of unemployment in Canada, directly related to the stigmas of drug-use and mental illness (Mental Health Commission of Canada 2013). Although the identification as being a former sex worker (Natalie) and former addict (Kathryn) was unintentional in granting both womxn some distance from the consequences affiliated with stigma more broadly, this distance from their stigmatized labels portrays sex work (Natalie) and drug-use (Kathryn) as being more "*socially acceptable* [where] *the impacts of stigma have been minor... it doesn't stick very well*" (Natalie). These privileges are also influenced by Natalie and Kathryn's social positioning as white, cis, middle-class, and able-bodied womxn.

Sarah also identifies as being face-out as a stripper, but experienced significant consequences when disclosing her work to her family. Now estranged from most her family, Sarah shared that being face-out was essential in prioritizing her mental health, even though she

faced a lot of discrimination and emotional abuse from her family members. Recognizing how “proud” she is for making that decision, regardless of the relationships she lost, Sarah shares:

Despite how difficult it was to come out, it was worth it for me. I knew [my family] wouldn't accept me, but I'm not interested in living a double life. To me that was just more stressful than losing out on people who should be there for me, no matter what. I've always had that attitude of expecting very little from others and living for myself... People come and go, you just have to let them.

To Sarah, being face-out was more about “living authentically” than “feeling the comfort of hiding away.” Sarah’s mindset was also echoed in Julie’s rationale for being face-out, stressing that it was necessary in her own pursuit in overcoming feelings of shame, in addition to her own intentions of accepting the decisions her son Matthew will make when he’s an adult. Reflecting on her experience coming out to her father, and posting photos online of trips she has taken with her sugar daddies (SDs), Julie shared:

My dad has always been there for me, he's always supported me...I could be in jail for murder and he'd come visit me- that's the mentality he raised me with... Aren't we supposed to raise our kids that way? I think so, but it's not common...And I don't get that same acceptance from people my age... Just as much as I don't want to be ashamed of how I live my life, I also don't want my SDs to be ashamed of paying me for my company. It's a two-fold, we shouldn't be ashamed for mutually consenting to an arrangement that benefits us both.

Natalie, Kathryn, Sarah, and Julie’s decision to be face-out was ultimately a decision that they had made for themselves; and despite the positive and negative outcomes of doing so, were content in their decision of being out. Confronting whorephobia, reducing the stress of maintaining their paid work a secret, combatting stigma, normalizing sex work, and humanizing their labour were some common reasons for disclosing their status to family, friends, and other forms of civvy work. These womxn also recognized their own privilege being out as sex workers, regardless of the outcomes they have faced. As cis, white, and middle-class Canadian citizens who were financially independent in raising their children, these mothers had access to

financial security and faced fewer risks in outing themselves to their family, friends, and colleagues, affording them the opportunity to be face-out as sex workers with fewer repercussions than migrant, racialized, or working-class mothers (Koken 2011). Despite only four participants being out as sex workers and mothers, these politics remained consistent in my discussions with almost all participants, meaning that being out and advocating for sex workers' rights are not mutually exclusive for those who have access to fewer privileges and fewer protections from the repercussions of stigma. Eloquently put by Kacy, *"it feels hypocritical that I'm not out-out, but it doesn't mean I don't care or that I'm not doing what I can to make sex work less stigmatized... I need to protect myself first."*

Selective Disclosure

As stigma can impose significant consequences on sex workers' lives, many sex workers are selective of who they disclose their occupation to—especially those most marginalized or facing intersecting forms of stigma (see Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull 2018). Often, sex workers rely on this tactic to protect themselves and their families from experiencing discrimination and mistreatment, as patients (Benoit et al. 2019), as potential employees (Bowen and Bungay 2016), as intimate partners (Jansson et al. 2022), and as family members and friends (Jiao and Bungay 2018), to name just a few. This tactic was commonly employed by the womxn who participated in this project, disclosing their occupation on a selective basis to only those they felt they could trust, or rather, the people they *"hoped"* (Marie) they could trust. Despite efforts to reduce the repercussions of stigma, however, many expressed the difficulty of anticipating negative reactions from their loved ones, experiencing first-hand the detrimental costs of sex work stigma in their personal relationships.

This was particularly true for both Jamie and Zara, who had negative experiences coming out to those they initially felt comfortable confiding in. Jamie's best friend of ten years instantly turned on her upon finding out about the income she earned from camming, which was both unexpected and "a harsh reality check." Becoming even more selective of who she can confide in, Jamie shares:

You know, it's never guaranteed. People who you thought might be supportive or understanding sometimes aren't. They can instantly change how they treat you, because now they only see you as a whore... You no longer are treated the same.

Zara also anticipated a supportive reaction from her ex-husband George, as she put forth her best effort to remain amicable amid their split and George's affair throughout their marriage.

Reflecting on George's reaction to her occupational status as an out-call escort, Zara shares:

Of all people, he really doesn't have the right to judge my sex life. I didn't consent to him having an affair, and I definitely did not consent to us having unprotected sex while he was sleeping with other womxn without me knowing... I honestly thought he'd be like 'that's not what I was expecting, but if you're able to support Josh without as much help from me, then cool.' More money for him, you know? But it was the exact opposite reaction. It became his MISSION to tear me down every chance he could... And he tried to rope our kid into that, he tried to paint me as the worst human being alive. And that's my fucking kid, the person I've always put before me, I'd do anything for. And I never have bad-worded him before, like I never even told Josh about his dad having affairs while we were married. And 10 years after coming out to him, his father still judges me for it. I regret ever telling him in the first place, fucking asshole.

Unlike Jamie and Zara, Kacy did not anticipate a supportive response from her family and friends, but she decided to tell them about her work as a dominatrix anyway, as she would rather experience rejection from her family than hide who she is. Being selective remained important to her, as the repercussions of rejection "just isn't worth it" with people outside of her immediate circle:

As much as it's work, it also says a lot about who I am as a person, my desires, and my politics. I felt the people closest to me should know. I don't think the whole world needs to know... just the people I care about most. And whether they accepted me or

not, that's on them... I obviously had hope they wouldn't look down on me for it, but I'm gradually coming to peace with that.

Living a “double-life” (Kacy) can impose serious consequences on sex workers’ mental health and well-being, leading to immense stress, social isolation, and acting as a burden on their overall health (Sanders 2004). This double life often consists of fabricating stories or concealing their involvement in the industry altogether, avoiding potential mistreatment, stigmatization, and discrimination (Sanders 2004), which is a stressful and difficult tactic to navigate in and of itself (Di Marco et al. 2020). Although many womxn have little to no choice but to maintain complete separation between their work and personal lives, for Kacy, this double life was unappealing for several reasons. Not only would a double life consist of excessive stress on her part to maintain her occupation a secret, a stressor she could not manage in a healthy manner, but more importantly, she felt it went against her personal beliefs and standards she has for others. Despite losing important relationships in the process of disclosing her occupational status, Kacy expressed that it was critical for her that she either receive genuine acceptance for who she is, or to have to accept that she requires distance from people who are incapable of treating her and her family with respect. For Kacy, living without fear of being outed also played a crucial role in her decision to disclose her status as a sex worker to her family, reducing her stress and time spent “worrying about people’s opinions which don’t even matter.”

Aware of the repercussions other sex workers’ experience when disclosing their occupational status to healthcare providers, employers, and loved ones, Victoria expressed that “it’s just easier not to tell every person that I’m around.” Apart from her mother and a few close friends, Victoria keeps her part-time work as a stripper a secret, separating her stigmatized work from that of her “professional employment” in healthcare. Although she is considering transitioning from stripping to self-producing online content and pornography, she’s unsure what

the repercussions will be at her job in healthcare if she chooses to be face-out or is eventually outed to her co-workers. Victoria shares:

[My co-workers] just need to know that I'm good at my job, that I show up, and that I'm here. And I'd prefer to keep it that way, I just prefer to keep each part of my life separate from the other... But I think if I started doing online content, I'd eventually be face out in it, but I'm not going to out myself because of that. I'm just a private person. I don't give a fuck what my co-workers do to pay their bills, but you never know how people will react. So I walk this fine line of hmm, what will the consequences be if I do that and someone finds out? Is it worth the risk of losing my job, or having people look down at me at work? Or would most of my co-workers be more like me, and not even give a fuck? You know, what kind of outcome will come from this, really, this financial decision? Cause that's what it is, you know? It's purely financial.

Loss of employment due to being outed is a fear that many sex workers navigating multiple occupations face, as the stigma of their paid work may be used as justification for job termination (Sanders et al. 2018; Jones 2020; LeMoon 2021). This was particularly true for a B.C. single mother, Kristin MacDonald, who was fired from her education assistant job because she also earned money through her OnlyFans account (Judd 2023). Concealing involvement in the industry has also been regarded as being crucial for sex workers attempting to secure new forms of employment, to reduce discriminatory hiring practices that hinder sex workers' ability to access mainstream employment (Burgmann 2016; see also LeMoon 2021). For Victoria, being outed at work may result in the loss of her formal employment, a job that took years of training and credentials to obtain. Although having a part-time occupation does not interfere with Victoria's capacity to care for her patients and meet the expectations of her nursing occupation, the pervasive consequences of whore stigma aim to undermine, devalue (Goffman 1963), discredit (Hannem 2012), and dehumanize (Terskova and Agadullina 2019) sex workers in their personal and professional lives (see also LeMoon 2021).

Liz also engaged in practices of disclosing her involvement in the industry on a selective basis. Liz's decision to keep her paid work a secret to most was primarily influenced by her own identity as a Black womxn, sharing that in the past, she has experienced stereotyping like that of the 'welfare queen' (Maynard 2017). Although she's currently partnered with Jason, who helps raise her daughter Macy, having been a Black, single mother working in the sex work industry in the past imposed unique and intensified experiences of stigma of their own:

I was treated as a failure, I was seen as 'another' Black, single mother. My baby crying at the store wasn't cute; it was a nuisance... You're not just cast off as being different than everyone else, no. You are put in this category with every other Black, single mom. And if people knew that I suck dick for a living, I'd be even worse- I'd be a 'Black Whore'. Which is never the same as being a white whore. We are seen as being worse... We aren't just judged on how we earn money, because Black mothers face judgment if they can't support themselves either.

Whore stigma is further exacerbated for racialized womxn (Lyons et al. 2017; Roitberg 2021), and even more so for single, racialized mothers as they experience varied layers of stigma and oppression. Liz's experiences demonstrate how privilege, or lack thereof, impacts sex workers' experiences of whore stigma. Regardless of only disclosing her occupation to select individuals to reduce the marginalization she faces, Liz remains subject to the stereotypes linked to the image of the Black single mother—assumptions that undermine and discredit her capacity to be a good mother. Maintaining her involvement in the industry thus serves to reduce the visibility of her discrediting attributes (Hannem 2012), in turn, reducing the impact stigma can impose on her daily life.

Stacey also shared that race plays a role in who she confides in, not for her own image as a white womxn, but for her Nigerian partner, Nick. When Stacey came out to her family, they immediately accused Nick of "pimping" Stacey out, blaming him for their 'unconventional relationship' and her involvement in the industry entirely. Stacey's family accused Nick of being

abusive, misogynistic, and controlling—"forcing" Stacey to pursue sex work. This courtesy stigma correlates with Bruckert and Parent's (2018) critique of the racialized underpinnings attached to the trope pimp, while also pointing to broader conceptualizations of sex workers being victims without agency (Bruckert 2012). Stacey shares:

I didn't expect them to be happy with it, but I didn't expect them to blame him... I had my blinders on; Nick knew this would happen, but I was completely ignorant. So now I don't tell anyone outside of our poly community. Not just for myself, but to protect him as well.

Here, the difference between Stacey's experiences of stigma, as a white cis-womxn, and Nick's experiences of courtesy stigma, as a racialized man, highlight how stigma can be exacerbated when layered with other forms of oppression. Whereas courtesy stigma is the transfer of stigma that disproportionately impacts womxn (Hannem 2012), here, Nick's experience of courtesy stigma is coupled with his racial identity and had more pervasive consequences than what Stacey experienced herself. Although there is little evidence that this experience is common in the literature, considerations of how courtesy stigma varies dependent on individuals' social positioning, and relative to that of the individual whose stigma is being transferred is necessary for further examination. This would be particularly interesting to best understand the complexities and individual experiences of courtesy stigma through an intersectional and interracial lens.

Remaining 'In the Closet'

For some participants, however, remaining in the closet was essential for their overall safety, health, and well-being. Xenophobia and her refugee status influenced Alina's ability to disclose her status as a sex worker, as the consequences of stigma are far too risky for her to justify. As a Ukrainian refugee, Alina is prohibited from engaging in any form of paid labour in

the sex trade under Canada's current *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*,¹⁵ both of which are heavily informed by anti-trafficking mythologies. Although technically legal for Canadians, sex work remains a criminalized form of paid work for all temporary residents, im/migrants, and refugees—imposing pervasive consequences as these womxn then are subject to heightened forms of abuse, violence, and exploitation from both police and clientele. Under these 'protections,' im/migrant sex workers are portrayed as victims of sexual exploitation who possess no agency, 'protecting vulnerable communities' from the 'inherent violence' and 'exploitation' of the industry. In doing so, the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* discourage temporary residents, im/migrants, and refugees from engaging in sex work by subjecting migrant sex workers to threats of being arrested, prosecuted and/or deported. Rendered unworthy of legal protections and at-risk for deportation, Alina must then maintain her secrecy as a sex worker, as the consequences of stigma disproportionately outweigh any benefits she may experience from disclosing her occupational status:

We could be deported, or I'd lose Ella. Which I just can't... I can't have any websites, I can't book hotels, I can't tell someone where I am, I can only take cash... I can't report anything to the police. I've been badly hurt before, but I think reporting it would only put us in a less safe situation. It's so scary to be so, alone, but we can't risk it.

Although she possesses more protections due to her Canadian citizenship, Kyra has not disclosed her occupation to anyone in her personal life as she fears for the potential well-being of her son, Simon. Unaware of the “*ins and outs*” on how sex work is regulated in Canada, due to the many grey areas within PCEPA, Kyra shares that the fear of any consequences being imposed on her family, especially worries around losing her son, “*just doesn't seem worth*” telling her friends

¹⁵ Sections 183 (1)(b.1), 196.1 (a), 200 (3) (g.1) and 203 (2)(a) deem all sex work a criminalized form of paid work for all refugees, im/migrant and temporary residents, including in legal establishments (i.e., strip clubs).

and family. The anticipated stigma from her family and friends also informed her decision to remain in the closet (Koken 2011), as the consequences of doing so would be difficult to navigate alone:

What if they take my kid, you know? What if something happens and this is used against me? I wouldn't be able to live with myself. It's not like I'm making tons of fucking money so I can't afford to pay for a lawyer or anything. And even if I could, what if I lost? I don't really know what would happen, just, what if..., there's just so many 'what ifs'.

The repercussions and fears around losing their children and support system thus remain a central reason for sex workers when deciding who, if anyone, to disclose their status to. Koken's (2011) research indicates selective disclosure and secrecy may be a contributing factor for some sex workers' experiences with social isolation; the same can be said for the womxn who participated in this study and experienced a loss in their support system entirely after choosing to be face-out as a sex worker. The anticipated and lived stigmatic response of family, friends, co-workers, and legal authorities thus plays a pivotal role in sex workers' engagement with their labour, as well as the supports they have available to them when navigating their stigmatized paid work with unpaid care.

Non-Consensual Disclosure: Being 'Outed'

Though disclosure remains a central question all sex workers grapple with at some point in time, in which the rationale for either disclosing their status or remaining closeted is pivotal in understanding the stigmatized nature of sex work itself, not all sex workers have the privilege of doing so. Both Marie and J.J. shared first-hand accounts of having been outed, followed by the consequences of experiencing this form of stigmatized violence. At the beginning of her career, Marie was pursuing sex work part-time while also navigating her civvy job on the side. Marie did not feel it was necessary to disclose her status as a sex worker to her family, especially her

estranged mother, so she decided to maintain her stigmatized work a secret from family and friends. Someone, somehow became aware Marie was escorting, and contacted her family and friends to inform them she was working in the industry:

A family friend found out and told, you know, other family friends, my mom, my brother. Yeah, everyone. And I received a lot, all my criticism from them, from people who had known me my whole life... These people had known me for 30 years, like my whole life, they labeled me with all the stigmas that that everyone does, you know, and these are people who are supposedly feminists who have done all sorts of advocacy, who, for womxn's rights and you know, and and it just it was so hypocritical.

Having been outed to her family, Marie's previous workplace was then informed by one of her close family members that she was escorting, sparking an investigation to seek proof of her involvement in the industry. Although by that point she had quit her civilian job and couldn't be fired by the organization, the threat of having proof used against her is significant enough for Marie to maintain a "*delicate balance*" of being both out and not out, on a selective basis. Remaining face-in thus reduced potential threats to her well-being and other employment down the line, while also being informed by the stigmatic consequences she would experience while travelling, to ensure she remains eligible to travel to and from the United States and other countries that impose border restrictions on sex workers.

J.J. was outed to the state during their pregnancy, and described this experience as being extremely "*disruptive in a violent[,]* carceral, personal way." After being outed, J.J. immediately discarded their life's worth of work in the industry, deleting podcasts, content, images, and profiles, "*out of this incredible fear, 'cause [they] didn't know what was going to happen.*" Just as Marie had expressed, J.J. had legitimate concerns around others accessing proof of their involvement in the sex work industry as said proof could be recorded and used against them in future court decisions. J.J. also had to refrain from working in the industry, their only source of

income, for a significant period following this, to best protect themselves and their daughter they were expecting, Elsa. Reflecting on their traumatic experience of having been outed, J.J. shared:

It was very, violent. I was very afraid of losing my kid. It was a very isolating experience because I- there were no supports that existed specifically for parents like me. And um, it was like such an experience of violence where you felt unsafe...I was just kind of like financially, emotionally drained. I felt like, kind of like my wings were cut...I'll be honest with you, I didn't think I would, I didn't think that I was gonna make it through...It was like my sense of security, my sense of safety was gone and um, that has been very vulnerable place to be in.

Operating contextually and influencing each participant's rationale for disclosing their occupational status, or experience being outed as a sex worker, stigma plays a prominent role in how participants engage with their work, even for those most privileged. Amplified by intersecting forms of social inequality, the repercussions of stigma, as well as anticipatory repercussions of stigma in disclosing their occupation were significant for some, including emotional, mental, and legal consequences in both their personal and professional lives (Bruckert 2002; 2012; Lazarus et al. 2012; Benoit et al. 2018; Benoit et al. 2019). Although much research argues that sex workers lose access to potential sources of support and are subject to feelings of social isolation when maintaining their work a paid secret (Koken 2011), my findings illuminate that for some, the ability to maintain secrecy avoids a loss of key relationships for themselves and their children, which are essential for their navigation and fulfillment of their dual roles. For im/migrant sex workers, like Alina, who are subject to heightened forms of punishment and social isolation for engaging in illegal work, this management strategy is necessary for preserving their access to key supports from her community, which otherwise, may no longer be available to her if others became aware of her paid work. Participants who were outed or had negative experiences coming out to loved ones utilized these experiences to inform their current approaches to disclosure and managing stigma more broadly. Regardless of these womxn's

experiences with disclosure, secrecy, and/ or being outed, one thing remained consistent throughout all participants' narratives—their positionality highly influenced their experiences navigating stigma itself. These experiences remain critical in informing participants' approach to navigating the complexities of sex work stigma, including the repercussions and risks affiliated with courtesy stigma.

Courtesy Stigma and Disclosure

Regardless of whether participants identified as being mostly out or in the closet as a sex worker, one thing remained consistent: the primary concern was regarding how the effects of courtesy stigma may impact (or has already impacted) their children (Goffman 1963; Barton 2006; see also Bruckert 2012). Experiences of courtesy stigma, as well as anticipatory stigmatic repercussions affiliated with courtesy stigma, thus remained central in our discussions regarding disclosure and stigma management more broadly. For some, the use of secrecy or selective disclosure was a primary tactic in reducing their worries and their children's likelihood of experiencing the repercussions of courtesy stigma. Others, who continue to prioritize their child's well-being above all else, acknowledged that courtesy stigma and the repercussions affiliated with stigma itself are beyond their individual capacity to control. In reflecting on participants' experiences of stigma, in addition to stigma management tactics they employ, this section builds on the previous discussion of disclosure to illustrate how participants reduce their children's exposure to potential consequences of courtesy stigma.

For Liz, the pervasive effects and consequences of courtesy stigma were the central reason she maintained her involvement in the industry a secret. To best protect her daughter, Macy, from experiencing bullying or marginalization, Liz felt it was critical she engage in practices of secrecy—which demand significant emotional and mental labour (Sanders 2004; Di Marco et al.

2020). For instance, Liz hosted a birthday party for the first time with Macy's school friends, as her previous birthdays were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. To maintain an impermeable divide between her personal and professional life, Liz knew that she needed to have an alibi for when she spoke about what she did for work with the parents who attended the party as well:

I wanted them to have a good impression of me and see that I'm a good mom. I wanted them to know that their children would always be welcomed in our home and that I didn't interfere with any of Macy's relationships she has at school... She loves her friends, and her friends love her too, but parents can be extremely judgemental. Like they could just tell their kid 'stay away from that one' and then a slew of bullying begins. So I just pulled out the old 'oh, I work in marketing' story and kept conversations short.

Saving face (Goffman 1963) tactics weren't only employed by misrepresenting her occupation, however; they were also prevalent in how she prepared for, planned, and hosted the party itself. As a Black mother, Liz shares that the expectations she faces to be regarded as a good parent, in comparison to white parents, are far more intensified, as mainstream ideologies continue to be rooted in racial stereotyping and prejudices (Elliot, Powell and Brenton 2015; Glenn 2016). Reflecting on these expectations and how they influenced her approach to protecting her daughter's identity while hosting her birthday party, Liz shares:

I swear my house has never been cleaner, I've never spent so much on party food and decorations. I just felt like if things weren't right, there would be consequences, like we wouldn't be 'good enough'... she's the only Black kid in her class. She's already different, you know, she already deals with bullying because of that... So it's not worth adding fuel to the fire and giving people more reason to marginalize her. She's just a fucking kid.

For Liz, not only was it critical she maintain her occupation a secret from other parents, but as a Black parent, she also had to engage in idealized forms of mothering to avoid racial stereotypes so often experienced by Black mothers (Maynard 2017). For racialized parents, the ideologies of

intensive mothering practices are not compatible with the constraints placed on working-class and racialized mothers (Sutherland 2010; Elliot et al. 2015), demanding Black mothers prove their capacity to be good mothers, while under scrutiny and surveillance from others (Elliot et al. 2013). Saving face (Goffman 1963) and protecting her daughter then demanded her not only to engage in forms of secrecy and fabrication, but also demanded she calibrate her parenting practices by making calculated decisions on how she fulfills the demands of social reproduction (Elliot et al. 2013; Elliott and Reid 2019) —a concern not expressed by white, cis mothers who participated in this project.

Given the violence they experienced having been outed, J.J. was hesitant about sharing their photos and experiences in this project. Although they have committed themselves to actively supporting and advocating for sex working parents, the image they felt would best describe their experience being outed was not included in this project, as they continue to face hesitation as to what they should and shouldn't disclose in public:

There's not this idea, or an understanding of how this violence works. And many, and also I wanted, that's what I did with my photos, I was like 'how am I gonna, share photos, of my struggle, right?... So many moments I couldn't share a photo, or even talk about it, or I would type something out online immediately deleted 'cause 'I shouldn't put that out there.'

J.J.'s response is critical for this project, as it demonstrates the limitations associated with the use of autophotography alone. Given our conversations on stigma and the violence of being outed, participants' images are influenced by their priority, first and foremost, to protect themselves and their children, even in an anonymous format. For some participants, including J.J., sharing certain images or stories was simply “*off the table*” (J.J) for their own well-being. For those most stigmatized and marginalized, the absence of images or rather, what lies in the margins of select images, are just as significant to acknowledge as the stories they are compelled to share, similar

to who they feel comfortable disclosing their occupation to in their personal and professional lives. Eloquently put by Liz, “*we can still be advocates without having to compromise any of our boundaries or putting ourselves in the line of fire.*”

To highlight the effects of marginalization, sex work, and mothering within the exhibits, I felt it was necessary to include J.J.’s response in the exhibit on a black background-- drawing attention to the limitations some participants faced when participating in this research. Contributions to the exhibit and this project overall are nonetheless defined, structured, and influenced by stigma itself—whereas, although all participants expressed deep interest in advocating for the destigmatization of their paid work, for some, the costs and risks of visibility put their families at risk of surveillance, policing, and whorephobia. This image serves as a reminder that for some mothers, the violence and repercussions of whore stigma is so pervasive they are unable to accurately capture their experiences without subjecting themselves and their families to even more violence-- especially for racialized, trans, LGBTQ+, migrant, and street-based sex workers (Koken 2011; Lyons et al. 2017; Roitberg 2021). Including this quote was necessary for the exhibit itself to ensure the images not captured and not shared would not marginalize the absence of said experiences from the exhibit overall.

‘So many moments I couldn’t share a photo, or even talk about it, or I would type something out online immediately deleted ‘cause ‘I shouldn’t put that out there.’

The photographic struggles and experiences submitted by participants to include in this project are just as important to analyze as the images some participants were unable to share. Both J.J. and Alina expressed personal obstacles when capturing, selecting, and submitting images for this

project, sharing that despite how some images may showcase their experiences more accurately, these same images could also subject them to serious risks, especially for racialized and im/migrant sex workers. The privilege of sharing images, especially images which participants requested their faces not be concealed or edited for anonymity purposes, illustrates how their privilege influences their experiences of navigating their stigmatized paid work and maternal identities, which may be further understood by analyzing how courtesy stigma influences their children, co-parents, and partners' daily lives. Including these quotes and addressing the limitations participants faced when submitting their images to this project was pivotal throughout the exhibits themselves—ensuring audiences could reflect not only on the images they do see at the exhibits, but also, the significance behind the absence of images showcased. The absence of photos was thus primarily impacted by participants' experiences not only of stigma, but especially the marginalization and gendered, racial, classed, and ableist violence they are subject to as sex workers.

Narrated experiences of stigma are thus limited, as sharing intimate or specific details, including visual representations, holds the potential to subject select participants and their families to heightened risks and forms of violence. Echoing this, Alina shares:

'I felt like I can't, like I couldn't really take pictures showing you that I'm a good mom, because every photo I took I would instantly delete... I had this photo idea in mind where I'm cuddling her in bed while she is sleeping, and I'm sitting there crying, because I wait until she is asleep so she doesn't know I cry everyday... you know, somebody could see a picture and report me, because they recognize something in the photo, or something could happen... and then I, I can't actually be a good mom, you know. We could lose our safety, or we could lose each other.'

For Alina, keeping sex work a secret was not only motivated by the legal repercussions she would face as a refugee, but also the potential loss of community she would experience should anyone find out. This was particularly evident when she shared her concerns around her daughter, Ella, as she only started making friends and “*being a happy kid*” recently. Sharing an image that represents the importance of this community for Ella, Alina shares:



They did a lemonade stand to raise money for refugees, and she was so happy because she knew they cared about her, and she had so much fun because that's very, like Canadian/American, and she just became really close with them after that... If their parents ever found out, she might lose her own friends who are really

like family to her now... She's lost so much, I don't want her to lose her friends, me, or for us to lose our safety. If she did it would be all my fault.

The risk of Ella losing her friends demonstrates the difference in privilege for some im/migrant sex workers. These potential repercussions are also unique in that Alina then assumes responsibility for any of the consequences Ella may experience, for choosing to engage in stigmatized, “*risky*,” and illegal work and thus “*choosing*” to subject her daughter to correlating repercussions. As the loss of friendships is one of many anticipatory impacts of courtesy stigma Ella may experience, Alina continues to keep her occupation a secret. She is determined to protect Ella’s legal, emotional, social, and physical well-being, regardless of how “*stressful and scary*” it may be.

This assumed responsibility, or in other words, experiences of mother blame (Blum 2007; Faircloth and Murray 2015), contributes significantly to Alina’s navigation of stigma more broadly and was echoed by Jamie when discussing her concerns about potentially being outed as a sex working parent, and how that may impact her son Jack. Having experienced bullying when she was younger for having parents that “*simply were just different*” and dealing with bullying as a single, teen parent, Jamie shares:

Even though I know it wouldn't be my fault, I don't think I'd actually be able to feel that way. I would feel like it was all on me, and because of that, my kid is the one to endure the bullying I grew up with... Just thinking about it makes me want to be sick.

Their children’s potential exposure to the repercussions of courtesy stigma remains a primary concern for most participants, with some struggling to separate these consequences from feelings of mother-blame, as mother-blame coincides with intensified ideologies of the ideal mother (Blum 2007; Sutherland 2010; Taylor 2011). This too, is embedded in the fear that others will also blame them should their children be subject to any negative repercussions. Jamie adds:

I worry about how people will see me as a mother, even though I know that perception would be completely inaccurate.

For Kyra, who is new to the industry and is still learning to confront the stigmas of sex work, concealing her involvement in the industry is necessary to preserve her image as a “good” mother to maintain her legal rights as Simon’s mother. Her status as a good mother is thus *contingent* on her capacity to conceal her online paid work from others in her life:

I’m a good mom, I’d do anything for my kid, and everyone knows it. Cole sees it, my family sees it, I’m dedicated to being a good mom for Simon. But if Cole or anyone found out, I know they’d do anything they could to make sure I don’t have Simon... It’s not just that they’d think negatively of me, it’s that they could legally deem me unfit as a mom, even though they see how good of a mother I am.

The legal repercussions are significant for all sex workers that are mothers, given the regulation and policing of their stigmatized work. Kyra’s concerns are echoed in Benoit et al.’s (2016) research on sex workers’ confidence in police in Canada, and their discussion with one participant who is an indoor sex worker and mother. Although, technically, sex work is not directly criminalized for the provider under PCEPA, what is criminalized grants police the opportunity to violate sex workers’ rights, demonstrating that “police played a stronger role in enforcing stigma and discrimination than in enforcing laws” (p. 463). In this case specifically, police interrogated this participant, implying that her involvement in the sex work industry hindered her capacity to take care of her own children. Thus, despite the claim that sex workers have been decriminalized under PCEPA, sex workers continue to be subject to police misconduct, harassment, and unfair treatment. For sex workers with children, as Kyla attests, the risks and repercussions of this surveillance are intensified, which makes concealing their occupation acutely urgent.

The concern with being labeled as either “the ‘Good Mother’ or the ‘Other’ Mother” (Rock 2007: 20) is not unique to sex working parents; however, what is unique is how the

stigmas of sex work subject these mother to intensified forms of mother blame, holding them individually responsible for exposing their children to the moral contamination of the industry (Bruckert 2012), in addition to characterizing who they are as womxn (Hannem 2012) and more importantly, as parents. Natalie's reflections are particularly valuable in exploring this obstacle in-depth. Having worked throughout her entire pregnancy, Natalie's clients and online followers were highly aware that she was a mother working in the industry. After giving birth to her daughter Nellie, she even announced Nellie's birth on her sex worker Twitter account and sent photos to show a few clients that she and the baby were doing well. A few years later, while navigating the stress of parenting during the pandemic and adjusting to online sex work, Natalie shared the following "*authentic*" image on Twitter, with the caption "*This is why I can't do online sex work, because my daughter Photobombs every shot.*"



'My Mother is a Whore'

This image was part of the collage Natalie submitted to this project and was cropped to discuss this image in particular. The original collage can be found on page 161, where you can see that this image is positioned directly in the center of the collage.

Despite her intentions of posting an “uplifting” photo to showcase a “fun and personable” side, during a very isolating time, Natalie was met with hundreds of responses and criticism, primarily from members of the sex work community itself (see also Jones 2020). Natalie shares:

Some sex workers replied and were quite horrified that I had posted a photograph of my child on my sex worker social media ... And then there were other sex workers who were voicing their support around, you know, sex workers are not simple caricatures, right? We're not these one-dimensional sexy objects; we have families and partners and lovers and children and stepchildren and half siblings ... And then I had other people kind of raising the issue around, well, you know what happens when you go to school drop off, right? And someone recognizes you or recognizes her, right? ... What happens when your daughter gets teased about this?

The responses Natalie received contribute to over-arching stigmas, treating her decision to post the image as being an ethical dilemma with the assumption that the image would contribute to her daughter's exposure to the dangers of stigma and the industry. These critiques thus hold Natalie individually responsible for all repercussions of courtesy stigma that Nellie might face, demanding answers on how Natalie will then assume accountability for any potential impact the stigma of her paid work might have on her daughter in the future. Taking space from social media was critical for Natalie in reflecting on the responses she received, reaching the conclusions that *"if [sex work] negatively impacts my daughter's experiences, if she's bullied or teased, that says more about how our society views womxn and sex workers than it reflects on my abilities to parent my child."* Natalie's realization illuminates how the stigmas of sex work are inherently attached to projections of the ideal mother, and the processes sex working parents must undergo to manage the repercussions of stigma and mother-blame entirely.

Kacy, Joe and their two children, Zack and Becca, also faced personal consequences after she came out to her immediate family, as they were instantly rejected by her parents. Although she anticipated this response, *"deep down [she] still hoped it went differently."* Coping with the loss of these relationships, the guilt she felt for her children losing their grandparents, and feeling responsible for the changes her children underwent, one thing that helped Kacy *"bounce back"* was how her children responded to their grandparents' decision:

It's a shame because they didn't do anything wrong and they deserve grandparents that love them for who they are... but Zack and Becca, especially Zack, saw it totally black and white. They didn't fault me, not once. I remember explaining why Grandma didn't call on him on his birthday, and Zack just said 'that's not very nice of them, but we can invite other people over for cake instead.' And that helped me see that what my parents were doing was essentially bullying.

Recognizing that the loss in these relationships was because of someone else's decision significantly helped Kacy cope with the changes her family underwent, allowing her to reduce her feelings of guilt and focus more on surrounding her children with "*people who make you feel like family.*" Creating chosen families and prioritizing communities of support is echoed across literature for most stigmatized communities, providing means of belonging and acceptance of identity (Weeks 2005) for those who lack said support from their biological families (Kim and Feyissa 2021). Fulfilling the needs that biological families may not offer to stigmatized individuals, including members of the LGBTQ+ community (Kim and Feyissa 2021), sex workers (Barton 2006), and people living with HIV/AIDS (Lewin 1993), chosen families can often offer more emotional and psychological comfort than even the most accepting of biological families, fitting to the needs of the individual by offering tailored support in navigating the repercussions of stigma (see also Annett 2019). For Kacy, to prioritize her children's well-being and reduce her feelings of guilt and mother-blame, she finds comfort in her chosen family and friends who support her, while she maintains a healthy distance between herself and her judgmental biological family. Family, for Kacy, is defined by "*the people who love you and your kids no matter what.*"

Hyper-sexualization and courtesy stigma also impacted Stacey and her children, as they too have been estranged from Stacey's family who disprove of her being in a bi-racial relationship, being polyamorous, and being a sex worker. She shares:

I lost my family because of sex work, and because I chose to be poly. And because my partner was Black... You know, I was no longer loveable, and, and my kids lost their family too because of that. They lost out on having the grandparents and cousins they deserve to have. And so I make sure they know they won't lose me or my love for them for the decisions they make... No matter what, I'm their mom. I've got their backs. I will love them. You know, I'm the parent to them that I needed myself... I really think about all the ways I needed my parents to be there for me, and what I

needed from them during really difficult times, and I make sure I'm providing that for my own kids.

Having been in the industry for the majority of her 15-year-old son Josh's life, Zara reflected on the experiences of courtesy stigma Josh has experienced, despite her efforts at maintaining a separation between her work life and his personal life. Reflecting on the initial feelings of "*guilt and shame*" she endured after her ex outed her occupation to Josh's best friend's parents, Zara stressed that it's not her work as a sex worker that harmed her son, but rather the intentions others possess in punishing her son because of her engagement in stigmatized work:

It wasn't the kids I had to worry about, it was the adults.... Can you imagine being a grown-ass adult, looking down on a kid and isolating them because of how their parent pays the bills, not to mention how hard that must've been on their own kid who just wanted to play with their best friend... The worst part is that my ex did that so I'd be seen as the reason Josh lost his best friend, you know, it would be my fault. He punished our kid because he knew I'd feel bad, and that it would hurt me too.

Mother-blame was both internally felt and externally projected onto Zara, with complete disregard for how this blame would then influence her son's well-being and relationships with others. This violence, separate from that of the nature of her work, acknowledges how the harms of courtesy stigma are projected onto sex workers' children by misogynistic, patriarchal, and stigmatizing perspectives in society at large. Like Natalie, Zara's acknowledgment of these deeply rooted harms was key in discarding feelings of self-blame, but unfortunately, could not protect her son from losing his closest friendship (at least, when the parents are around). What is also critical to recognize is how this violence, experienced by Josh, was inflicted onto him by adults, actively othering him and distancing him from "*tainting the innocence*" of their own child. Here, the stigma Zara faced predominantly affected his relationships with his peers (Barton 2006). Interestingly, despite Tom's parents' disapproval of their friendship, Josh and

Tom remain friends, although their friendship can only be expressed at school, because Tom “*doesn’t care*” about how Zara chooses to support her family.

For racialized mothers, the consequences of stigma impose higher risks for their family, which in turn, were also recognized as having a more profound impact on their child’s experiences with courtesy stigma. For teen mothers, their children had already been subject to courtesy stigma linked to their mothers’ reproductive health decisions. This violent form of active othering their children experienced, and the repercussion of courtesy stigma more broadly, demands significant emotional labour for sex working parents to process initial feelings of guilt and self-blame, in order to accept that they are not at fault for how stigma is mobilized throughout their personal life. The use of stigma power then is crucial in recognizing how courtesy stigma influences their children (see Link and Phelan 2014; Link and Hatzenbuehler 2016; Benoit et al. 2018), in which any form of harassment, exploitation, or exclusion is caused by the violent cultural processes that inflict the repercussions. Labelling sex workers as being bad mothers for exposing their children to the potential repercussions of stigma thus disregards the intentional processes that produce these experiences of prejudice, bullying, and social isolation (Barton 2006), placing full responsibility and blame for the consequences children may undergo on sex workers themselves. Although there are broad understandings of how courtesy stigma impacts sex workers’ children, it is critical to acknowledge that sex workers’ children’s own lived experiences of courtesy stigma are rarely explored in nuanced ways, meaning we lack critical, intersectional analyses.

Structural Stigmatic Repercussions as a Sex Working Parent

Participants often discussed systemic and institutional consequences of stigma, which subjected them and their children to various social, legal, economic, workplace, and health

inequalities (Hannem 2012; Link and Hatzenbuehler 2016). These consequences, often informing participants' decision to disclose their stigmatized work to family and friends, as well as child protective services, police services, healthcare workers, the CRA, and civvy employers, were unique to that of other working mothers and sex workers without children. Although these experiences and concerns varied, it was evident that for most participants, visibility heightened their risk of experiencing repercussions and was thus a barrier in accessing fundamental needs and supports. Highlighting these experiences, this section illuminates how participants experience and manage the repercussions of structural stigma, in which community-based organizing and grassroots organizations were deemed essential in supporting and advocating for sex workers' rights, given the regulation of sex work in Canada.

Having worked throughout her pregnancy to prepare to support herself and her family postpartum, Natalie updated her advertisement images to celebrate the changes her pregnant “*mothering body*” was undergoing. After updating her profile’s photos, however, Natalie shared that some sex workers reached out to her to express their concerns that her profile would be reported to Child Protection and Aid Societies (CAS) and she would be subject to investigation, because of the visibility of her being a mother. Including several of these images on her collage, shown below, Natalie shared how she inquired about any potential concerns CAS had regarding her case specifically:



My Mother is a Whore: 'Mothering Body'

These images are part of the collage Natalie submitted to this project and was cropped to discuss her pregnancy experiences in particular. The original collage can be found on page 161.

So, me being me and very privileged, I'm like, 'oh, I'll just give them a call'. So I gave them a call and I said, 'hi, I'm a sex worker I'm, you know, seven months pregnant. Are you guys worried about anything?' And they were like, 'well, are you doing drugs?' I'm like, 'no'. 'Are you drinking?' 'No.' 'Do you plan on fucking your clients in front of your newborn daughter?' I'm like, 'no'. 'OK, you're good'. Like, that was pretty much the conversation I had with CAS.

Fortunately for Natalie, CAS had no concerns regarding her work and ability to parent; her experiences with CAS “*were quite different*” than those who felt compelled to reach out and warn Natalie of potential repercussions. For the racialized and im/migrant mothers in this study, reaching out to CAS was not an option or privilege they could access since CAS has deep and systemic problems with anti-Black racism (Maynard 2017; see also Aston et al. 2021) and take a disproportionate number of racialized children into the care of the Canadian Child Welfare system (see also Fallon et al. 2020). Although no Indigenous womxn participated in this study, 53.8% of children in foster care are Indigenous, yet only account for 7.7% of the child

population in Canada (Statistics Canada 2021), which may in fact be at least part of the reason why this project was unable to recruit any Indigenous mothers to begin with. Reflecting on her privileges as a white, cis womxn and the conversations Natalie has had with other sex working parents in response to this, she adds:

There were sex workers, obviously, who had had negative experiences with CAS as sex workers with children, some of whom had had their children taken away. Right. And so, they were like very protective of me, reaching out to me and being like, hey, like in a very cautionary sort of way, you need to be really careful about how you're talking about this on social media and how much of your experience you're sharing, and I really did take that in as concern.

Contacting CAS directly was also an approach that Kathryn employed, after learning about CAS' concerns regarding her and her ex's failed drug tests. Only investigating Kathryn's ability to parent because she was working as a stripper at the time, Kathryn had to invest in costly resources and sex worker friendly lawyers who had previously been employed by CAS. Kathryn shared:

CAS can be nasty...I did my homework when CAS called and got involved in my life, and I hired her... She's like 'I'm your lawyer, you have to tell me everything so that I can protect you...there's nothing wrong with what you do for a living and they shouldn't treat you like a second class citizen'. Especially back then I- I was just stripping, and still CAS wanted to like come down on me so much harder.

By only investigating Kathryn despite both Cory and her failing their drug test, CAS conflated bad/ risky parenting with sex work. Further, focusing primarily on evaluating mothers' capacity to protect and provide for their children, with less attention to evaluating fathers' capacity to be good parents, child protection services enforce policies and practices that are gendered, racist, colonial, and classed (Aston et al. 2021). This is evident in CAS' classification of 'at-risk' families, which includes "single parents, low socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic minorities and those who experience mental health or substance use issues" (p. 915), and as other research has indicated, mothers who are also sex workers (Duff et al. 2015). The threat of being surveilled by

child protective services is a lived reality for sex working parents, especially racialized, working-class, and street-based workers (Aston et al. 2021). Reflecting on the importance of community-based social supports and community organizing to help mothers meet their demands of unpaid care while maintaining their confidentiality as sex workers, particularly sex working parents who are racialized, working-class, queer and/or transgender, J.J. shared:

When you're at the different levels of criminalization, racialization other things like that like, you know, nobody wants to get their baby taken away. So we're all going to come up with some of this shit and you know, not get detected. Like it's, you know, even if you aren't racialized, it's- it's not always easy... Like for me, you know I realized I don't have money for a lawyer... Right now, there was just like a roach infestation at the same time as a mouse infestation and we just kept being like if [CAS] gets in here, no matter how much we clean, we're just worried about, you know, just, how do you leave?

Access to legal supports and attorneys is a classed privilege for sex working parents who require support in challenging the discrimination experienced from child protective services, and as a classed privilege, most sex workers adapt practices of secrecy to conceal their stigmatized work. This was also expressed by Kyra, whose concerns regarding child protective services stem back to when she was “a victim in the system”—as growing up, her own family was subject to penalization from CAS. Reflecting on the traumatic impact CAS had on her, her sister, and her mother, Kyra continues to work face-in to avoid any legal repercussions. She shares:

I don't want to lose Simon, you know?... I experienced that first-hand growing up; I was in the system, and it fucked me up. My mom left us home while she was working, a neighbour called the cops, they found some weed, they saw we were left home and we were a little too young to be alone, we were really poor, so yeah. Boom, they just ripped our family apart... To this day, I'm like traumatized by it. I was so unstable, I was just a kid, I was better off with my mom, we all knew that, and to this day even my mom isn't the same. She really spiraled because of that and I'm just, I'm just not letting that happen.

Aware that the child welfare system in Canada lacks a trauma-informed approach, continuing to subject families to separation, isolation, policing, class inequalities, racial inequalities, trauma,

intergenerational trauma, and re-traumatization (see Aston et al. 2021; Maynard 2017; Statistics Canada 2021), Kyra prioritizes her children's well-being by protecting them from the harms of the foster care system. For Kyra, maintaining her involvement in the industry a secret is pivotal in ensuring her own children are protected from a system that was not designed to help children.

Alina is cognizant of her lack of rights to protection as a sex worker given her refugee status, meaning she is unable to report any instances of assault to police without the risk of deportation or having child protective services intervene. Unable to leave a paper trail that could be used against her by legal authorities, Alina is forced to engage in street-based work while maintaining a low-profile and is unable to implement any measures to pre-screen potential clients or further protect herself from dangerous clients. This unfortunately has resulted in Alina being sexually and physically assaulted by men posing as paid customers and has left her unable to seek legal and medical help when needed (see also McBride and Janushev 2021). Asking that the details of her assault be kept "*off the record*," Alina felt it was necessary her experiences of violence still be included in this project, to showcase what it's like for her to work as a street sex worker and how stigma influences her ability to access necessary resources that could ensure she has access to safe working conditions, such as adequate healthcare, policing services, or access to a sexual assault nurse examiner .

Just 48 hours prior to our scheduled interview, Alina captured this image to share the dangers of street-based sex work, especially for im/migrant womxn, and how despite her exposure to violence, she must continue working to provide for her daughter.



'It's a picture of what I live through.'

In discussing this image, Alina shared:

It was two in the morning, and I was in the back of someone's car, in the middle of it, and they saw a cop car drive by so they kicked me out because they didn't want to get in trouble, and they drove away. I was naked waist down, and I panicked. I had all my things in my arms and I was hiding in this alley. I was trying to get, get changed into my sweats and my running shoes. And I saw the cop at the lights nearby, so I just ran... I left all my stuff on the ground, because I thought they might see it on me and figure it out, and I ran home. But the hardest part was that I had to come back the next day, because I can't afford to buy new things. So I came back to get my clothes, and I remember going to the alley and seeing my things like this, and I just started crying... I didn't know if I could share this picture, when I took it I remember thinking so many negative thoughts about myself, like 'how did you let yourself get here in life'... but I think, I think people need a reality check. They don't know how hard it is for us, and making me a criminal just means I'm not safe.

Visibility was a concern for both her client and Alina, as any visible indication of her engaging in sex work could heighten her risk of being questioned by an officer and could pose legal consequences for the client as well. In addition, visibility of her engaging in sex work could impose consequences on her daughter, Ella, as child protective services would likely intervene.

Criminalizing sex work for im/migrant workers thus penalizes workers and contributes to the precarity of their labour, as they are unable to access safe working conditions, adequate health services or any form of police protections (McBride and Janushev 2021). The photograph itself, shared below, was very difficult for Alina to capture, let alone contribute to the project, but she felt it was necessary to include to showcase the dangers of criminalized work and gain sympathy for street-based sex workers. The visibility of these dangers rarely is captured and shared publicly given the severity of the repercussions affiliated with whore stigma (see also Sitter et al. 202). This picture left a profound impact on me as the researcher and demonstrated first-hand how autophotography can be utilized as a medium between participants and researchers, especially as English was not Alina's first (or second) language, and she sometimes struggled to translate her experiences.

The criminalization and surveillance of sex work doesn't just impact im/migrant workers, but all sex workers. For Liz, it has always been difficult accessing monthly STI testing, as she shares the same family doctor with her daughter, Macy. Not wanting to come out to her family doctor, out of fear of the doctor reporting her to child protective services or mistreating her and Macy, Liz is unable to access STI testing on a regular basis. Although there are local services she can sometimes rely on, these services have been limited since the start of the pandemic, due to the overwhelming impact COVID-19 has had on the healthcare system. Including this photo in her contributions for this project, Liz shares how stigma influences her access to adequate healthcare, and how stigma sustains health inequalities experienced by sex workers (Benoit et al. 2018; Benoit et al. 2019):



Every fucking time I'm like questioned when I ask for testing... so it's always overwhelming going into these appointments... I went like, 3 months, without getting tested because my doctor wouldn't see me in person and clinics weren't open. And they don't sell STI pee strips at the drugstore, because that would be too easy for sex workers or people who are seen as being 'diseased' to not be reported to public health. It makes no sense... Obviously I use protection, but that's never a guarantee.

The lack of adequate healthcare services available to sex workers was also echoed by Stacey, who added that these inequalities also transfer over to her partner Nick, her clients, sexual partners, and the sexual partners of those she has sex with. This was a primary issue with the uprise of the monkeypox virus (MPXV), which disproportionately impacted the sex work community (see World Health Organization 2022):

[Public Health] constantly preaches safe sex, you know. 'Safe sex this,' 'safe sex that.' But how safe can sex be if it's so hard for some people to access the tools they need to have safe sex?

For monkeypox specifically, access to the vaccine was first offered to the LGBTQ+ and sex work community; however, it required sex workers to out themselves to confirm their eligibility for the vaccine. Despite low-barrier clinics that were set up by grassroots organizations including Maggie's Toronto and Butterfly, access to the vaccine remained limited to participants who felt safe to disclose their occupation to healthcare professionals, or rather, felt safe to occupy visible sex worker friendly spaces, should anyone find out.

Other barriers participants identified included disclosing their involvement in the industry to current or future employers, the fear of being outed to civvy work (Sanders et al. 2018; Jones 2020; LeMoon 2021), as well as fear of losing access to necessary social supports they require to support their family. Face-in and just having started out on OnlyFans, Kyra has yet to establish a steady income and is still heavily reliant on the EI payments she receives from the government. Requiring excess funds to file for child support following her split from Cole, Kyra is unable to rely solely on her EI to support herself and Simon, and her income from sex work is minimal in meeting their needs. Unaware of grassroots organizations' initiatives to support sex workers, including Food Box Delivery services, we spent the second half of the interview identifying sex-worker friendly resources and programs Kyra could rely on to help her navigate the financial and emotional demands as a single, sex working parent:

I can't afford to lose out on these payments because without them, I can't cover rent. Or groceries, and I don't think I'll have access to social supports if they find out I'm earning money from porn work... I didn't think there were any supports for sex workers that wouldn't run the risk of, you know, me being outed to my landlord or the CRA.

An hour or so after our interview was complete, Kyra sent me this image to include in the project to showcase the supports she became aware of that support sex workers. Since our interview, Kyra has relied on these supports, sharing that the support and community organizing from grassroots organizations “*have made all the difference.*”



Grassroot organizations and support from within the sex work community was thus deemed invaluable for most participants, as these efforts helped to alleviate some of the ongoing legal, health, employment, and economic inequalities (Shimei 2022; McBride et al. 2023; see also Alpízar Lobo et al. 2023) that disproportionately impact sex working parents. Although some participants were required to pay out of pocket for lawyer fees to protect their children from CAS, community-based organizing aimed to relieve, to some extent, consequences mothers experience within the industry. Visibility was also regarded as heightening participants' risk of repercussions for engaging in stigmatized and criminalized work (see Hannem 2012), interfering

with sex workers' ability to establish safe working conditions and have access to police protections. As these organizations are pivotal in challenging broader stereotypes surrounding the nature of sex work and offer marginalized workers assistance in navigating the repercussions of structural stigma, it is crucial that these organizations receive the funding to continue providing these resources and challenging the stigmas of criminalized work (McBride et al. 2023).

Concluding Remarks

Mothers' disclosure of their engagement in sex work was ultimately linked to the privileges they had; however, for even the most privileged, stigma imposed pervasive effects on their everyday lives. Given the variation of experiences of stigma, disclosure, acceptance, and discrimination for each womxn, stigma must then be regarded as operating contextually (Koken et al. 2004; Williams and Frederick 2015; Jones 2020). Playing a prominent role in how participants choose to engage with their work, as mostly out, selectively out, in secret, and outed sex workers, stigma and structural stigma of their paid work had varied impacts on each womxn and their families. Individualized experiences of stigma were thus structured and impacted by each participant's privileges or lack thereof, upholding racial and classed hierarchies, and significantly impacting street-based, im/migrant, and racialized workers (Koken 2011). Stigma also imposed significant barriers in sex workers' navigation of sex work and mothering, subjecting sex workers to poor working conditions (Duff et al. 2015; McBride and Janushev 2021), limited healthcare opportunities (see Benoit et al. 2018; Benoit et al. 2019), forms of discrimination when attempting to secure civvy forms of employment (see also LeMoon 2021), as well as heightened forms of surveillance from child welfare services (Maynard 2017; see also Aston et al. 2021). Whore stigma thus defines sex workers' experiences with their paid work,

their mothering responsibilities, their professional and personal relationships, their safety, their decisions behind disclosure, and the ways in which they can access supports, resources, and informal care in navigating their dual roles as both mothers and sex workers. As their experiences of stigma are predominantly informed and impacted by the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy (Bromwich and DeJong 2015; Levey and Pinsky 2015; see also Ralston 2021), in the next chapter, I examine how sex workers define and engage in good mothering practices, highlighting how their engagement in stigmatized paid work plays an influential role in their capacity to be good, empathetic mothers.

Chapter Six: How Sex Work Informs Good Mothering Practices

Contemporary ideologies of idealized mothering in North America and Europe are inherently linked to Victorian definitions of “True Womanhood” (Banks 2022:451) which are defined by characteristics including purity, chastity, and submissiveness. In this sense, “the perfect woman became synonymous with being the perfect wife and mother” (p. 451), constructing a dichotomy in which womxn could only be categorized as being “perfectly good or entirely bad” (Filipovic 2018: n.p.). These ideals act as discourses of knowledge (Foucault 1980), possessing regulatory oppressive functions, compelling individuals to comply with social order and gendered expectations through surveillance and self-regulation (see also Fuentes 2022). As a result, ideologies of mothering reinforce mainstream patriarchal ideals (Rich 1976; see also Fuentes 2022), “creat[ing] the dangerous schism between ‘private’ and ‘public’ life [,]... alienat[ing] women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them” (Rich 1976:13).

Notions of the ‘good’ mother’ have been characterized as all-encompassing (Hays 1996); “lacking identity outside of the world of motherhood” (Fuentes 2022: 2a). As idealized discourses of mothering are rooted in traditional, white, hegemonic, heterosexual, and middle-class notions of the ‘good’ mother (Hays 1996; Banks 2022; Fuentes 2022), research suggests marginalized, low-income, young and/or criminalized mothers undergo processes of redefining what good mothering entails (Spowart et al. 2008; Romagnoli and Wall 2012). For instance, Romagnoli and Wall’s (2012) research on young, low-income mothers contends that resistance to internalized middle-class definitions of the good mother led to participants’ own ‘redefinition’ and self-perceptions of good motherhood. Fuentes’ (2022) research on incarcerated mothers argues that participants simultaneously retained and redefined hegemonic discourses of good mothering, reconceptualizing good mothering to position their deviance as a product of

marginalization which Fuentes regards as “the struggling good mother” (p. 3). Gibbon’s (2010) work suggests mothers internalize dominant discourses of mothering, redefining the good mother to accommodate the constraints they face in fulfilling middle-class ideals. Spowart et al.’s (2008) case study on mothers who snowboard also illustrates a link between resistance of societal expectations and redefining what good mothering entails, as participants discussed how their decision to engage in leisure activities, that are typically considered male-dominated, challenges traditional constraints and regulations of mothers’ leisure time within patriarchal societies. Nonetheless, societal notions of the ideal mother are tied to perfectionism (Henderson et al. 2016), which can only be regarded as myth (Douglas and Michaels 2004).

The mutually exclusive Madonna-Whore dichotomy (MWD) categorizes womxn as being either sacred housewives or sexually profane whores, thus reinforcing dominant ideologies that serve to punish and regulate womxn’s sexual behaviours (Musial 2014). This fear of womxn’s sexual agency, “whether rooted in biology or culture... is engrained in our culture and since the early Victorian era, women’s sexuality has been seen as something to control and contain” (Ralston 2021:61). Abolitionists and purity culture denies sex workers possess agency, reproducing notions of female vulnerability and assuming “no woman could willingly sell her body for sex” (Wyers 2017:778). This polarization serves to dehumanize sex workers, fuelling anti-trafficking narratives and encouraging criminalization and heightened regulation of the sex work industry.

The womxn in this study however, felt it was necessary they address the inaccuracies of this dichotomy. In doing so, this chapter argues that these womxn are good mothers, and that they are good mothers in part, *because* of their experiences navigating stigmatic occupations and their transferrable skills as sex workers. Eloquently put by, Victoria, “*I don’t need someone to*

tell me how to be a good mom or tell me I'm wrong, because I'm a good mom every single day. And I know it." In doing so, this chapter further explores participants' definitions and reclaiming of good mothering as complying with mainstream ideologies. But more importantly, the chapter demonstrates that the participants' recognition as good mothers is heavily dependent on their capacity to demystify the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy more broadly. I begin by examining how participants i) define and identify as good mothers, and further ii) illuminate how they engage with good and empathetic mothering practices. Accordingly, this chapter aims to shed light on how participants' mothering practices are informed by their paid work, experiences navigating stigma, and transferrable skills as sex workers, enabling these womxn to be compliant with dominant all-encompassing ideologies of intensive mothering.

Defining 'Good' Mothering

One of the autophotography prompts I gave participants was to capture an image that they felt best defined them as mothers, and all fourteen participants voluntarily chose to engage with this prompt. Motherhood played an essential role for the mothers who took part in this study and participants expressed the importance of demystifying cultural stereotypes which cast sex workers as being inadequate mothers, capturing images that depict that they themselves are proud, attentive, loving, and caring mothers to their children. Their definitions of good mothers, in part, required them to address "*the elephant in the room- stigma*" (Stacey). For Stacey, J.J., Marie, and Natalie, addressing the flaws in the Madonna/Whore complex was the primary motivation for participating in this study in the first place. Unlike the mothers in Fuentes' (2022) study, however, my participants' definitions of good mothering were not dependent on, nor made in contrast to, definitions of the 'bad' mother. In doing so, participants ensured that their definitions of good mothering did not contribute to ongoing stereotypes and criticisms that

mothers face daily. As Julie puts it, *“it doesn’t matter what you do, if you’re a mom, people will judge you... every mom gets judged, it’s just part of our fucked up society, where everyone always blames the mother.”* In line with Julie’s reflections, this chapter begins by acknowledging how these womxn define and identify as good mothers and comply with dominant ideologies of good mothering (Schmidt et al. 2023), while avoiding making contributions that maintain the good/bad mother divide.

Acknowledging the criticism that all mothers and parents face in fulfilling dominant ideologies of ‘ideal’ parenting, Zara reflects on how her paid work automatically discredits other’s capacity to recognize her as a good mother—despite knowing that she herself is a good mother. She shares:

People just have this idea of what a good parent is, and you either fit that mold or you don’t. You know, it’s really, rigid, and it’s really dated because it assumes that every child requires the same type of parent, and we know that’s far from true... Because I’m a sex worker, some people automatically assume I don’t fit that idea. Like there’s some kinda link between sex work and being a bad parent... I know I’m a good mom, and I’ve always been a good mom. Josh comes first, and that’s something I’ve always been proud of. He’s always well taken care of, he feels comfortable in his home, and I know that I’m doing everything I can to set him up for a good future... No mom is perfect, but at the end of the day, I know I’m a good mom, and that’s something I’m really proud of.

Zara’s definition of a good mother is compliant with contemporary dominant ideologies and expectations of good mothering (see Hays 1996)—specifically, as she fulfills the need of being the present mother (Schmidt et al. 2023), the good working mother (Christopher 2012; Schmidt et al. 2023), as well as the future-oriented mother (Schmidt et al. 2023). To Zara, knowing she is a good mother fills her with pride—not because she fits the “mold” of being the “perfect parent,” but rather, because she is conscious that she is “doing [her] best” in raising her son, despite barriers, stereotypes, and discrimination that sex working mothers face. She adds:



I'm a good mom, I put Josh first and I'd do anything for Josh. I've been through shit, and that makes me a good parent, because I've been through the ringer to put my kid first. I know I'm a good mom, it's something I'm really confident in saying. And I'm used to people disagreeing with me on things, but this is something that I just, I just know that I give my all to. And at the end of the day, when Josh calls me a good mom, then that's proof to me... he's old enough to recognize whether I'm a good parent or not... He's the one who has me as his mom; not his dad or some fucking Karen on the internet.

It was important for Zara to include this text exchange with her son, to center his experiences growing up with a mom in the sex work industry. Although she is often judged by others who label her as being a bad mother, she affirms that his perspective is the most direct and accurate evaluation of her performance of motherhood-- confirming that her ability to be a good mother throughout his childhood and teenage years was not, in fact, negatively impacted by her career

choice.¹⁶ The inclusion of this image holds significant value to this project, as research platforming the voices, accounts, and experiences of sex workers' children remains limited.

The definition of a 'good' mother is significantly reinforced and impacted by "a ferocious climate of mother blaming" (Bobel 2004:73-74)—globally, socially, by media, and internally (see also Douglas and Michaels 2004). This culture of mother blaming, or rather, mother "shaming" is an obstacle these womxn faced in challenging dominant stereotypes that define sex workers as unfit caregivers. Reflecting on her experiences of mother shame as a sex worker, Kacy explains that she often is expected to provide "*proof*" that she is in fact a good mother. Explaining how her approach to mothering is compliant with dominant ideologies of the loving and all-sacrificing mother (Pederson 2016; Hays 1996), Kacy shares:

I'm a good mom, it's just hard for other people to see me as one. I'm a good parent because I love my child, I protect them, I meet all of their needs, and I'm always there for them. But because people just see me as a sex worker, they think 'oh wow, what type of parent would do that?' ... And I have to defend myself. I have to be like 'I'm a good parent, a parent who cares about supporting their child, you know, I do XYZ for my kids.' I have to give concrete evidence that I'm not a complete fuck up. And I know that defending myself doesn't dictate whether I'm a good mom or not, you know, I see the actual fruits of my labour. I see every single day how well taken care of my kids are, and I see how I devote myself to being that good parent for them. And people who don't know I'm a sex worker can see the fruits of my labour too. So, what does that tell you?

Kacy is, without a doubt, a good mother. Centering her child's needs, being a supportive and present mother, protecting her children and devoting her time to provide them with "*a fulfilling childhood*" are all practices she prioritizes, in which her approach to mothering is compliant with contemporary and idealized forms of mothering (Schmidt et al. 2023). More importantly, however, she feels intensified pressure to provide concrete examples to others, "*defend[ing]*" her

¹⁶ Although Zara stressed that her son's shared experiences were, in no way, more valid than those shared by other participants' children, she is conscious that Josh's experiences may hold more credibility from non-sex working audiences, granted his age and maturity.

ability to fulfill the role of being a good parent, given the stereotypes associated with her paid work. These pressures were also felt by Liz, who shares:

Because of [sex work] stereotypes, I have more to prove. My bar is [set] higher. I've automatically been labeled a bad mom, and I have to prove them otherwise. And when I do, they still find a way to twist the situation... If I buy my kid a toy or a treat at Starbucks, or if I spend more time with my kids than other parents, people just fixate on me being a whore. 'Oh that's a nice toy, but she slept with someone for that.' Or 'oh you're just spending more time with your kids because you're lazy and just suck dick for money'. So even though I check off all the boxes of being a good parent, and I mean, every box, I'm not this angelic bullshit image society wants me to be.

Expected to prove their capacity as good parents serves to reinforce the feminized responsibility of caregiving, holding mothers individually responsible for the health, protection, and well-being of their children (Lapierre and Côté 2011). This blame occurs even in the most extreme cases (Lapierre and Côté 2011), including when both mothers and children are victims in domestic violence situations— “shift[ing] the focus and blame away from men’s violence onto women’s mothering” (p. 317). As the intensified responsibilities of caregiving remain gendered, so too does the blame, criticism, and scrutiny that all mothers, not just sex workers, face.

The experiences of mother-shaming are further amplified and reinforced by racist undertones inflicted on Black womxn specifically (Elliot et al. 2013; Elliott and Reid 2019; see also Maynard 2017). Reflecting on how mainstream conceptions of good mothering uphold and preserve “hegemonic white standard[s] of motherhood” (Banks 2022:450), while simultaneously portraying Black mothers as “immoral, careless, domineering [and] devious” (p. 453; see also Roberts 1997), Liz shares:

I don't think its half as bad for white sex workers, because well, they don't face the race issue. You know, I'm seen as being a bad mom just for being Black... I have an extra obstacle to overcome, I have more to prove. It just shows how Black mothers are always facing that judgement that we can't possibly be good mothers, that we can't possibly be enough for our kids... BLM [Black Lives Matter] is so much more than just police violence, you know, it's also about the violence we experience from

society because of the colour of our skin. And part of that is the gendered violence and stereotypes that we as mothers face.

The meaning of motherhood and idealized expectations of mothering must then be acknowledged as products of both racism and patriarchy-- working as interrelated systems of domination and systemic violence to sustain gender inequalities and preserve subordination of racialized womxn (Roberts 1997). Discourses on the good or ideal mother have always been constructed in contrast to, and dependent on, discourses of the “racially degenerate and inferior mother” (Comeau 2007:20)—reproducing racialized hierarchies that was used to justify colonial and imperial projects for centuries. Constructing racialized womxn as being unfit mothers provided legitimacy for the discrimination enacted on racialized families—including the development and enforcement of Indigenous child removal policies and justification for the enactment of racialized police violence, portraying Black mothers “as bad mothers who fail their children and threaten society” (Paganelli Marin 2020:25). Stripping Black mothers of their agency and subjectivities, contemporary Black mothers must then “have to fight for recognition of their families as legitimate and worthwhile” (p.25)—despite being portrayed as “unworthy of political, social, and economic justice” (p. 23). The construction of the good white mother is thus dependent on the distinction from the inferior racialized mother, contributing to ongoing experiences of systemic racialized violence—as “the carceral state presents constant, everyday danger to Black children and loved ones” (p. 41). Racist ideologies are thus heavily embedded within the construction of the good/bad mother divide—justifying systemic violence against racialized womxn and their families, and privileging the construction of the white, middle-class, nuclear family (Collins 2000).

Mother-shaming is further reinforced by the polarizing categories of the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy, policing, penalizing, and perpetuating shame towards mothers who assert their

sexual agency (Bareket et al. 2019), designed to reinforce patriarchal ideologies. Classifying womxn as being either good or bad mothers based on their sexual desires, autonomy, and/ or sexuality (see also Filipovic 2018), the MWD intensifies sex working mothers' experiences with mother blame, penalizing these womxn for performing motherhood while deviating from societal norms (Douglas and Michaels 2004). Acknowledging the constraints placed on sex working mothers due to the polarization of these categories, J.J. reflects on how they define themselves as a good parent, compared to how the general public perceives racialized sex working parents:

A lot of people have very complex ideas about what it means to be a good parent, right? And they will internalize that. I'll, you know, I'll say to people about my past for example, they're very quick sort of quick to judge and sort of go 'oh, is that where you've started? Is that how you became a parent?' ... Despite all of this, I am a good parent. You know, like I see, I'm here. I just, I kept going.

Natalie has also experienced criticism and mother-shaming for being face-out as a sex working parent online, highlighting how, despite her dedication to being a good mother, she remains limited to protect her daughter from the gendered violence of the MWD altogether:

I am a good mother. And I'm very confident in that. But I am a good mother. I love my daughter. I would do everything to protect her, but I actually can't protect her from patriarchy. I can't protect her from Whorephobia. I can't protect her from rape culture. I can give her all the tools she might need to understand what's happening, right, but I really sat with it for a long time and I was like, I can't be held responsible for that.

Natalie is conscious of the whorephobic, patriarchal underpinnings affiliated with the MWD, recognizing claims of sex workers being “*terrible mothers*” as reflecting society's flaws, rather than that of sex workers who are fulfilling and navigating these dual roles. Her experiences of mother-shaming are directly correlated with the MWD, which construct sex workers in contrast to the ideal caregiver. Natalie's photographic submissions to this project, in part, aim to demonstrate that she, “*a whore,*” is a good mother—a depiction that contrasts common tropes.

When discussing the collage of images she submitted for this project, shown below, Natalie shares:



'My Mother is a Whore'

I just took a lot of random photos of [daughter's name] so a lot of the photos don't have any significance in particular, but what I do think it shows is that I'm a sex worker and I'm a mother and I have a very joyful, happy child that has a diversity of experiences. You see her with family. You see her with toilet paper. You see her at the park. You see her throwing rocks. You see her hiking. You see her in a bucket of water, right? You see her in all sorts of different states and while her face is blurred, I think it's clear that she's smiling in most of them. She's a joy, a joyful child. Uhm, and so it's this idea that, like, sex workers are good mothers, can be good mothers. You know, being a sex worker doesn't foreclose the possibility of being a good mother.

Very few participants chose to illustrate their images in a collage format as Natalie did, but what is unique to Natalie's submission is that it showcases in a nuanced way how her experience of motherhood, sex work, relationships, and experiences with mother shaming are all linked to one another. As a good, working mother, Natalie engages in paid work in order to provide and fulfill the unpaid demands of care for her daughter, Nellie (Schmidt et al. 2023). Her livelihood, sexuality, relationships, and views on feminism shape who she is, and more importantly, who she is as a parent. This is crucial in recognizing how mothering is a psychological experience (Barlow and Cairns 1997), as mothering practices, beliefs, attitudes, and empathy are defined, shaped, and guided by mothers' own experiences of everyday life. For Natalie then, sex work and mothering are not mutually exclusive categories; rather, they are two roles she assumes in combination with the intent to love, provide, and care for her family, central to her definition and identity as a "*good mother*."

Kathryn also identifies as a good mother, and like Natalie, made the decision to submit some of her images in a collage format. Kathryn's collage aims to depict how she, like other sex working parents, is a good mother—providing visual insight into how she maintains healthy and honest relationships with her family, partner, co-parents, and her son, Alex. Utilizing collages also allows Kathryn to capture both "*the good and the bad*" in navigating her dual roles, maintaining sobriety, experiences with marginalization and abuse, all while being what Alex refers to as an "*awesome*" and "*badass*" mom. For Kathryn, this collage provides insight into what her daily life truly looks like.



As Kathryn “*really can't separate when [she's] doing sex work, [as] that, that's a part of [her] life,*” portraying these snapshots of her lived experiences through a collage is necessary in illustrating how her personal life is impacted by the stigmatization of her paid work, and on the other hand, how her experiences as a mother influence her experiences as a sex worker. This is particularly evident when analyzing the image displayed in the top right hand corner of Kathryn crying, with text across the image depicting some of the stereotypes she has faced being a mother in the sex industry, in comparison to the image below which displays a painting and hand-written poem Alex wrote for her, as a gift for mother's day, expressing how much he loves her and appreciates her for everything that she does for him. These images hold symbolic value, not only depicting how she herself is emotionally impacted by the stigma of her paid work, but also how she remains a good mother to her son Alex *in spite* of stigmatic assumptions about her ability to be a good mother.

When discussing this collage and reflecting on her mothering responsibilities, Kathryn shared that prioritizing Alex's happiness and well-being, ensuring he is exposed to strong and healthy relationships, was essential in fulfilling the role of a good mother. Maintaining healthy relationships, especially co-parenting relationships, and building strong support systems have been essential for Kathryn in her approach to mothering, stressing "*children can never have too many people who love them.*" This is echoed in literature focusing on good mothers in blended families—maintaining healthy communication and relationships with all co-parents involved, prioritizing the well-being of the children and their sense of belonging (Zelevnikow and Zelevnikow 2015). Now that her son is getting older, Kathryn also stressed that being a good mother meant prioritizing her son's wants and agency over that of forced custody arrangements.

Kathryn shares:

I think that he's so, like, well adjusted and he's becoming such a wonderful little human being because, you know, instead of seeing Mommy and Daddy unhappy together and fighting all the time, you know, like he sees 3 adults, you know, making adult decisions and keeping him out of it. You know, we went to mediation, and we don't, neither of us pays support to the other and joint custody right down the middle...I don't want to disrupt his routine and stuff, but I mean anytime he wants to come here on weekends or in the summer or holidays, like now that he's 12, we kind of let him make his choice, you know?

For all participants, including Kathryn, prioritizing their children's needs and happiness before their own remained a priority in fulfilling their role as a good mother (Schmidt et al. 2023; Hays 1996). For Kathryn, this meant granting agency to her son in the decision-making processes concerning his ongoing custody arrangement (see also Watson 1981)—respecting that, for her child, "*each week his needs or wants might be different.*" Participants' definitions of good mothering thus align with dominant ideologies, but more importantly, acknowledge that mother-shaming is not unique to sex working parents. All mothers are subject to public scrutiny and

varied forms of mother-blame, in which the intensification of this labour has also increased the intensification of the surveillance that mothers are subject to (see Hays 1996; Rosenberg 2001; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Fox 2006; Blum 2007; Lee 2008; Faircloth and Murray 2015; Henderson et al. 2016). Eloquently put by Jamie: *“it’s not just me who faces this, you know, every mom at some point is told they aren’t doing something right or that they are a shit mom, you know... I’m always having to remind myself that.”*

What is crucial to acknowledge, however, is that although participants expressed that they are typically regarded as being ‘bad’ mothers, reclaiming and redefining themselves as good mothers was not contingent on identifying what being a bad mother entails. For these womxn, good mothering was not in contrast to bad mothering—they did not engage in practices of ‘othering’ other parents, nor did they critique other womxn and their capacity to care for their children. By not contributing to this good/bad mother divide, these mothers acknowledge the harms instilled in the construction of these contrasting identities—similar to that of the MWD. Instead, they center a collective voice around reclaiming motherhood, drawing attention to the harms affiliated with characterizing mothers as being bad, immoral, or risky womxn, and further, consciously make the decision to not participate in harmful practices of mother-shaming. The empathy expressed by these womxn in reclaiming good mothering was also influential and present in their implementation of good mothering practices, influenced by the stigma they’ve experienced first-hand as sex working mothers. These practices of empathy must also be acknowledged as being a transferrable skill from engaging in their paid work—in which their experiences and skills as sex workers was regarded as playing an influential role in their capacity to fulfill the demands of good mothering.

Stigma, Sex Work, and Empathetic Mothering

When defining what good mothering entails, many participants expressed that because of the stigma and prejudice they've experienced first-hand, that they prioritize being "*empathetic*" (J.J., Kacy) with their own children. Reflecting on the impact stigma has had on her approach to mothering, Sarah shares "*I think in a lot of ways, [stigma] has made me a better mom.*" In line with these reflections, this section focuses on how participants utilized their own experiences of stigma to inform their approach to being "*empathetic*," "*patient*," "*kind*," and child-centered mothers, demystifying the stigmatic assumptions attributed to sex working parents while prioritizing their children's education on progressive and socially "*taboo*" topics. Following this, I highlight how participants narrate their skills as sex workers as being transferrable to their responsibilities of unpaid care—enabling and enhancing their capacity to engage in good mothering practices. Their positionality as sex workers thus plays an influential role in their ability to engage in empathetic mothering practices.

Coming out to her family and receiving negative feedback for working in the industry was difficult for Kacy to overcome, leading to feelings of isolation and "*feeling alone*" within a "*mostly conservative*" family. As her choice to pursue sex work largely reflects her own feminist politics, and her family's response was "*quite traumatic*" to endure, Kacy makes it a priority to raise her children with empathy, giving them the comfort of knowing that "*to [her], they will always be enough.*" Having progressive conversations with her children about the isolation she has faced, and implementing these lessons of "*acceptance into practice*," she shares:

We always keep it age-appropriate, but they've always been taught to never judge a book by its cover. You know, they are aware of some of the real, systemic problems we have in this world. Kids see homelessness, they see bullying, they watch the news... Once a month, we go to the grocery store together and buy baby things, like diapers and formula and clothes, and we donate it to either the foodbank or one of the shelters. So this is a photo of when we did that last, and when we do, we talk about how we can be better human beings, without having the expectation that we will be rewarded for being good people... We really prioritize being empathetic with our kids, but at the same time, we prioritize teaching them how to be empathetic. And I'm really proud of them, because they are the kindest, most selfless kids you'd ever meet.

Her own experiences of stigma and marginalization have thus played a key informing role in Kacy's approach to parenting, ensuring that her children are not raised to become "products of hate" (see also Barlow and Cairns 1997). When discussing this image specifically, Kacy shared that she has been open with her children about the struggles of motherhood, including postpartum depression and the financial stress she experiences while on unpaid maternity leave when Zack and Becca were first born. Not having had the support she needed during the early stages of motherhood, especially from her family who did not approve of her involvement in sex work, was a major obstacle for Kacy when her children were young, something she wishes to alleviate for other mothers struggling. Donating funds to womxn's shelters and resources such as diapers give her the dual opportunity of giving back to womxn experiencing similar struggles, while instilling important values in her children's upbringing to be kind, empathetic and to "pay it forward."



This mobilization of support is a common priority amongst sex worker communities, as sex workers themselves are most conscious of the lack of legal and economic support afforded to sex workers from governing institutions, building grassroots systems of support and mutual aid (Shimei 2022), much like the organizations these exhibits are fundraising for. In fact, most participants expressed involvement in various types of sex worker social justice advocacy work, including being actively involved or regular donors to collective organizations including Maggie's Toronto, Butterfly, SHOP, SWAN, OIC, the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform and (formerly) POWER, to name just a few. Collective efforts of mutual aid were further mobilized throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to redistribute resources and provide emergency mutual aid for workers unable to sustain a living income and to provide those unable to claim CERB, generally the most marginalized and criminalized sex workers, supplementary financial support (Peterson 2020).

Prioritizing their engagement in community-focused, compassionate, intersectional advocacy work for sex workers in the GTA, J.J. also shares that their politics and experiences of stigma act as key informants on what values they want to instill into their own daughter, Elsa, at home. Working at a grassroots organization and using their own lived experiences to organize resources to engage in advocacy work to best support marginalized sex workers, J.J. submitted a series of images where their paid advocacy work afforded them an opportunity to include their daughter in the work they were involved in, giving Elsa a first-hand experience of what acceptance and mutual aid looks like in practice. "*Proud*" to include these images into this project, J.J. shares:



This was in Montreal when we, when I took her with me as a part of the [organization's] crew to go to the AIDS 2022 [conference] sex work content part so that I was able to participate. But this was one of our tours we did of...like a historical, like a red-light district in Montreal and I was really proud to be able to take her. I mean, it was—it's really hard, when people are like 'what do you mean? Like are you exposing your child stuff?' Even though what I expose her to is like the most wholesome, like sex work justice advocacy, like, proves that it's like work, you know. The people when they were there, they just treated her so well like, my coworkers...It was just I had a lot of pride to be able to like... I have this photo I'm able to show you, like this is an incredibly important moment for me to represent [a grassroots sex worker] organization.

As mutual aid and community-organizing play a central role in J.J.'s personal and professional life, having the opportunity to share this experience with their daughter allowed them to “bring [Elsa] into my world in a way that's just so beautiful and like, warm and loving.” Despite how “violently” stigma has impacted their own life as a sex working parent, J.J. has been able to utilize their paid work to best advocate mutual aid to support sex working parents, whose specific needs are not always a priority amongst the agendas of other sex worker organizations. J.J. also ensures their own lived experiences navigating racism, fascism, ableism, gender-based

violence, mothering, and stigma also inform their approaches to advocacy, shedding light on the experiences of sex workers who are most marginalized. Acknowledging how the intentions of this project align with their own advocacy work, they included the following image of a poster they had made for the AIDS 2022 Conference, reflecting on the impact their advocacy work has had on sex working parents:



I'm really excited to be a part of this project... I've helped with a lot of like a lot of the [organization's] ideas. And, you know, consulted and stuff, but I really, really, really believe in this. And and, creating a, you know, a voice for sex working parents. And having representation on our own terms, but also just like, it's one of the most isolating experiences. Especially when you add other types of things, like racialization and other kinds of marginalization on top of that it becomes, uhm, really intense.

J.J.'s approach to raising Elsa is predominantly influenced by their own "isolating" experiences of stigmatization, marginalization, and being outed—utilizing these experiences to make calculated and meaningful choices to best protect and support their family. Not only does

J.J. include Elsa in community-based organizing to give her an understanding of what social justice work looks like, but also, they want to share with Elsa the values that they live by, in an age-appropriate manner. Teaching Elsa about how society operates to marginalize racialized, disabled, and low-income communities and ensuring their daughter knows that they deserve to be loved, regardless of the choices they make in life, are mere examples of how J.J. has used their own lived experiences to adapt a more empathetic approach to mothering (see also Barlow and Cairns 1997). J.J. explains:

I don't want her to ever be ashamed of who she is or what she comes from, however if she chooses as an adult you know to engage with sex work or whatever she wants to talk to me about, it's like...There's often a sanitization, and we, you know, I do want better for them, and you want better for her than experiences I have for sure. But then also she realizes why I had those experiences and the way why the work I've done has been so challenging. You know what I mean? ...But I just felt like when I had her, I was just like, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure she walks into the world feeling like she can love herself and feel proud of herself and feel secure enough that, I don't know, that whatever happened she knows that she has that strong foundation of self-love and yeah, that's what it is really, really, really important to me. And, and understanding what I- I have these specific politics you know, and I want to pass them down, but then how she engages with that—that's her choice. Of course, but also, I never want to hide that. Especially in a world where fascism getting worse and worse and worse, like it's incredibly important to me to be able to take her to these events while I can, you know?

Teaching their children about issues of social injustice and discussions of taboo topics was a priority for not just J.J., but also for Natalie, Zara, Victoria, and Stacey. This priority is further echoed in literature, as Black mothers stress the importance of ‘successful’ mothering practices within hostile climates—including instilling ‘good’ values into their children to ensure that, in return, their children become conscious and good citizens (Ramírez 2015). Good mothering thus demands these womxn engage in practices of empathy and awareness, while simultaneously installing these values in their own children. Aware that their own “attitudes toward life and outlook shape the incumbent and attitudes [their] children hold” (Murad and Khan 2022:21), J.J.

acknowledges their responsibility as a good mother involves not just prioritizing the well-being of their daughter Elsa, but moreover, the social responsibility of raising an empathetic and conscious womxn. Empathy then is something that J.J. not only prioritizes in their own mothering practices towards Elsa to be a good mother, but also, is a primary value they wish to instill in their children.

Having experienced the consequences and marginalization of these institutions of power first-hand, giving their children the necessary tools to navigate whorephobia, patriarchy, stigma, racism, and homophobia was seen as essential for these parents (see also Barlow and Cairns 1997). Sex workers' own critical engagement in advocacy work thus translated into their individualized responsibilities socializing their children, ensuring their kids understood the importance of "*kindness, inclusion, acceptance*" (Kacy) or as Julie puts it, prioritizing her intention for her son to "*not grow up to become some asshole.*" A good mother then was defined as a mother who informs and prepares their children to navigate systemic injustices, both experienced by their parents, but also, injustices relative to the consequences of whore stigma more broadly. For some, good mothering also included involving their children in active forms of advocacy work, ensuring from a young age they had experiences with mutual aid efforts and played an active role within their own respective communities. These approaches to mothering were significantly informed by their own upbringing, observations, and experiences with stigma, discrimination, and social injustices, demonstrating why, for these mothers, sex work heightened their capacity to engage in good mothering practices and enhance their capacity to be good mothers themselves (see also Buzzanell et al. 2005).

Zara also expressed the need to educate her son on "*taboo*" topics other parents typically sanitize or avoid entirely, including drug use, alcohol, violence and most importantly, sex. Given

her son's "inevitable exposure" to sex in his social life being a teenager, Zara expressed that it was critical for her as his parent to have honest, thorough discussions on sex education and consent, to best protect Josh, but also, to center the protection of those he socializes with.

Reflecting on what lead her to prioritize these difficult conversations with her 15-year-old son, she shares:

I am really intentional with how I raise Josh because I want him to have the difficult conversations I wish someone had with me... I feel like we really avoid a lot of important topics because we want to protect our kids, but at the same time, we know that doesn't actually protect them... We talk about sex, we talk about bullying, we talk about consent, we talk about the double standards too... He's a teenager, and he needs guidance. You know, none of his friends have those type of conversations with their parents, so they really are just going through a lot of firsts without knowing how to protect themselves. Or how to protect others... His school has always been really conservative, you know, with sex ed ... I guess sex work has taught me that taboo conversations are usually the most important conversations we should be having with our kids. Because curiosity is natural. Sex is something that our kids are exposed to. We can't just avoid topics we don't want our kids to think about, or filter sex out of their lives. They're thinking about it whether you talk to them about it or not.

Sex workers have long engaged in advocacy for safe sex and sex education, with those they work alongside but also for the development of government policy (Bates and Berg 2014). It is no surprise then that their children's sex education was also valued at home, recognizing parents as typically being their children's first and most prevalent sex educators (Turnbull et al. 2008). Doing so is not a practice exclusive to sex workers; however, it was further motivated by participants' own experiences with sex, sex education, consent, and stigmatization more broadly (see also Buzzanell et al. 2005). For Zara, educating her son on sex and consent provided reassurance that she was best protecting Josh as his parent, while also fulfilling her obligation to teach Josh to respect and protect others, which to Zara was "just as important."

Having been a teenage parent herself, Victoria also felt it was important to educate her daughter about sex at home, as the conversations Ivy has with her teachers merely touch on the

biological aspect of sex, which “*just isn’t enough*.” Despite her intention of heightening Ivy’s awareness of the emotional, mental, and physical outcomes of sex in order to best prepare and protect Ivy in the long run, Victoria expressed she is judged for having these conversations, as others have misinterpreted this education as Victoria “*promoting*” sex to her 9-year-old daughter.

Victoria shares:

I got pregnant when I was fifteen, and she knows that. And we talk about sex, from more than just a health stance... She knows what consent is, she knows I’ll love her no matter what, you know. I really try to take away any sort of slut-shaming a lot of little girls experience from their own parents, like, she knows she’ll be loved no matter what her sexuality is, she knows I won’t judge her... It doesn’t mean I want the same for her, and it’s fucked up because I know some people view it like that.

Over the past two decades, teen mothers have played a pivotal role in advocating for better sex education in schools, identifying first-hand the gaps present in current curriculums (Kidger 2005). Teen mothers have also assumed sex educator roles within their own communities, helping youth make informed decisions and have access to necessary resources for protection. These efforts, however, have been met with resistance—as teen mother’s experiences of “pleasure and fulfillment” (p. 492) raise the concern that rather than educating young adults, their testimony would encourage others to also become teen parents (Arai 2009; see also Kidger 2005). These same concerns arose when MTV introduced their reality series *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*; however, statistics have now credited these media depictions of teen pregnancy as significantly reducing teenage birth rates across the United States (Kearney and Levine 2014).

Victoria’s experiences with sex education, being a teen mother, and the stigmas she was subject to primarily informed her decision to educate her daughter on sex and slut-shaming. Even as a professional in the healthcare sector, however, Victoria shared that she faces a lot of judgment from extended family for talking to Ivy about sex. She feels family members “*still*”

view her as being a teen parent and try to “*undermine*” her ability to make the best decisions for her daughter. The stigma as a teen mom thus prevails into Victoria’s adulthood (see also Whitley and Kirmayer 2008), serving to undermine her accredited expertise both “*as a mom and as a [healthcare worker]*.” Despite maintaining her engagement in sex work a secret from most people in her life, Victoria experiences judgment for her approach to teaching her daughter about sex, sexuality, and the female body, all from a medical stance. Victoria’s experiences with said judgment demonstrates how the stigmas affiliated with teen pregnancy follow mothers into later stages of their adulthood, in which within this dichotomy, Victoria’s teen pregnancy classifies her as an unfit parent, or rather, the “*whore*.”

As former teen parents, both Jamie and Julie also expressed that the stigmas surrounding teen pregnancy undermine their capacity to be good mothers (Bekaert and Bradly 2019) for their children and assume that teenage pregnancy will be generational, that their children will “*follow in their footsteps*” (Jamie). For Jamie, this includes “*side-comments*” from her extended family members who continue to slut-shame her for having a child younger in life, implying “*[her] decisions as his mom will just ruin [Jack’s] life.*” Julie also experiences similar judgment from others, especially when expressing her desire to educate her son on safe-sex practices. Julie shares:

‘It’s like, I’m going to do what is best for him and what I think is most responsible. And that means we are going to talk about sex... [But] once you’re a slut, you are always a slut. So people just think I’m a shit parent and that I’ll encourage him to have sex really young. Even though I’m most qualified to talk about sex with him, as someone who never really got that from their own parents and had to figure it out on my own.’

Reflecting on how her parenting practices are subject to further stigmatization from those aware that Julie supports her son through sex work, Julie adds:

I do think though that we face stigma when it comes to talking about sex with our kids because we are whores. You know, people assume we are fucked up parents and

that if I talk to my kid about sex, that I'm in some way grooming them to be a sex worker. Even though I'm just teaching them what consent means when someone touches their body... We are just hypersexualized, so anything to do with us teaching our kids about sex is stigmatized as well.

Despite being young, Jamie and Julie's children already face societal assumptions that they too will be sexually active at a young age, and potentially, become teenage parents. Although Jamie and Julie both prioritize their children's sexual education at home, which according to research and professionals, is the preferred source for educating children about preventive measures and safe-sex practices (Turnbull et al. 2008; see also Somers and Surmann 2004; Weaver et al. 2002; Berne et al. 2000), they are perceived as being unfit as not just mothers, but also as sexual educators. Although they credit their experiences of stigma and difficulty navigating teen mothering as directly informing their decisions to educate their children, their mothering practices, which "*other moms would be praised for*" (Jamie) continue to be socially criticized and subject to public scrutiny.

Concluding Remarks

The empathetic mothering practices that these womxn engage in align with mainstream narratives of 'good' mothering, but also, ensure that they are raising "*good, conscious, and empathetic*" (Kacy) children. These definitions of good mothering are compliant with dominant ideologies—the responsibility of putting their children's needs above their own, protecting their children and their well-being, being future-oriented parents, and playing a present role in their children's lives. Participants' ability to engage in good, empathetic mothering practices however, was directly influenced by their occupational choice and experiences within the sex work industry.

In accordance with Leely Moore's (2023) reflections as a 'whore-mom,' sex workers have the advantage of possessing necessary and transferable work skills in caring for clients and

navigating the stigma affiliated with their paid work, which also align with dominant ideologies of good mothering. For Leely Moore, “holding boundaries[,]. . . saying no[,]. . . being present and meeting people where they are at[,]. . . [and] teaching by modeling behaviour”(n.p) are just some skills she has acquired as a sex worker, that have enabled her to be a good mother to her children. For the womxn in this study, being empathetic and having “*patience*” (Kathryn), having experience navigating marginalization and stigma, advocating for themselves, mobilizing support for their community, and being sexual educators were all transferrable skills they possess from engaging in sex work, that they regarded as being necessary for prioritizing their children and engaging in good mothering practices. Having experienced the repercussions of stigma, social isolation, mistreatment, and marginalization was directly correlated with their definitions of being good, kind, loving, empathetic and conscious mothers. Reflecting on their own experiences and hardships as sex workers played a pivotal role in their approaches to mothering (Barlow and Cairns 1997), prioritizing meaningful parental choices that align with their own values, beliefs, and attitudes as sex workers. The Madonna-Whore Dichotomy, or rather, Madonna-Whore Dynamic was thus credited as playing an essential role in sex workers’ capacity to be good mothers—highlighting that they are good mothers *because* of their engagement in sex work and their navigation of stigmas related to their paid work.

This chapter illuminates how sex workers navigate these stereotypes to combat patriarchal discourses of social control (Rich 1976; Fuentes 2022), and fulfill the expectations of good, empathetic mothering. Although womxn are still subject to this dichotomy, including those who participated in this study, these definitions and examples of good mothering demonstrate sex workers’ reclaiming their identities as mothers, as sex workers, and most importantly, as good sex working parents. These insights expand contemporary debates on ideologies of good

mothering, illuminating the impact stigma plays on working mothers' capacity to engage with idealized mothering practices, while also, informing their approaches to their mothering practices. Further, these findings bridge sex workers' experiences into mainstream scholarship on working motherhood —expanding contemporary debates on the daily navigation and negotiation of feminized paid work and unpaid care.

Although participants' experiences of stigma, social isolation and discrimination informed their self-definitions and practices of good mothering, further examination is necessary in understanding how sex work specifically enables these womxn to care and provide for their children. Enhancing their ability to be financially secure and for some, to engage in middle-class consumption practices (Rivers-Moore 2010), I explore how sex work has enabled mothers to provide for their children, tending successfully to their children's needs and wants, in comparison to traditional forms of pink-collar work in the chapter to follow. As financial security was not a homogenous experience for all participants, this chapter will further analyze why sex work remains the best choice, or for some, the only choice, in navigating their unpaid responsibilities of care work at home (Federici 2012; Holmstrom 2019; Weeks 2011).

Chapter Seven: Sex Work and Mothering in the Context of Choice and Anti-Work Politics

Marxist feminists have played a key role in identifying the necessity of including gender, class, and reproductive labour in anti-capitalist ideologies (see Dalla Costa and James 1973; Federici 2012; Weeks 2011). In acknowledging the necessary role reproductive labour plays in the overall functioning of capitalism, Marxist feminists have expanded anti-capitalist debates to include the hidden and wageless labour that sustains women's oppression and subordination in capitalist regimes (Dalla Costa and James 1973; see also Federici 2012). For instance, in her analysis of politics of the *Wages for Housework Campaign*, Silvia Federici (2012) demystifies the role women have been granted within capitalist societies, drawing attention to the exploitation associated with housework and disrupting the ways in which unwaged labour is recognized within capitalist formations. Federici further demonstrates the construction of the nuclear family and the role of the housewife as being the root cause of women's oppression-- conceptualizing women as unfree subjects within the context of patriarchal and capitalist societies. Simply put by Federici, women "have cooked, smiled, [and] fucked throughout the years not because it was easier for [them] than for anybody else, but because [they] did not have any other *choice*" (p. 19) (my italics).

Inspired by the *Wages for Housework* campaign, Kathi Weeks (2011) further critiques the necessity of work and proposes a refusal of work altogether-- theorizing the possibility of a postwork society capable of alleviating people from the constraints and inequalities affiliated with burdensome and exploitative labour (Weeks 2011). In proposing a postwork society, Weeks demands a redefinition of work entirely, alleviating people from the burdens of overworking and equally distributing time spent on leisure, personal development, and investing in personal relationships. A postwork society can further challenge capitalist work ethic beliefs that work is

inherently a social and political good-- acknowledging leisure, rest, and non-productive activities as fostering greater individual well-being and collective flourishing. Weeks' theoretical considerations thus demand a reimagining of work altogether, arguing that by moving beyond the traditional emphasis on waged labor, society can create a more just, fulfilling, and sustainable way of life for all.

Although Marxist feminists have made significant contributions in highlighting the role domestic labour and gendered work play in sustaining womxn's subordination in capitalist societies, little scholarship applies an anti-work lens to the case of sex workers (Carlisle 2021). Paralleling the motives behind the *Wages for Housework Campaign*, the *Sex Work is Work* movement highlights the importance of acknowledging sex work, like domestic labour, as a legitimate form of labour—enabling sex workers to advocate for labour rights, fair compensation, and better working conditions (Merteuil 2015; see also Carlisle 2021). As waged labour, the regulation, criminalization, and stigmatization of sex work can be further understood as being reflective of the oppressive conditions produced by capitalism, patriarchy, and racism altogether. Reflecting on womxn's work in the private sphere, sex, whether waged or 'free', must also be recognized as playing a necessary role in reproducing labouring power within capitalist societies (Merteuil 2015). Inviting sex work into broader anti-capitalist discussions on social reproduction can thus enhance understandings of womxn's work within both the private and public sphere—demystifying “the time we consume in the ‘social factory,’ preparing ourselves for work or going to work, restoring our ‘muscles, nerves, bones and brains’ with quick snacks, quick sex, movies, all this appears as leisure, free time, individual choice” (Cox and Federici 1975: 9). Anti-capitalist perspectives may further recognize sex workers as possessing autonomy over their own bodies, making strategic decisions for engaging in survival work when other employment options

are otherwise unavailable (Hester and Stardust 2020). The *Sex Work is Work* movement, like the *Wages for Housework* campaign, must then be understood as advocating for safer working conditions, the recognition of under-recognized legitimate labour, and the reification of work ethic—necessary for a longer-term project that enables sex workers to, in turn, resist their work altogether, crucial for the anti-work movement (Hester and Stardust 2020). Eloquently put by Hester and Stardust (2020) “to claim that ‘sex work is work’ is the necessary starting point for any emancipatory position on contemporary erotic labour, rather than a betrayal of postwork principles” (p. 79).

Sex work is an appealing occupation for many, granting some womxn greater flexibility in their paid working hours and offering some womxn financial benefits that exceed traditional forms of pink-collar careers (Barton 2006; Hardy 2010; Fogel and Quinlan 2011). Motivations to pursue sex work are also influenced by the lack of opportunities available for womxn to earn a sustainable living within our current labour climate (Fogel and Quinlan 2011; Hannem and Tigchelaar 2016), especially in comparison to other gendered forms of paid work that require formal credentials to pursue (Bruckert 2002; Barton 2006). This was echoed in Bernadette Barton’s (2006) study on exotic dancers across the United States, as she recounts dancers’ initial motives to pursue sex work:

Many women begin dancing after struggling to support themselves through more conventional means and after exhausting other employment options. Finding work that supports oneself without a bachelor’s degree—and, unfortunately, sometimes with one—is increasingly difficult in the twenty-first century... [as] the number of jobs that pay a living wage is decreasing. (p. 25)

The potential for higher earnings, economic independence, and greater flexibility in their paid work schedule however can be particularly appealing for mothers (Duff et al. 2015), as mothers, especially single mothers, remain economically marginalized and face more precarious

economic circumstances in comparison to men (Rivers-Moore 2010; Bromwich and Dejong 2015). In Canada, the gendered wage gap prevails – with womxn earning only \$0.89 for every dollar earned by men (Statistics Canada 2019); men out-earn womxn in almost every occupational group, including jobs traditionally perceived as pink-collar occupations (Moyser 2017; p. 30). The gendered wage gap is even worse for womxn facing multiple barriers, with racialized womxn in Canada earning only \$0.74 per dollar (Statistics Canada 2019), and womxn with disabilities earning even less, in comparison to men with and without disabilities (Burlock 2017). As such, it is no surprise that womxn make up the majority of sex workers in Canada, with racialized womxn vastly over-represented in Canada’s sex industry (Goodall 2019; see also Maynard 2018).

Although no formal studies have accurately captured estimates on the demographics of sex workers in Canada, estimates provided by The English Collective of Prostitutes indicate 70% of sex workers in the UK are mothers (see also Elsdon et al. 2022) and this is echoed globally (Nestadt 2021), with some entering the profession as a means to support their families, in the absence of state funded supports and affordable childcare, and some in navigating impoverished conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (see also NSWP 2021). Regardless of the motives behind the decision to pursue sex work, researchers demonstrate a clear link between sex work, class mobility, consumption, and motherhood (Rivers-Moore 2010), enabling womxn to engage in quality mothering practices and having heightened access to middle-class consumption privileges (Rivers-Moore 2010; see also Annett 2019; Nestadt 2021). This connection was especially prevalent throughout my interviews with each of my participants, in which participants’ ability to perform good mothering was directly linked to the benefits and nature of their paid work.

Enhancing their ability to be financially secure and for some, to engage in middle-class consumption practices (Rivers-Moore 2010), this chapter explores i) how sex work has enabled mothers to financially provide for their children, tending successfully to their children's needs and wants, in comparison to other forms of civvy work. Highlighting how ii) financial security was not a homogenous experience for all participants, this chapter further analyzes why sex work remains the best choice or for some, the only choice in navigating their unpaid responsibilities of care work—acknowledging agency as existing on a continuum, influenced by the violence of capitalism and patriarchy itself (Federici 2012; Holmstrom 2019; Weeks 2011). Lastly, iii) I demonstrate how participants acknowledge the flexibility of sex work as playing a crucial role in their capacity to navigate paid work and unpaid care, enabling mothers to fulfill the mundane gendered and unpaid responsibilities at home, while also, affording participants unique opportunities to further bond with their children. Echoed throughout all participants' narratives was that these mothers were able to be present in their children's lives in ways other forms of employment did not allow them to be—having access to time spent with their children, and more so, having time exclusively dedicated to themselves. This is reflective of Kathi Weeks' (2011) critique of the requirement to engage in waged and unwaged work as a primary means for survival, proposing a post-work society that highlights a refusal of work, or more importantly, the refusal of being bound to work. Weeks' anti-work politics draw attention to how work has been naturalized and centralized, defining labour and productivity as our primary purpose and means for survival, making leisure time a luxury, sustaining gendered inequalities, and maintaining womxn's second-class status in the paid labouring market. Anti-work politics thus highlight the necessary relationship and role that work and violence play in the overall

preservation of capitalism (Gordon 1997; see also Berg 2014)— “as if ‘work’ and ‘violence’ were mutually exclusive” (Merteuil 2015: n.p.).

In recognizing the violence of capitalism itself, Hester and Stardust (2020) further stress that “to choose sex work, then, may be to refuse to be swallowed by the alternatives and resist the pressure to submit to more ‘respectable’ forms of labour. Within this context, one can easily recognize anti-work tendencies” (p. 77). In line with this argument and reflective of Kathi Weeks’ (2011) proposition for a post-work/ anti-work society, this chapter demonstrates how these mothers made significant and intentional choices to engage in sex work to best support themselves and their families. Although participants did not actively refuse to engage in both waged and unwaged survival work, in the absence of a basic income and state funded supports, this chapter argues that as complexly positioned workers within capitalism, these mothers’ motivations to pursue sex work reflect anti-work tendencies. By this, participants stress their occupational choice as best enabling them to negotiate some of the traditional constraints of working motherhood — granting some participants financial security, greater flexibility in their paid working hours, fewer hours than traditional full-time occupations and refusing to overwork, and having greater leisure time to invest in themselves and their families. Though participants do not fully engage in a refusal of domestic and waged work entirely and remain subject to the constraints placed on working mothers in capitalism, their decision to navigate sex work and mothering provides us with critical vantage points that illuminate how working mothers in capitalist societies are attempting to negotiate the constraints placed on them, to best achieve the motives that coincide with anti-capitalist, anti-work, and post-work ideologies. As such, occupying complex positions as workers whose motivations are reflective of anti-work tendencies, this chapter aims to expand current debates on anti-capitalist ideologies. In doing so,

this chapter recognizes these mother's decision to engage in sex work as actively refusing the burdensome hours, low wages, exploitation, alienation, and inequalities otherwise afforded to working mothers engaging in traditional forms of waged work (see also Hester and Stardust 2020).

Regardless of the constraints associated with racial capitalism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism, this chapter highlights how participants narrate their decision to engage in sex work as being conscious, significant, and meaningful. In doing so, participants' own experiences challenge the analysis of sex work exclusionary radical feminists (SWERFs), who disregard sex workers' agency and equate consensual sex work with sex trafficking to portray sex workers as coerced by the need for survival and because of patriarchal oppression (see Barry 1995; Miriam 2005; Brison 2006). The photographic contributions throughout this chapter further serve to demystify cultural assumptions about their everyday lives, showcasing how choosing to engage in sex work enhanced mothers' ability to financially and emotionally provide for their children and was a meaningful choice that best suits their needs, contrary to the stigmatization of their dual roles (see Barton 2006).

Centering participants' experiences is pivotal to combatting SWERF narratives and ideologies that position sex workers as one-dimensional victims and exclude sex workers' experiences from their analyses. Rather than highlighting variations of free and unfree choices womxn make in the context of capitalism, all of which are gendered, racialized, classed, and impacted by the legal system (Cruz 2018; see also Holmstrom 2019), SWERF perspectives pay little attention to sex workers' own accounts of agency, in addition to nuances of choice. As participants' own experiences discredit radical/ abolitionist feminists' arguments regarding sex work and choice (Barry 1995; Miriam 2005; Brison 2006), it is crucial to note this chapter does

not engage with SWERF perspectives at length, to uphold my intent of producing destigmatizing literature.

Economic Security

Throughout my photo-elicitation interviews, a common theme bled through all participants' narratives—sex work was a meaningful occupational choice that afforded some womxn the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families, in ways other forms of traditional employment could not. This is further echoed throughout the literature, in which working mothers in other industries have credited their engagement in paid labour as enabling them to access financial security and engage in good mothering practices (Buzzanell et al. 2005). Some participants took pride in their decision to pursue sex work, as sex work enabled them to cater to their children's wants and needs, providing their families with economic stability not accessible to them in other types of paid work (see also Buzzanell et al. 2005). This same trend has also been observed in the Global South (Rivers-Moore 2010; Basu and Dutta 2011), where the financial security as working mothers provides womxn greater resources to engage in middle-class consumption practices. In comparison to other case studies exploring the navigation of mothering and sex work, what is unique for my findings is that half (seven) of my participants engaged in sex work prior to deciding on becoming parents. As a result, these womxn made their decision to navigate these dual roles knowing the resources they would be able to access as sex workers to support their families. Recognizing sex work as a chosen career for many, including those who are or intend on becoming mothers, is crucial in normalizing sex work—refuting stigmas that otherwise assume mothers engage in sex work as an “alternative plan” or “last resort” based on necessity.

Liz, a full-service sex worker, felt that normalizing and recognizing sex work as being an ideal career choice for mothers was crucial in demystifying cultural stereotypes surrounding sex work—highlighting that the benefits of sex work, reflective of anti-work tendencies, are often overlooked by others. Reflecting on how sex work gave her reassurance that she would be able to financially support her family prior to having her daughter, she shared:

I saw an opportunity to earn money and become independent and when I realized that was manageable for me, I stayed in the industry... I've always wanted kids, and sex work actually made it feel like it was possible. You know, if I have secure finances and am self-employed, and have everything I need to raise a child, why wouldn't I? I'd probably be in a worse financial state if I worked any other job, so it would've been irrational and stupid for me to work somewhere else before I had my kids. And I might not have even been in a place where I felt like I could support kids... So right from the beginning, this was my plan. And I'm proud to say that... I think people view sex work as a last resort, plan B, especially when you're a mom.

For Liz, not only was pursuing sex work a choice she consciously made to best support her family, but it was also an opportunity to expand her independence, financial security, and her capacity to navigate working motherhood. These financial benefits of being in the industry prior to becoming a mother were also appealing for Stacey, who worked as an escort for two years before giving birth to her daughter, Claire. Stacey shared that she often faced judgment for choosing to become a mother as a sex worker, as sex work is rarely recognized as a legitimate source of income. Most of Stacey's family felt she was being irresponsible for choosing to become a mother while working in the industry yet failed to recognize how her occupational choice benefitted her, her family, and ultimately, was a contributing factor in Stacey's family planning decisions. Regarding sex work as solely exploitative and degrading, as opposed to being a “financially rewarding” and “ideal career” for Stacey to pursue, especially as a mother, she shares:

Just your typical drugstore run...

- Juice boxes
- meds (cause kids are ALWAYS sick)
- Condoms
- Lube



You know, sex work was an outlet to explore my sexuality, but it was also a means to support myself. It's a job...I planned my pregnancy as a sex worker, and I did that for a reason... [Sex work] sustains us, it pays our bills, and I knew I could give Claire everything she needed from being a sex worker, and more, so in fact, it was the most responsible choice I made for our family. It's basically given me privileges, you know, to confidently say that Claire will always have whatever she needs.

For Stacey, pursuing sex work was a “*responsible choice*”—enabling her to secure a middle-class income to support herself, and eventually, to be in a comfortable financial position to begin family-planning. Although her choice to pursue unconventional and stigmatized paid work was not supported by family and friends, Stacey stressed that her decision was motivated by the lack of opportunities available to her. Wanting to break free from the burdens of low-waged, feminized work and maximize her economic growth (Crain 1991), sex work enabled her to

negotiate the conditions of capitalism when planning to become a mother—confident that her occupational choice would provide financial stability required to care for her family.

Sex work also played a primary role in Natalie's ability to financially support herself and her family, especially once her daughter was born. Prior to becoming pregnant with her partner Sam, Natalie worked as an escort and continued working as an escort until she was 8 ½ months pregnant with her daughter, Nellie. As an escort, Natalie was able to self-fund her 18 month long maternity leave, saving enough money "*to be able to live comfortably postpartum*" and "*not feel pressured to go back to work before [she] was ready.*" Natalie was also able to secure further economic stability for her family through her innovative decision to have a virtual baby shower inviting all her regular clients, who were able to cover a significant amount of the initial expenses of having a newborn:

I worked throughout my pregnancy so there was no hiding that I was a mother and then post postpartum, you know, I had like a virtual baby shower where all my clients bought me all sorts of gifts. Like I didn't have to buy anything. It was wonderful... I had one client pay for my entire, uh, cloth diapering system. It was like \$700.00. He hooked me up, got [me] every single thing I needed... I used those diapers for 3 1/2 years... It was such a great. Uh, such a great baby shower gift.

Sarah also chose to self-fund her maternity leave through sex work, working overtime to allow her to take 4 months off work while pregnant, and 4 months off work after giving birth to care for her daughter, Isabel. Sarah's decision to fund her maternity leave was, in part, advice she had received from other dancers she worked with, who reassured her that her earnings would be enough to cover the costs of a newborn, and that self-funding her maternity leave would likely be in the best interest of protecting her future daughter:

I got advice from a few other girls who were also moms, and I'm glad I did. Because it did feel kinda sketchy, to be like, 'hey I work at this club, I'm pregnant, I'd like to invest in EI for mat leave, come raid our club, come take my kid away'... I don't really know what the consequences would've been, and really, money wasn't a huge concern for me... it was a matter of cost versus benefit... So that's why I took so

much time off before giving birth, because I really wanted to avoid customers knowing I was pregnant... But we had enough money to get by, without money being like a primary stressor, and we had Andrew supporting us, so we were fortunate.

From a family planning perspective, sex workers felt confident that their occupational choice would provide them with the suitable income, access to resources, and working conditions they would require as mothers. Their occupational choice was not only informed by the perks of sex work, but also by the lack of feasible opportunities for womxn in the labour market (see Federici 2012). For these mothers, sex work enabled them to negotiate some of the precarious conditions that characterize womxn's work—unemployment, underemployment, being overworked, and earning low-wages to meet their basic needs (Hester and Stardust 2020; Weeks 2011). This is further echoed in participants' choices around maternity leave pay. Having not paid into the EI premiums for accessing maternity leave pay under the *Fairness for the Self-Employed Act* (Department of Justice Canada 2012), these mothers chose to self-fund their maternity leave, which also enabled them to extend their leave beyond the maximum allotted time of 15 weeks through the EI self-employed program (Government of Canada 2022a). Here, the financial security sex work offered some participants was thus seen as being more secure and reliable than that provided by the government (see Weeks 2011), and more reliable than maternity leave opportunities for womxn engaging in full-time, conventional paid work. Although participants' choice to self-fund their own maternity leave was influenced by the costs associated with making regular EI payments for a minimum of 12 consecutive months prior to accessing the maternity leave benefits, as well as concerns regarding heightened surveillance and stigmatization from government-related programs as mothers in the sex work industry, sex work provided these new mothers with the financial security of taking unpaid leave while tending to the expenses affiliated with their newborn's needs. Sex work enhanced their ability to engage in family planning and

feel reassured that they could access the necessary resources and self-funded supports when raising their children.

The choice to pursue sex work, and more importantly, stay in the industry when they became mothers, was an intentional and meaningful choice—a choice to provide their families and themselves by obtaining financial security, unique opportunities, stable self-funded resources in lieu of inadequate government-funded options, affording privileges otherwise not accessible to them. With the responsibilities of unwaged childcare at home, these mothers made the calculated choice to resist “overworking to meet basic survival needs” (Carlisle 2021:584)—acknowledging how sex work has enhanced their capacity to financially care for themselves and their families, refuting what would otherwise be available to them in traditional waged work (see also Hester and Stardust 2020). For participants facing multiple barriers, sex work was also regarded as playing a key role in their ability to financially tend to their children’s needs. For instance, when Jamie first became pregnant in high school, she felt like she was “*completely fucked.*” Receiving no financial support from Jack’s father and having limited access to financial and physical support from her parents, she knew raising Jack would come with challenges and barriers that were “*impossible to overcome.*” Reflecting on her decision to pursue online sex work, and how remote self-employment enables her to provide for and support her son, Jack, in ways other forms of paid work “*can’t provide*” her without formal university/college credentials, Jamie shares:

I was fucked, and if I didn’t want to be fucked, I had to be creative... I needed an income, and I needed the flexibility of being home to take care of Jack... It’s not as easy as everyone thinks, like you have to motivate yourself and be strategic. You need an entire persona online and you have to be consistent... It’s really paid off for me, because I’m covering expenses I wouldn’t normally be able to cover, I’m really proving myself to be a good mom, you know, a good single-mom who got pregnant in high school and was set up to fail, and I’m not... I have financial security that even

my friends who don't have kids and went to university and didn't pay a dime for it don't have.

The ability to be financially independent, especially for single mothers and mothers facing multiple forms of oppression, granted these womxn a sense of empowerment, which is further echoed in Poduval and Poduval's (2009) analysis on the navigation of paid work and good mothering. Under the shift of neoliberalism, working womxn redefined the image of good mothers—highlighting that working mothers can in fact be better mothers, as they take on the extra burden of paid work to benefit their family's financial position. Compared to stay-at-home mothers, working mothers provide their families with additional income, improving the standards of living for their families and ensuring they have access to resources that improve their children's health and overall well-being. Sex work thus offers these womxn the opportunity to be financially independent and access the opportunity to exercise a relative amount of freedom to choose the conditions of their lives (Carlisle 2021) further reflected in postwork imaginaries (see Weeks 2011). Although not a direct refusal of waged and unwaged labour, participants' motivations to pursue sex work clearly reflect anti-work tendencies, enabling mothers to at times, reduce their workload, while also, best negotiate the constraints placed on working mothers and single working mothers within capitalist, neoliberal societies. These valuable insights demonstrate the importance of anti-capitalist ideologies for womxn specifically—in which their motivations to navigate mothering and sex work are fueled by their intent to negotiate the conditions of their lives and financially support themselves and their families. Motivations behind their occupational choice further reflect a refusal to engage in excessive, burdensome, survival work that womxn are otherwise subject to-- as mothers, as caretakers, as domestic workers, and as complexly positioned, subordinate labourers within capitalism (Federici 2012; see also Weeks 2011). Being able to engage in financially rewarding work that

required fewer hours was thus appealing to these womxn, as “a lesser share of one’s life [was] consumed by remunerated labour” (Hester and Stardust 2020: 77). Engaging in sex work then was acknowledged as a strategic decision for these mothers, that is further reflective of anti-work tendencies, granting mothers the opportunity to prioritize their unpaid responsibilities at home, reduce the hours spent on waged work, while also maintaining financial autonomy, even from the state. In a system that requires us to engage in waged work based off necessity, these motivations behind participants’ occupational choices demonstrate not only the limitations and burdens of traditional employment on mothers specifically, but more significantly, the importance of reimagining work entirely—to best suit our needs, wants, work-life balance, and autonomy, even if still limited and characterized by the constraints of capitalism itself. As participants highlight the benefits of engaging in sex work as mothers, in contrast to traditional employment opportunities otherwise available, these insights provide crucial vantage points that demonstrate how working mothers engage in waged work out of necessity, while also, negotiating the limitations of patriarchal, capitalist, and neoliberal regimes to achieve some semblance of the fulfillment and autonomy that is advocated by postwork scholars (Weeks 2011). An active refusal of work is thus not necessary in acknowledging how participants’ motivations are reflective of anti-work perspectives.

This was particularly evident amongst participants, including Jamie, whose engagement in sex work, compared to other forms of paid work, greatly improved their living conditions and the ways in which they could attend to their children’s financial needs on their own. Like Jamie, Marie also faced challenges as a single mother, making sex work a more appealing option for her to pursue. Prior to becoming a full-time escort, Marie worked a desk job for an organization that was based on shift work, sometimes working as late as midnight. As a single mother, late

evening shift work made finding secure childcare for her daughter “*a full-time job in itself.*” So, Marie started escorting part-time to earn additional income. She soon realized she was earning more income from sex work and that indeed, quitting her desk job would allow her to maximize her earnings through sex work. This granted her further flexibility and time she could spend with her daughter, Lydia. Reflecting on how sex work has provided her family with financial security and alleviated the stress of having to navigate a tight budget as she did when working for her previous employer, Marie shared the image below of three receipts she had found in her purse which capture the purchases she had made over the weekend for her family.



This image showcases how Marie’s decision to pursue sex work allows her to not only afford the necessities to care for her daughter, but also, gives her the privilege to treat her daughter. Giving

a glimpse of an average weekend's shopping habits, Marie provides a breakdown of her purchases, and how sex work affords her the comfort of middle-class level consumption:

For the Shoppers one, it was like my kid was sick so I went and got her like Pepto Bismol and a nail Polish... There's that and then a couple days later, she really wanted to go to Olive Garden. She loves Olive Garden for some reason, even though she only gets spaghetti and butter. And I could make it at home for a quarter I'm sure... I have like the financial means to take care of my kid when she's sick and get her nail polish to make her feel better and take her out for lunch even though I pay way too much money for spaghetti and butter... It's like I don't have to like budget down to the dollar anymore, you know, it's not like I'm going to a grocery store with like \$60.00 and I gotta like and I always, paranoid of like, you know, not having enough money...It's like groceries and like snacks and stuff for my kid, but then also condoms and Lubes [for work].

This image Marie captured demonstrates how sex work has impacted her ability to become financially stable and cover the costs of her family's needs, while also affording the privilege of buying her daughter “*special little things*,” or what she calls “*I love you presents*.” The decision to pursue sex work was not only motivated by enhancing Marie's capacity to be financially independent in comparison to her previous job (see Rivers-Moore 2010), but also, provided her the conditions and time to engage in good mothering practices which had not been previously available to her. Unlike her previous job, sex work amplified her ability to spend more quality time with her daughter, Lydia, like taking her daughter out for a special lunch or even the “*freedom*” of “*being able to go to the park on a whim on a random Tuesday and not having to go to my eight to five job*.”



Here, the opportunity to spend more time with her daughter was pivotal in making her decision to pursue sex work full-time. Recognizing how much her family's life has changed as a result of this decision, and more importantly, how sex work has benefitted her in navigating work and motherhood, Marie confidently shared that despite how others may perceive her, *"I think I'm a better mother, yeah, because I do this work... I wouldn't be able to do it without, without this job."* Being a better mother was thus regarded as having ample quality time spent with their children, while also having secure finances that enabled participants to engage in middle-class level consumption beyond their family's basic needs (Rivers-Moore 2010). Sex work then must be acknowledged as enabling Marie to maximize her earnings as a working mother, while also

accessing the privilege and freedom to spend time with her children, rather than spending most of her waking hours tied to lower waged work (Weeks 2011; see also Hester and Stardust 2020).

Stacey and Zara shared similar images to illustrate how sex work has amplified their ability to engage in middle-class level consumption on a weekly basis. “*Not having to penny pinch*” (Stacey) and “*being able to invest in [her] son’s future*” (Zara) provided both mothers with the flexibility of ensuring their family’s finances were “*on the right track*.” For Stacey, this meant she was able to cover all the “*daunting costs of motherhood*”—including food, clothing, shelter, medical care, school supplies, field trip money, and extra-curricular activities. Affording her the privilege to “*walk into a grocery store and get all of the items off our list... [including] the chocolate chip cookies Claire tried to add to the list,*” Stacey credited her occupational choice as enabling her to be a stable provider for her family.

Prior to our interview, Zara spent the morning at the grocery store buying everything she needed to make a special Thanksgiving meal for Josh and herself, with all his favourite desserts to follow. After getting groceries, she met with her financial advisor to review her year’s investments and “*plan ahead*” to support Josh’s future and post-secondary endeavors (see also Dalla et al. 2019; McCloskey et al. 2020; Schmidt et al. 2023). As a single mother, she believes her financial independence is critical to ensuring Josh isn’t disadvantaged in comparison to his peers living in dual-earner homes. Reflecting on how she not only challenges traditional gendered roles of parenting, but also fulfills the responsibilities of two parents, Zara shares:

At times, I’m mom. You know, I’m the one making dinner and doing the chores and taking him to school... But I’ve gotta play both parts, you know, I’m mom and dad. He has a dad, but it’s different. He’s not with his dad much, and his dad’s income is divided, like we aren’t pooling our money together and paying for like one apartment or anything. So I have to care for him and be there for him and make him my priority, but I also have to bring home the money... As an escort, you know, I’m, I’m able to work reduced hours, and it’s really flexible like with my schedule, but I still have the income that’s compared to another mom who works like 60 hours a week.

Sex work enables Zara to engage in not just ideologies of good mothering, but more importantly, ideologies of what Carroll and Yeadon-Lee (2022) refer to as good lone motherhood. Having access to an income comparable to some white-collar occupations, but only required to work a fraction of the hours to earn her income is “*the only way [Zara] can support Josh the way he deserves to be supported*”—financially, materially, emotionally, and physically. Even though buying special desserts “*might seem like the littlest of luxuries*” to others, Zara feels “*proud*” for being able to fulfill Josh’s needs and wants as a single mother. Sex work was thus essential in Zara’s ability to maintain this independence (Rivers-Moore 2010) and the material constraints generally affiliated with lone motherhood (Carroll and Yeadon-Lee 2022). Sex work further enables Zara to remain “*present*” in Josh’s day-to-day life—something very few middle/upper-class occupations can offer single working mothers—affording Zara the financial benefits typically granted to employees working “*60 hours a week... [but] instead only having to work a third of [those hours]*”. The requirement to work fewer hours reflects the motivations of the anti-work movement (Weeks 2011; Hester and Stardust 2020) and is further essential in recognizing how the refusal of work can be “*empowering*” (Zara) for womxn specifically, as they’ve been granted a second-class status within the paid labouring market (Hester and Stardust 2020; see also Federici 2012; Budig, Misra and Boeckmann 2012). Sex work was acknowledged as enabling these working mothers to negotiate some of the traditional constraints sustained in capitalism (see Weeks 2011)—offering Zara specifically a life that enables womxn “*to have time to actually be a present mom, and also, just have the time to do shit for me and be fucking happy.*”

These findings have also been observed in the Global South (Rivers-Moore 2010; Basu and Dutta 2011; Karandikar et al. 2022), where the financial security as sex workers and mothers

provides womxn greater resources to provide and care for their families, a rational choice that enables them to be better mothers (Basnyat 2014). For some mothers, the decision to pursue sex work was a goal-oriented choice, creating opportunity for themselves to improve their financial situations and work-life balance (see also Kabeer 2002). Echoed in Karandikar et al.'s (2022) study, mothers who engaged in sex work did so due to limited social and familial support or help from government agencies, an empowering choice that enabled them to secure their family's financial independence and act as breadwinners for their family. Their choice to pursue sex work was also critical in providing their children with better futures, including post-secondary education, managing "the social challenges involved for the sake of using their earnings to give their children a better future" (Karandikar et al. 2022: 27-28; see also Dalla et al. 2019, McCloskey et al. 2020).

Some participants shared how sex work had provided them with the financial freedom to engage in consumption practices they've struggled with in the past: buying their children treats at the store, taking their children on vacation, hosting birthday parties for their kids, enrolling their kids in extra-curricular programs, and buying their family members special holiday gifts. As sex work enabled mothers to engage in middle-class consumption practices, their choice to engage in sex work was strategic and meaningful, "based on an assessment [or in this case, past experiences] of how much they can earn compared to other types of employment available to them" (Rivers-Moore 2010:721). For Kacy, her decision to engage in sex work was an empowering choice, enabling her to save enough money and afford the classed privilege of taking her family on their first family vacation, paid exclusively by her earnings.



Reflecting on how sex work has contributed to Kacy and her husband Darian's finances, including paying for their family trip to Jamaica and acting as a breadwinner supporting her family's financial needs, she shares:

We have a mortgage, we have a car, you know, we like can pay our bills every month, and we aren't always stressed about saving our money... We actually went on our first trip together as a family, I paid for it all on my own, which was a really proud moment for me. We went to Jamaica, and we just got to spend an entire week together as a family... as much as it was, you know, amazing to be staying at a resort with unlimited food and drinks, it was even better just to like spend that time together as a family. Like, the kids just had a blast, it wasn't relaxing at all haha but it just felt really good, like it was really rewarding, rewarding to see them have fun like that. I swear Zack has told every person he's met about the cereal bar they had haha.

Sex work also enabled Kathryn to treat her son Alex to unique experiences and hotel getaways, a space typically used to meet with clients. Acknowledging that it hasn't always been easy for her, especially when she was struggling with an active addiction, Kathryn shared this collage to showcase how her ability to earn a secure income and her commitment to recovery has directly enabled her to be a good mother. Laughing while reflecting on these memories she shared with Alex, Kathryn shares:



I can't forget his little face and like how excited he was. He's like, 'you can just call and they bring you pancakes?!' And it's just like, it's like he just didn't believe you, you know? Like how, you know, like this is great! You just pick up the phone and a little while later they just show up at your door with pancakes hahahah... I went [on the balcony] and I left him with a jacuzzi tub for like a minute and I told him he couldn't go in there. And he didn't. But then he just dumped all of the soap and I walked into this room and there is just bubbles, everywhere, like just and he's sitting there laughing like he thinks it's just great hahaha.

Sometimes, participants were also able to share some of the ‘perks’ of their work with their children as well—including adding their Christmas gifts on their sex work specific wishlists for clients to purchase—not yet observed in current research. Although much of Julie’s Amazon wishlist generally consists of “little gifts” for herself, work-related necessities like condoms and lube, and everyday items she “has her eye on,” Julie decided to add a few basic Christmas gifts this year. Sharing this image of all the packages that arrived at her house a few days later, purchased by two gentlemen she was seeing regularly and consisting of every single Christmas gift she wanted to buy for her son and father, Julie shares:



They literally paid for all of our Christmas gifts, and like, I put waaay more things on my wishlist than I would've bought... I basically went on a free shopping spree that didn't interfere with my income, and I saved a lot of money that I could use to pay for groceries and tuition... Imagine if someone paid for all of your Christmas gifts that you gave your family, you'd be like, blown away... Christmas is so fucking expensive, we've like normalized spending a lot of money on your kids for Christmas, because you're a good mom, and you're like rewarding your kid for being good all year too... I wouldn't have been able to afford like half of their gifts on my own, and seeing Matthew open his gifts was like the best feeling ever.

The “caring,” “reciprocal” relationships Julie has with her sugar daddies and OnlyFans subscribers offers a unique entry for analysis—where she receives gifts, in addition to what she charges for her services. These gifts aren’t necessarily luxurious, nor are they wants. These items include necessities that she would otherwise be required to pay out of pocket for—such as books,

toys, and clothes her son needs, as well as replacements for old appliances for the joint household she shares with her father, David. For Julie, some of the costs affiliated with everyday life, whether it be “*covering [her] tuition*” or “*replac[ing] old bath towels*” do not impact the income she receives—rather, her experiences demonstrate how the commodification of sex, or in this case, the commodification of companionship, offers womxn additional forms of meaningful support that is not available to them within the labour market (see also Weeks 2011; Federici 2012).

Julie is transparent that she “*expects*” to be compensated through agreed upon monetary arrangements, in addition to receiving material or monetary gifts for her time spent maintaining ongoing emotional companionships. As a sugar baby, Julie can profit from what is often treated as “private, intimate, and spontaneous acts of love” (Weeks 2011:68)—or otherwise regarded as “nonwork” (p. 68)—recognizing how capitalism maintains the “invisibility, devaluation and gendering” (p. 28) of intimate relationships. Under these arrangements then, Julie can heighten her expectations of how she is compensated—ensuring compensation meets her and her son’s basic needs of everyday life. This was further echoed by Natalie and her decision to host a virtual baby shower with her clients, encouraging them to send her gifts to help her in welcoming her daughter, Nellie.

For sex workers then, compensation can be acknowledged as not only an exchange of money for sexual services, but also, as a way for sugar daddies, clients, and patrons to demonstrate gratitude for these womxn and reciprocate the companionship they receive—just as they would with their wives, girlfriends, or family members. In this context, sex workers’ engagement in their paid work can be understood as reflective of anti-work tendencies, in that they are modifying and challenging mainstream forms of compensation to address their

individual needs, making critical negotiations that best suit their needs and are otherwise not available in traditional occupations. They expect compensation that will exceed their agreed upon rate of pay, and they cultivate and prioritize relationships with clients that are reciprocal and fulfilling. These insights are crucial in expanding current debates and understandings of the anti-work movement, highlighting how commodifying companionship, sex, love, and socially reproductive activities challenges dominant ideologies around 'legitimate' labour, wages, and work ethic altogether (see Weeks 2011; Federici 2012).

Financial independence, middle-class income opportunities, greater flexibility in their paid working schedules, and their capacity to enhance their family's living conditions were thus influential factors in some mothers' decisions to pursue sex work, demonstrating their choice to do so as being intentional and strategic. For these womxn, their decision to engage in sex work directly influenced their capacity to care for their families-- financially and emotionally, fulfilling their children's needs, wants, having access to certain classed-privileges and luxuries, amplifying their time spent with their families, and planning for their children's futures. The decision to pursue sex work, compared to other forms of paid work, was critical in upholding their goals of being *better* mothers, especially for participants who were single mothers, mothers without formal education, and mothers' who came from working-class backgrounds (see also Basnyat 2014). To be a better mother was thus defined as being a mother who best could navigate and negotiate the traditional constraints of capitalism on working mothers, reducing their reliance on traditional burdensome low-waged work, within a system that is sustained by unemployment, underemployment, precarious employment, and hidden, unwaged work (Weeks 2011). This was largely reflective in the photos captured and submitted to the project overall, crediting the financial and emotional benefits of their career as benefitting their family's overall

health, lifestyle, and future opportunities. In capturing these intersections, mothers aim to illustrate their decisions as being strategic, selfless, meaningful, and could overcome some of the common obstacles and struggles faced by working mothers in mainstream occupations ((Hochschild and Machung 2014; Budig et al. 2012; Federici 2012; Weeks 2011). Sex working mothers can thus be understood as contributing to the anti-work movement, because their occupational choice is directly informed by their intent to reduce and negotiate the inequalities, constraints, and positionality available to them in ‘legitimate’ work within capitalist regimes and further, enhance their autonomy from exploitative, burdensome traditional waged work.

‘Getting by’

Although sex work was regarded as enhancing some participants’ ability to access resources necessary in meeting their family’s needs in comparison to other forms of gendered paid work, financial security varied amongst participants, especially those experiencing layered forms of marginalization. Achieving middle or upper-class level consumption is far from a homogenous experience for most Canadian sex workers, with many sex workers facing precarious and impoverished living/ working conditions, and many street-level sex working mothers facing homelessness (Duff et al. 2015). However, this reality of sex workers being working-class or facing financial difficulties is rarely present in online forums, as the ability to engage in middle-class consumption is often part of the “*brand[ing]*” (J.J.) of a “*successful*” (J.J.) sex worker for middle and upper-class clients, also commonly referred to as upscaling (Sanders and Hardy 2015). Reflecting on this, J.J. shares:

We're all online talking about 'Oh yeah, we make so much money. With such class. We are so classy'. If that's our brand at this point. But most of us aren't, most of us aren't. Like we just don't have that kind of money, so it's just like, there's limits to that.

Performing success may, for some, act as a form of stigma management, highlighting that the stigmas affiliated with their paid work are manageable and minor compared to the success of their careers, contrary to the belief that sex workers are fallen womxn (see Barton 2006). This is evident in how some sex workers distinguish their labour and services as being more respectable from those who are most stigmatized—including street-based sex workers, sex workers who use drugs and im/migrant sex workers (Bernstein 2007). In doing so, performing class acts as a marketable tool to gain respectability, heightening the desires of their services and marketing these services as being exclusive to middle- and upper-class clientele (Sanders and Hardy 2015; see also Bernstein 2007).

However, what has yet to be identified in literature is how sex workers may utilize these forms of branding to profit from capitalist ideologies, while simultaneously making strategic decisions to reject engaging in traditional forms of waged work. Existing within a capitalist society, these womxn are subject to the requirement to work for survival, yet they are intentionally engaging in paid work that best enables them to negotiate the conditions of capitalism working mothers face—having access to flexible working hours, dedicating fewer hours to paid work, having greater potential for higher earnings, dictating their working environments, and having more time to engage in leisurely activities. Performing class then remains essential in upscaling their otherwise stigmatized services (Sanders and Hardy 2015), acknowledging that their services typically target clientele who benefit from the capitalistic mode of production, in which their marketing tactics must then cater to the attitudes of their intended clientele. Financial success and independence help people gain respectability within capitalist societies more broadly, as capital gain is directly linked to social power (Federici 2012; Fraser 2016). This marketisation of class, however, can

impose pervasive consequences for those who do not have access to middle- and upper-class privileges-- contributing to heightened forms of stigmatization for street-based, racialized, disabled, im/migrant and working-class sex workers more broadly. This was particularly observed by J.J., who expressed that sex workers' income was typically linked to the intensity of violence, stigmatization, and criminalization, requiring womxn to brand themselves as achieving middle-class ideals.

As a working-class mother with a disability, sex work and affiliated paid advocacy work provided J.J. with enough income to support their daughter Elsa but has not alleviated the structural barriers that they face. In an economy built to further marginalize racialized, disabled, and working-poor individuals, J.J. shares that although their work in the industry has assisted them in providing the material necessities for their daughter, Elsa, middle-class and upper-class level consumption remains out of reach:

I'm proud of who I am and the advocacy that I do and the job—with this job, I'm able to provide for her. And as somebody with a disability and who struggled a lot, you know, the fact that I did it and the fact that I've been doing that, I'm incredibly proud of you know, I used to not. I mean, I used to live on like \$15,000. I was never one of these; like a year, and that was like more than enough. And then, I had a baby. I was like. Oh my God, what am I going to do, Right? Haha. And then I figured it out and it's like every month, every week, sometimes, you figure it out... I know the people around me, are a lot more middle and middle upper class, and It's like, I'm the person that you'll see talking to their kids. You know. Like 'I want a cookie, I want a cookie' And I'm like "well I can't, but we can go home, and I'll make sure you are fed, and that you have clothes and you're never going to; we're lucky right now that we wouldn't have to be fully worried about that too much.

For many sex working mothers, the nature and flexibility of their occupation is thus more beneficial than that of the precarious and unpredictable earnings they secure. As most participants could not access help with childcare from family and friends, the bulk of responsibilities affiliated with unwaged social reproduction was, as Jamie shares, “*put on [her] shoulders.*” With the “*weight*” (Jamie) of gendered care work primarily fulfilled by these

mothers themselves, the flexibility of sex work enabled some mothers to rationalize the precarity of their income, with both Kyra and Alina acknowledging that their occupational choice was dictated by the lack of feasible options available to them, work they had to pursue for their families to “*survive*” (Alina). Despite the lack of financial security, sex work remained a strategic choice made by these mothers to fulfill their responsibilities at home, especially in comparison to the lack of flexibility available to mothers in other occupations. Nevertheless, sex work must be regarded as being situated within and influenced by macro-level economic structures, impacting the inputs and outputs of sex workers’ earnings (Barton 2006) and producing diverse class-based experiences of sex work more broadly. From an anti-work perspective, Alina and Kyra’s decision to engage in sex work, compared to other forms of traditional work, was a way to negotiate some of the constraints many single working mothers experience, especially given the lack of affordable, accessible, and adequate state-funded or subsidized childcare in Canada. Sex work presents these mothers the opportunity to fulfill their demands of unwaged social reproduction at home, while still maintaining an income necessary to support themselves and their families. Though this is not a direct refusal of waged work, it is crucial to acknowledge how sex work presents these mothers with opportunities that traditional forms of employment do not. For Alina specifically, sex work offers an alternative to traditional capitalist labour relations and exploitation that often offers low-wage and burdensome working conditions for migrant mothers (see also Hester and Stardust 2020; Weeks 2011).

Online sex work has helped Kyra supplement some of the costs required to care for her son, Simon, but doesn’t allow her the luxury of middle-class consumption experienced by some other participants. Regardless of her earnings, however, Kyra expressed that sex work is the best, or rather “*the only*” occupational choice for her as a newly single mother at this time, as she

requires flexibility in her schedule to care for Simon, due to the lack of state-funded supports and affordable childcare services available in Canada (MacDonald and Friendly 2019; Prentice and White 2019). Given she is responsible for the bulk of childcare, Kyra is also limited as to how much time she can dedicate to employment, in which the “extensive, undervalued, and largely invisible” (Bezanson 2006b:175) work of mothering interferes with her ability to gain capital (Federici 2012; Fraser 2016). Ensuring Simon’s physical and emotional needs are met, in addition to covering the costs of the basic expenses they require as a sole financial provider for Simon, Kyra shares:



We survive but we don't like, thrive... I could make this much at a part-time gig, but who then who would watch Simon? How would I pay for that?... It's not like I'm making thousands every month, I'm not in like the top whatever percentage of creators [on OnlyFans], but we can make ourselves lunch. You know, we can eat peanut butter sandwiches. We can spend the day at the library and we can cuddle and laugh and go to the park. You know, he can still have a childhood. And like—that's why I chose this picture. I mean, I guess there's a lot to it, but I liked the title 'Mama, why?'. Cause I feel like that's a question I might get one day, and I don't

know how I'll answer it, but if he has a happy childhood and he sees that he will always be put first, then I think he might understand my decisions.

For Alina, however, street-based sex work was also the “*best choice*” she had, in comparison to other forms of paid work, as well as other forms of sex work that would involve paper trails and could lead to her being deported. Her daughter Ella’s life has changed substantially these past few months, and the trauma she experienced as a refugee has heightened her reliance on Alina. Speaking little English, Ella experiences “*a lot of anxiety*” when she is away from her mother, limiting Alina’s ability to find reliable childcare suitable for Ella’s needs. As Ella’s primary caregiver, Alina thus faces barriers in finding paid work that enables her to tend to Ella’s needs— sharing Ella deserves to have her mother’s full attention, even if that means Alina must engage in “*risky*” street-based work during some evenings. This trend is prevalent amongst working mothers whose children require accommodations for childcare, as income and flexibility of their paid working schedule is necessary in supporting their children, especially with a lack of inclusive childcare services available (Nikolić Ivanišević et al. 2023). Reflecting on the sacrifices her husband has made for their family, and the sacrifices Ella has had to make these past few months, Alina reflects on her own “*sacrifices*” to ensure her paid work accommodates the flexibility she requires in caring for Ella, sharing:

I don't want to do this, but I did it because she needs me with her, I need money to support her, and I need to make sure we don't lose our safety... I wish I could do [online sex work] but I can't... it's funny that it's more risky for me to make porn than it is to work alone at night and have nobody to protect me... You know, I'm sad and scared, but if I do something else then she is the one who is sad and scared, so I need to make sacrifices... I've seen what mothers do when their children are in danger. Any mother would do this.

As Ella’s mother, Alina’s choices are dictated by her need to prioritize her caregiving responsibilities at home. As such, Alina’s well-being is always “*second*” to that of her daughters. Self-sacrificing to care for one’s child has always been tied to ideologies of

ideal mothering (O'Brien Hallstein 2006; Schmidt et al. 2023), and with limited access to care for her daughter's specific needs, sex work is the only way Alina can engage in her mothering responsibilities. For Alina, engaging in street-based sex work is thus one example of how she is a good mother, demonstrating that her choice to pursue this work is a rational choice centered around her ability to focus on fulfilling Ella's needs, regardless of her own safety when engaging in street-based work. Alina stresses this is a sacrifice that not only she makes for Ella, but her husband Paul, as he fulfills his military service; "*we both are doing whatever we can to care for her, to make her life better one day. That's all we can do as parents... we just have to face it and get by.*"

Demonstrated through their narratives, both Kyra and Alina's choice to engage in sex work simply wasn't black and white—rather, choice existed on a continuum (Holmstrom 2019). In this case, Alina and Kyra both made the conscious choice to prioritize their responsibilities as mothers over pursuing waged work that would otherwise subject them to less flexible working conditions and additional hours spent engaging in exploitative labour to provide financially for their families. Other scholars assume similar positions, arguing that sex workers made individualized choices in pursuit of sex work, within and structured by the context of economic options available to them (Azhar et al. 2020; Dalla et al., 2019; McCloskey et al., 2020), in which "even under current socioeconomic conditions marked by uncertainty and instability, workers are not without agency" (Benoit et al. 2021:240; see also Basnyat 2014; Manky 2018). This was evident throughout Basnyat's (2014) study on street-based sex workers in Nepal, who viewed themselves not as "powerless, agency-less and victimized" (p. 1045), but rather, regarded their decision to engage in street prostitution as a rational choice, enabling them to best provide for their families. For some,

the decision to pursue sex work is perceived as being a goal-oriented choice, creating opportunity for themselves to improve their financial situations and work-life balance, rather than being victims of the violence of patriarchy (Karandikar et al. 2021; see also Kabeer 2002). Sex workers thus make individualized, rational, strategic, calculated, and meaningful choices to pursue sex work over other forms of paid work— increasing their earnings to best navigate the conditions of capitalism, and more importantly, they possess increased “autonomy over their work and bodies” (Karandikar et al. 2021:27; see also Azhar et al. 2020).

The context of rational choice can be further understood through Victoria’s experiences navigating sex work and nursing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Since late 2019, Victoria has secured a full-time job in healthcare, but chose to continue stripping part-time out of financial necessity. Receiving no financial support from Ivy’s biological father, the income Victoria earns from nursing is not enough for her to pay for Ivy’s expenses alone. Having worked in ‘multiple sectors’ over the past few years, sex work has been one of the few occupations that has afforded Victoria the opportunity to “*get ahead*” and prioritize her family’s future (Dalla et al. 2019; McCloskey et al. 2020), funding her education, paying bills, and helping her put money away for emergency purposes. Despite narratives surrounding how “*degrading*” stripping is, Victoria’s experience in sex work has been “*more freeing*” and “*less exploitative*” than that of her pink-collar occupation, especially throughout the pandemic. Comparing her working conditions in healthcare versus her working conditions as a stripper, she shares:



We were under-staffed, we were dealing with patients every day, we had no beds, we had limited PPE, we weren't vaccinated, we'd work like 20 hours a day and then be too scared to go home to our kids... We didn't really choose to work that much, or get sick or you know, I didn't get much choice in avoiding going home and like not seeing my kid. It was too risky. Like, we had no choice but to do our job... I've always had the choice to strip, you know. I've always been able to push back and have boundaries even if it's a shitty club manager. Like, I've always had more freedom than healthcare... But in healthcare, oh yeah, we are 'heroes' and if you push back, you're a shit [healthcare worker]. As a sex worker, I'm 'just a whore'... it tells you a lot about society... Even when they've offered me to work overtime, I never say yes, like I just can't take it. I would honestly choose to work a shift at the club any day... Cause when I have [worked overtime at the hospital], it takes me days to recover.

For Victoria, her agency as a sex worker was actually “*more empowering*” than that of her nursing career, enabling her to earn a supplementary income that was less exploitative than her accredited and unionized career. For Victoria then, the choice to engage in sex work was the choice to reject the economic and political positioning afforded to her as a healthcare worker—acknowledging how, even as a professional and respectable career, healthcare workers are subject to the exploitation of being underpaid and overworked (see Weeks 2011). This is further reflective of anti-work tendencies, in which Victoria’s strategic choice to engage in sex work over her ‘respectable’ career highlights a direct

resistance of the conditions of traditional waged work and anti-capitalist perspectives on the ideologies of careerism and respectability (Hester and Stardust 2020). A similar perspective arises from the Prostitutes' War group, stating: "we believe in the formula: Least amount of labour/ for Highest rates of pay. We have no interest in careerism or 'respectable' lowly paid employment... We fundraise on our own terms to enable our Autonomy, the time and freedom to realise and unleash our own latent Power" (Hester and Stardust 2020: 77).

Victoria's experiences illuminate how sex work can challenge current understanding around work today, in terms of choice, respectability, assumptions, and security, maximizing her capacity as a single mother to provide the best for her daughter, Ivy, despite her circumstances and constraints. In this case, sex work enhances her capacity to engage in less exploitative work while also being a present and good mother, compared to the privileges and benefits associated with her full-time, unionized, respectable career that has left a significant toll on her emotional well-being. As her income is more precarious and "*less predictable*" as a stripper, however, she does not have the option to pursue sex work full-time, nor does she receive a stable enough income to only work her full-time nursing job alone. Though incapable of refusing her waged responsibilities entirely, as both a stripper and healthcare worker, her reflections on the exploitation she has experienced working in the healthcare industry highlight that even the most respected careers within capitalism can impose pervasive consequences on the mental well-being of the labourers. Sex work thus offers Victoria the opportunity to reduce the exploitation she experiences when engaging in waged work, and more importantly, refuse to engage in

overtime labour at the hospital to supplement her income, which she regards as being more “*tiring*,” “*draining*,” and “*really heavy*”.

Although participants’ decision to engage in sex work was based on their interest in maximizing their social, economic, and political capital (see Weeks 2011), and at times, affording them the flexibility to tend to their gendered and unwaged responsibilities of social reproduction at home (see Federici 2012), each womxn’s individualized agency was dictated by their own social positioning. This is also echoed in participants’ individualized experiences of the industry itself; for some mothers, this made sex work an empowering occupation that enabled them to afford the luxuries of middle and upper-level class consumption, while for others, it was a means of getting by that did not necessarily alleviate them from financial burdens, but rather, enabled them to navigate the demands of paid work and motherhood in ways that “*civvy*” (Kathryn, J.J, Natalie, Marie, Victoria) work could not—greater flexibility, greater control of their time, and a prioritization of their familial responsibilities.

These mothers’ choices to pursue sex work demonstrates participants’ motivations as being fuelled by the unique financial opportunities sex work afforded them, particularly within “a complex system of debts and credits that pushes us to work more for less” (Berg 2014:164; see also Weeks 2011). Regardless of their earnings, sex work provided these mothers the potential to earn higher wages and work fewer hours, compared to other forms of waged labour, as well as the “freedom from underpaid overemployment, unemployment, or solely relying on government assistance” (Carlisle 2021:585; see also Hester and Stardust 2020). Recognizing the limitations affiliated with both traditional forms of waged labour and government assisted programs, these womxn’s occupational choices play a key role in their ability to navigate and negotiate the barriers imposed on womxn within the restrictive and oppressive workforce (see

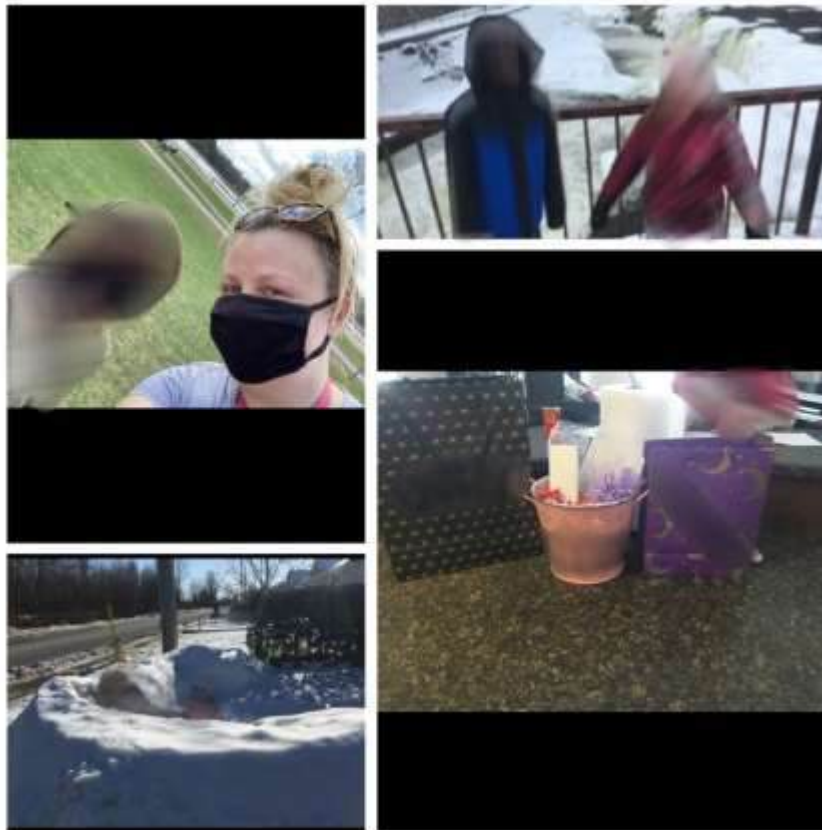
also Weeks 2011), especially working mothers' financial inferiority in capitalist regimes. Through an anti-work lens and contributing to ideologies of a postwork society, these insights highlight participants' occupational choices as best enabling them to prioritize work-life balances and reduce their hours spent engaging in waged labour, especially in the face of exploitative and burdensome opportunities otherwise afforded to mothers in the paid labour market. These anti-capitalist choices reflect a rejection not of work per se, but of traditional work ethos and the characterizations of traditional, full-time, feminized work—undervalued, underpaid, and precarious labour.

Flexibility & Bonding

Having financial security and flexibility with their time allowed some participants to engage in middle-class consumption, but more importantly, afforded all participants the opportunity to further invest in their relationship with their children. All fourteen participants were “*fortunate*” (Liz) to have not lost custody of their children and maintained primary responsibilities/ guardianship of their children, with three participants also co-parenting their partners' children. For all participants then, the benefits of sex work, compared to other forms of traditional work, included the freedom to choose when they engaged in paid work and when they could spend their time with their families. Having greater flexibility as working mothers is significantly reflective of anti-work politics and was central to the *Wages for Housework* movement (see Federici 2012; Weeks 2011), upholding the argument that “to have choices requires having time, and ‘to ‘have time’ means to work less” (Weeks 2011:126; see also Dalla Costa and James 1973). Sex workers' flexibility in paid working hours must then be regarded as maximizing their agency, enabling mothers to possess choices within a system built upon

constraints, “to have time to be with children, to be with old people, with the sick, when and where we choose” (Dalla Costa and James 1973:38).

This was particularly true for Kathryn, who, throughout the pandemic, worked alongside Alex’s father and stepmother, Cory and Kelly, to care for kids as a “*team*.” Alternating roles with Kelly to help homeschool their kids, plan fun activities to entertain their kids during lockdowns, and taking Alex and his half-siblings out to play in the snow, Kathryn’s flexibility in her work schedule enabled her to continue earning money while engaging in care work. Sharing the “*special ways*” she was able to bond with Alex and entertain his three half-siblings Zack, Heather, and Cole, Kathryn shared all the “*fun*” memories they made together— providing insight into navigating “*sex work and co-parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic*.” Commenting on the collage she made, she shares:



Instead of just sitting in front of screens, we did Pokémon Go... We did a lot of catching Pokémon!... It was perfect, you know, like he was so excited every time... The bottom picture [is] where they're building a Fort in my front yard. I would take Heather and Alex, so that Kelly could have one-on-one time and [do] schoolwork with Zack and Cole... [And] then they were 'gifting ninjas'. So it's sort of like 'nicky-nicky-nine-doors,' except with gifts... So, you know, we tried to get things that maybe they would like, like different candies, or, you know, there's juice boxes in there and there's crayons and different, you know, those like little travel, magnetic checkers games... Alex had such a blast going and doing this. Right. And of course, Kelly was in on that, on him getting his siblings their gifts. She knew that we were coming, right? So she made sure to keep them on the other side of the house so they wouldn't see us coming, right? So it would be more of a, you know, a ninja sort of thing where they wouldn't know right away.

In the absence of state supports, COVID-19 lockdowns had a significant impact on families, with mothers assuming even greater responsibilities for caring for their children. School closures required parents to assist their children in learning from home and/or in navigating new learning conditions online, in addition to navigating the pressures, changes and new working conditions associated with their own paid work responsibilities. Taking a community approach to care, Kathryn assisted in fulfilling the unpaid care responsibilities for both her son and his stepsiblings, demonstrating an alternative approach to fulfilling the demands of unpaid social reproduction outside of the nuclear family. Assuming responsibilities of unwaged care work for her son and his stepsiblings further demonstrates how, in rejecting traditional care work norms within the family, as a team Kathryn, Cory and Kelly adapted alternative approaches to balancing work and childcare responsibilities. This communal approach of care work resembles the importance of community and mutual aid supports over individualistic pursuits in anti-work ideologies (see Shimei 2022). Kathryn's capacity to do so was heavily dependent on the flexibility associated with her paid work, enabling her to schedule paid work around the increased unwaged demands of social reproduction. Further, having acquired savings prior to

lockdowns, Kathryn was able to focus solely on spending her time with Alex, while taking a few months off from engaging in paid work.

For Marie, the flexibility sex work offers her family is a “*luxury*”—ensuring she gets to spend time with Lydia herself, rather than “*shuttling her off to daycare at 7am and not seeing her til’ 6pm.*” Reflecting on how her dual roles intersect, she captured these images to showcase how her paid work enables her to care for her daughter, in which the flexibility of her paid work enhances her capacity to “*multitask*” the demands of paid work and mothering altogether, sharing:



I knew that I wanted to take a picture of, like, you know, giving my kid a bath and have my lingerie, hanging up... This isn't just exclusive to sex work like, I mean, it's lingerie, but like you know, like moms with office jobs probably have plenty of things that can't go in the dryer either...



[This second image] I was like folding our laundry beside her while she was watching cartoons and you can't really see, but, like, it's like her laundry, my laundry, plus lingerie and then like, my partner's laundry as well. So, like uh, another laundry photo haha... My Saturday afternoon looks just the same as anybody else is. You know, like my kid wakes me up at 5:30 every morning. Just like everyone else I stumble out of bed and like pour some Cheerios in a bowl and you know, like... it's not always super glamorous. In fact, most of the time it's not glamorous at all.

In part, Marie shared this image to showcase how normal her life is contrary to misconceptions of who sex workers are, and how “*unconventional*” their lives seem. Like other participants, Marie stressed that she is first and foremost a mom (see also Basu and Dutta 2011), a mom who engages in paid work to support her family, choosing sex work over a traditional “*desk job*” because it has enhanced her capacity to provide for and care for her daughter Lydia. Affording her the “*luxury*” of having a flexible schedule, Marie gets to experience the realities of mothering on her terms: laundry, housework, cartoons, mid-week park dates, instead of paying a childcare provider while she works her 9 to 5. For Marie then, the flexibility of sex work enables her to spend less time engaged in paid work, which is pivotal in enhancing her capacity to fulfill the

unwaged demands of social reproduction. Sex work enables Marie to be a present mother (Schmidt et al. 2023), increasing the time she has to spend with her daughter. Her choice to pursue sex work is thus motivated by her goal of establishing a financially secure life, built on a reduced workload, with more opportunities to spend time and invest in her relationships with her daughter, herself, and her partner—overcoming some barriers affiliated with womxn’s dual responsibilities of waged and unwaged work (see also Dalla Costa and James 1973; Federici 2012).

For Kyra, online sex work enables her to be her son’s primary caregiver, avoiding the costly fees of formal childcare in the GTA. Despite promises made by the government in 2022 to reduce Early Learning and Childcare fees by 50%, and eventually, implement a \$10 fee per day for childcare by 2026 (Government of Canada 2022c), affordable childcare remains inaccessible for many. Having the opportunity to reduce her expenses and prioritize time spent with her son, Kyra shared that the flexibility of sex work allows her to ‘invest more, emotionally’ into her son. Reflecting on how they spend their time together, Kyra shares:

We do weekly trips to the library, and we spend like, the entire day there. Because he looooooves books. He pulls them off the shelf and brings them to me, and he like squishes into my lap, and is just so eager for me to read them. We basically read all day until I’m exhausted and I can’t read another fucking book haha... But he doesn’t know the difference between borrowing a library book and owning one. So we sit there and we read like two dozen books and he’s just so happy. And I know that means so much more to him right now than me having, you know, the income to pay for the books and pay for him to spend 8 hours at daycare.

It was important for Kyra to choose paid work that complemented her responsibilities as a single mother, prioritizing the care for her son and maximizing the time spent with him, especially as she adjusts to having an informal custody schedule. For Kyra, sex work was pivotal in adjusting

to her separation, being a good mother and navigating the financial burdens of becoming a single mom. Sex work allowed her to reduce the hours she is required to engage in paid work, granting her freedom to choose when she engages in paid work and giving her the opportunity to spend quality time with her son, Simon.

For Jamie, online sex work was flexible enough for her to be a “*mommy all the time*”—allowing her to be flexible in her streaming schedule, upload content during her spare time, and work around Jack’s sleeping schedule. Working from home, she is also able to prioritize Jack’s needs 24/7—even if that means her paid working schedule gets interrupted. Acknowledging how sex work allows her to be present in ways other forms of paid work can’t, she shared these two images showcasing her experiences navigating paid work and motherhood:



I've taken breaks during my, my stream, to like switch the laundry, or um, because, because Jack like woke up and he had a nightmare or, he wet the bed or whatever. You know, there's not like this imaginary separation between working and like being a mom, because I'm always a mom, but I'm not always working. But, you know, I can do those things because my work is flexible and I just come up with excuses like to entice people watching to wait for me to come back or like make them tip me to come back and it's just not that big of a deal... You know, him crying in the night is like my main priority. Like I'm going to drop what I'm doing for him, and I can do that. Even if that means I change his sheets and smell like pee the rest of my stream haha... I'm just always really hands on. He doesn't even know that I work, because he doesn't see me go to work or anything, like I'm just mommy all the time.

As the demands of mothering are always “unpredictable” (Jamie) the flexibility in their paid work was regarded as essential for participants, especially those who are single mothers, to care

for their children's needs. Employment flexibility for full-time work is often out of reach in mainstream occupations, subjecting womxn to immense barriers accessing paid work that enables them to manage and prioritize their responsibilities of family life in tandem with paid work (Baxter et al. 2007), especially single mothers and mothers who do not have access to quality, affordable childcare (Howe and Pidwell 2004). Current constraints affiliated with mainstream, gendered employment thus make sex work an appealing occupation for these mothers to pursue, where flexibility in their working hours and higher earnings for less time spent engaging in paid labour were essential decision-making factors in participants' choice to pursue sex work (Maher et al. 2012).

Like Jamie, Julie shared that her limited schedule and need to put her son first as a single parent would likely “*piss off an employer*” and last-minute requests to care for her son could “*be denied completely*,” tensions other working mothers have experienced (Rose 2017) and which can contribute to varied forms of motherhood penalties (Budig et al. 2012). Reflecting on the importance of her occupational choice as a mother, despite the criticism she faces, Julie shares:

I get hate from people online but there's literally no other form of employment that I could have, on top of being a student and a single mother, that would let me provide for Matthew the way Sugaring has. We have everything we want and everything we need... and because of that, unlike most like young single mothers, I have my sanity. I have time for Matthew, I have time for me... It allows me to be a better mother, and a better provider for us.

Working for themselves and dictating the hours that they work, participants were able to be active and present in their children's lives. The flexibility of sex work and being “[*her*] own boss” was necessary for Kacy's family, as she can work around her family's needs and faces less limitations when adjusting her schedule, compared to her husband Darian. Darian works “*a typical 9-5 but usually he works crazy long hours*”—making his work schedule unpredictable, and often resulting in him being unable to be on “*carpool duty*” or attend Zack and Becca's

soccer games. His employer “*isn’t always accommodating or like, open to adjusting deadlines*” which can be challenging for their family to establish concrete plans in advance. Acknowledging how sex work allows Kacy to navigate the unexpected extended work hours associated with Darian’s paid work, ensuring their children’s interests and extra-curricular activities remain a priority, Kacy shares:

He works really hard, and he wants to be like ‘there’ more, but his hands are tied... And he really loves his job, but the way it functions can really like fuck up his whole week... One of the reasons I am really happy with my job is that, because, for the most part, I can avoid that, you know? He’s an amazing Dad but he can’t always be present or make it in time to see [our kid’s] games... But the kids always have one of us there, you know, on the sidelines, rooting them on, with juice boxes and snacks, which it seems like a lot of kids don’t really get and just, it, it allows us to actually like be able to enroll our kids in stuff, because we can make it work.

The flexibility sex work offers Kacy also contributes to Darian’s own job security, as he can fulfill the demands of his paid work with fewer requests to compromise his work schedule to prioritize their family’s needs. Since Darian’s income also plays a key role in financially supporting their family, Kacy and Darian feel “*relief*” in the compromises she can make as an independent contractor, while he navigates a “*demanding*” and “*unattainable*” work schedule dictated by his employer. Acknowledging the flexibility of sex work as being a “*privilege*” that other working parents might not be able to access due to general constraints with most employment, Kacy and Darian are able to reduce potential repercussions affiliated with the child penalty—ensuring this penalty does not interfere with Darian’s paid work (Wall 2013) and enabling Kacy to avoid experiencing motherhood penalty altogether as a self-employed sex worker. The flexibility of sex work thus enables Kacy and Darian to “*put [their] kids first*”—rather than the constraints of mainstream work within capitalist societies.

Regardless of their income, sex work enabled mothers to challenge some of the constraints affiliated with the traditional 40-hour waged work week and navigating their work-family life. The remaining hours of their days were not spent solely on cooking, cleaning, and meeting the unwaged demands of housework; rather, they could also occupy leisure time to bond with their children and invest in their personal relationships. For Marie, quitting her full-time “*desk job*” and pursuing sex work offered higher earnings and more quality time spent with her daughter, going to the park, grabbing Starbucks, or going out for lunch together. For Zara, sex work reduced how many hours she would have to engage in paid labour on a weekly basis, and offered higher wages compared to other forms of employment, which as a single mother, afforded her the luxury to actually spend time with her son on a regular basis, going to the mall, taking him on trips, going to his favourite theme parks, and “*binging [their] favourite TV shows together before bed.*”



For Sarah, sex work allows her to attend all her daughter's soccer games, ballet recitals, and her daughter's birthday parties—on top of having the opportunity to invest more into her friends and partner, Cam. For Kacy, sex work enabled her to not only pay for her family's vacation by herself, but also, take unpaid vacation time, without the approval of an employer, and specifically dedicate that time to bonding with her family. For Jamie,

streaming enabled her to combine her hobby of gaming with sex work, opting for later streaming hours so she could spend most of her day “*play[ing] and tak[ing] care of [her son] Jack*”. For Victoria, her agency as a sex worker granted her the opportunity to engage in paid work that had fewer constraints on her personal life than nursing: shorter working hours, flexibility of hours, and most importantly, reducing her family’s exposure to COVID-19. These are just a few examples highlighting how sex work enhanced mothers’ capacity and agency to spend time with their family, outside of their mothering and paid work responsibilities. Their decision to pursue sex work wasn’t just about increasing their financial security or having access to more flexible paid working hours to meet the demands of unpaid care; it was also about making conscious, meaningful, and strategic choices to navigate some of the traditional constraints of working motherhood, recognizing that mothers often have limited quality time with their children, their partners, and with themselves (see Hester and Stardust 2020; Weeks 2011; Dalla Costa and James 1973).

Concluding Remarks

Practically speaking, these mothers do not by any means engage in a refusal of work. Under capitalist, patriarchal, ableist, racist, and neoliberal regimes, they are obligated to engage in work, both waged and unwaged, as the refusal of work presents pervasive consequences. For mothers specifically, a refusal of unwaged labour, including childcare and domestic work, would subject them to labels of being unfit caretakers, bad mothers, and risky parents-- potentially subjecting them to varied forms of policing and surveillance, reinforced by child protective services (see Aston et al. 2021). Since unpaid care work has been constructed as a feminized responsibility, the absence of state-funded supports in fulfilling these demands further burdens mothers specifically to fulfill idealized and intensified approaches to unpaid care (Fox 2006;

Hays 1996). The latter can be said for waged work as well; under neoliberalism, adequate childcare, housing and living conditions are regarded as an individualized responsibility—exacerbating existing inequalities, especially for working-class and racialized mothers. Further, in an economic system that is dependent on paid participation in the labouring market to access fundamental resources, these mothers are required to earn an income to fulfill their family’s necessities. In the absence of a basic universal income (see Weeks 2011), to simply survive, these mothers are thus required to engage in waged work and earn a sustainable income.

Both the *Wages for Housework* campaign and the *Sex Work is Work* movement also demonstrate that these mothers, engaging in sex work, are not, by any means, refusing work (see Federici 2012; Merteuil 2015). Rather, these movements highlight the opposite-- drawing attention to the under-recognized, hidden socially reproductive labour that these womxn engage in, calling for recognition of this labour as legitimate (Merteuil 2015; Hester and Stardust 2020). In line with the purpose of these movements, I strongly affirm that my participants, navigating both mothering and sex work, have not achieved some form of utopia that alleviates them from the exploitative conditions of capitalism. They still are required to engage in work, both waged and unwaged, to provide their families with the means to survive. If only it was as simple as making an occupational choice that enables us to escape the inequalities embedded into our overarching systems.

Just as other Marxist feminists have demonstrated in our current economic structure, mothers are subject to immense unpaid care work and second-class positions within the paid labouring market (see Hester and Stardust 2020; Federici 2012; Weeks 2011). The gender wage gap alone highlights that despite womxn’s increasing educational attainment over that of men

(see Friesen 2022), womxn continue to be subject to low waged, precarious employment, relative to their unwaged demands of care at home (Hochschild and Machung 2012; Federici 2012).

In comparison to employment options otherwise available to these mothers, the choice to pursue sex work, though structured and influenced by the constraints of capitalism, was regarded as a meaningful choice that provided these womxn the opportunity to negotiate some of the constraints affiliated with traditional working motherhood. This choice allowed these mothers to refuse the limited alternative opportunities available to them (see also Hester and Stardust 2020), to be present as caretakers, financially support their immediate and extended family members, have time for themselves, and put their family's safety and well-being first amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The choice was to pursue a life less defined by their labour, and to be the best mothers to their children. They made the choice even to participate in this time-consuming project in the first place, capturing, editing, and creating visual representations of their day-to-day lives and attending hour long interviews with me, regardless of the low compensation I was able to offer them.

Although these mothers still face the requirement of engaging in paid and unpaid work to sustain themselves and their children, their motivations, and intentional choices to pursue sex work must be regarded as reflecting anti-work tendencies (Weeks 2011). Choosing sex work had profound impacts on their agency in their day-to-day lives, granting some womxn financial security otherwise not available to them, as well as greater flexibility in their paid work to ensure they could access time to engage in activities, hobbies, socialization, self-care, and spend quality time with their families. Sex work enabled mothers to create a life that was not solely defined by the burdens of waged and unwaged labour-- a life beyond making ends meet and structured around "what most pleases [them]" (Aronowitz et al. 1998:76). These benefits were central

motives behind participants' rational choice to engage in sex work over that of traditional forms of paid work, in attempts to negotiate some of the burdens, time constraints, emotional tolls and financial struggles typically experienced by working mothers (Federici 2012).

My interviews illustrate how, under the structures of capitalism and patriarchy, working mothers aim to negotiate the constraints placed on them, to best achieve the motives that coincide with anti-capitalist, anti-work, and post-work ideologies. These experiences, insights, and motivations behind pursuing sex work demonstrate valuable anti-work inclinations, including an attempt to live a life not solely defined by labour, both waged and unwaged (see Weeks 2011). Although little research analyzes how sex working mothers' decisions align with the anti-work movement, it is crucial to acknowledge that, for even the most marginalized participants, sex work enhanced their capacity to navigate paid work and unpaid care. This gap in literature requires further examination into how sex workers and working mothers can utilize anti-work politics to address and alleviate ongoing systemic inequalities sustained throughout Canada's labour market, while also expanding current understandings of anti-work tendencies at play within our current economic structures.

Chapter Eight: Exhibit Endeavors and Reflections

Research isn't always what we make it out to be. It doesn't always measure up to the rose-coloured glasses we're wearing when we embark on a new project, full of hopes and challenging goals, driven by our intent to contribute something different, or to get the chance to make a difference. We face obstacles we never anticipated, both in our research and personal life, all of which throws our progress off course.

Our progress is never linear. We confront the doubt of others and are placed in a position where we are questioned and must justify the importance of our research to family, faculty, and friends who simply don't value our work. We grapple with feelings of imposter syndrome, and for some, can only find glimpses of encouragement in rare, safe collective spaces we can occupy. These glimpses push us through the doubt engrained in us by others and give us strength to carry our work out to the finish line. Even if crossing the finish line wasn't as rewarding as we thought it would be.

Sometimes we don't get the gold star on our final project, sometimes we overestimate our capacity to impact the world. I'm not going to lie and say I've perfected an approach to conducting really intriguing, destigmatizing work that reached audiences that my dissertation wouldn't. Because that wasn't the case. Not only was it challenging to organize the exhibits, secure financial support to reduce my own out of pocket costs, and defend my research to colleagues in my community, but there was also limited engagement with the exhibits themselves.

But just like any true methodologist, my priority is to take these lessons learned to propose potential ways forward. In doing so, this chapter highlights my experience hosting exhibits, giving context to what they looked like, the behind-the-scenes work, and the obstacles I

overcame in the process. This chapter acknowledges the importance and value of these exhibits despite the limited feedback I received, and most importantly, the lessons I've learned in the process, lessons that remind me that progress isn't linear, but that progress is also not out of reach.

Organizing the Exhibit

My fundraising exhibit was housed in Carleton University's MacOdrum Library from June 8th-July 17th, 2023, in a free, inclusive, and accessible event space that welcomed the Carleton and broader community to attend the installation. The exhibit itself could be accessed via the main entrance of the library and was set up along one wall to the left of the corridor. The first poster greeting attendees introduced and explained the exhibit, providing information on how to access direct links for donation and a pre-recorded audio-recording uploaded to Spotify (Appendix G; see also Annett 2023) to provide detailed image and caption descriptions for those requiring accommodations. The exhibit included fourteen profiles and accompanying posters that showcased at least one image selected from each participant, with some participants requesting multiple images in collage formats be displayed. All posters were meaningfully captioned by the participant or were captioned using direct quotes from our photo-elicitation interviews. To reflect the commonalities throughout these narratives and draw more attention to the exhibit, I hung posters on the wall with a scrapbook-like feel—scattering the images along the wall, replicating a gallery wall displaying family photos that one might have at home. This design choice was also pivotal in ensuring the exhibit stood out in the busy corridor, inviting attendees to step away from their studies and browse the exhibit. To further enhance fundraising efforts, accessibility needs, and prioritize obtaining feedback from exhibit attendees, small posters with QR codes were posted throughout the exhibit, ensuring attendees could directly donate to grassroots

initiatives and provide the exhibit with anonymous feedback. With the help of Monica Ferguson, the Exhibits Chair and Ottawa Resource Collection Coordinator, I was able to set the exhibit up in under two hours, actively doing so with audiences already surrounding the posters and getting a first glimpse of the exhibit. Once set-up was complete, I advertised this fundraising exhibit on Twitter, LinkedIn, and supporting social media platforms (Appendix F), receiving the support of all affiliated grassroots organizations: Maggie's Toronto, Butterfly CSW, SWAP, SWAN Waterloo, and SWAN Vancouver. Carleton University's library staff captured and uploaded images to their website and social media platforms to assist in advertising purposes. These images are featured below:



Image Description: This image was taken by Carleton University's Library staff and showcases the set-up of the exhibit located at the library's main entrance. Posters are scattered in an organic setup along the white wall and are accompanied by a profile explaining who each participant is as well as a caption that explains or gives context to each poster.



Image Description: These images were taken by Carleton University's Library staff and provide a close-up shot of the exhibit.

Navigating Unanticipated Obstacles

Receiving approval to showcase my exhibit at MacOdrum library didn't come easy. For months, I had multiple correspondence with various librarians, who questioned the appropriateness of my participants' selected images. Some librarians disapproved of images containing participants' children, questioned participants' capacity to consent to their images being displayed, and most harshly, deemed the blurred image of Marie's child in the bathtub as being too "*controversial*" for the library to showcase. I had to meet their resistance with as much force as possible-- relying on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram's terms of services to argue that if participants could post these exact images on public platforms without any violations, that the images should also be welcome in a space of learning. It took almost 6 months from my first meeting with the librarians to when I received approval and support from library staff to house my exhibit on their premises, and I held my breath right until they published the exhibit's description and location on the library's official website.

This lack of support unfortunately echoed throughout my cohort, with some members expressing their disapproval of my research being showcased in a public space which could've

been utilized to showcase research on other equity-deserving groups, despite the fact this space had no competing submissions for that time. Members of my cohort who did show support for my exhibit online were confronted by other graduate students and asked to explain why my fundraising and destigmatizing efforts deserved their support. Becoming aware of this was extremely difficult, because more than anything I believe my participants deserved to have their narratives showcased in public forums. For many, their lived experiences have been marginalized and scrutinized by the people they love most, with some maintaining their occupation a secret to protect themselves and their children from the repercussions of stigma. But regardless of their situation, each participant dedicated a significant amount of time in perfecting the collages they made or editing the images they captured, because they wanted their daily lives to be accurately represented to public audiences and combat the stereotypes surrounding their paid work. This exhibit wasn't just meaningful to me—it held meaning for every womxn that captured images and shared their lived experiences in the hopes that it would contribute to destigmatizing efforts. And it was meaningful for the sex work community, inviting the opportunity for connection with other sex working parents, and raising money for organizations that have had profound impacts on the community and those most marginalized. Having to defend my self-funded research to my own colleagues might have been one of the most disheartening experiences of my entire dissertation but knowing what this space meant to participants and sex workers across the globe silenced all objections I faced in organizing this exhibit.

Receiving Support

Despite all resistance, throughout the entire process I was fortunate enough to receive endless support from my own committee and supervisor, Megan. Aware that my out-of-pocket

expenses were quickly adding up, Megan wrote a letter of support to FGPA, requesting my exhibit be considered for financial compensation typically granted to students who present their research at conferences. Once received, I directed this compensation directly towards my fundraising efforts, equally divided amongst all affiliated grassroots organizations. Megan also advised me on how to access additional supports and resources on campus, relying on departmental printers to supply additional paper, having the exhibits be promoted on multiple platforms on Departmental accounts, and finding the confidence to persevere through any objections this exhibit received. Megan was one of the first attendees of the exhibit, and her kind words helped me cope with some of the anxieties and uncertainties I had once the exhibit was open to the public. Every ounce of support I received from Megan made this exhibit and the entire research project possible.

This support was echoed in the anonymous feedback I received from a handful of attendees. Although only four individuals submitted anonymous feedback, which was far less than I was hoping for, the responses themselves encouraged me to lean more into this approach for conducting destigmatizing research. Attendees referred to the exhibit as “*an incredibly powerful exhibit that should be in front of as many people as possible*,” “*great, informative and very cool*,” and “*a pleasant surprise to find in my school library*,” with one attendee sharing: “*I felt the exhibit gave me a broader picture and a more empowered sense of sex work and some potential precarities and discrimination that workers face*.” I have no doubt this exhibit would have had an even more profound impact and received more feedback if hosted during the fall or winter academic terms—which may become a reality soon, as I’ve applied to re-install the exhibit again at the library and have contacted other spaces to house additional exhibits. But I am grateful for the audiences this exhibit did reach, all the support I received over its 6-week-long

installation, and how motivated I feel today to continue utilizing research practices that enhance my capacity to produce destigmatizing and accessible research for public consumption. Through this I've learned that a good academic isn't one who has all the answers, but rather, is the one motivated to learn, step out of their comfort zone, and grow, with their pocket always filled with new questions and goals to reach.

Lessons Learned

Offering concrete solutions to some of these obstacles isn't entirely easy. Some of my obstacles were due to my limited access to resources, including my lack of access to free and inclusive venue spaces and the financial constraints I experience as a graduate student. Others were more personal challenges and objections, which demanded I engage in practices of empathy and coping skills to overcome feelings of imposed imposter syndrome. But if I could do this process all over again, which I plan on doing, there are some changes I would prioritize to ensure my experience going forward was much smoother. The following lessons are what I need to keep at the forefront, reminding me to find pride and success in my work, even if at times I feel I've failed. Future me, read closely.

1. The goals and intentions of your exhibit are not defined by the amount of support you receive. Yes, it may be hard to see that your work isn't supported or valued by colleagues, family, and/or friends you look up to. A lot of people that you want to be there by your side might not show up. There may not be any interest from your friends to visit the exhibit or express interest in the work you're doing. But although they might inspire your work, they aren't the reason why you're doing this in the first place. Their actions don't reflect the progress or potential your project has, and they also don't define your success. There are people who see value in what you're doing, and see this work as being meaningful. You're actively pushing

yourself to learn by hosting these exhibits, and you're inviting others to join you on that journey. Not everyone can prioritize your research, and that's okay. Focus on the support you do have and be grateful for the audiences your research did reach. They aren't walking through the exhibit, thinking to themselves 'wow, this was a complete disaster' or 'why even do this in the first place?'. The glass isn't always half-empty-- focus on the little wins and why this exhibit was so important for you to do.

2. It doesn't have to be perfect to be purposeful. So what if you couldn't secure a better venue or afford to buy better quality materials? You're a graduate student, your finances are going to hold you back. Stop thinking that what you can afford isn't enough; let the data speak for itself and stop worrying about the things you can't change. Don't compare your work to exhibits that have access to an endless supply of funds; no one else is. Your work can hold purpose without meeting the standards of perfection.

3. Find creative ways to maximize audience attendance and maximize your data collection of anonymous feedback. This is probably the most important consideration of them all. Because I only received four responses in total, I can't accurately evaluate the effectiveness of these exhibits, the accessibility measures taken, nor provide really nuanced solutions to improve future exhibitions. For future installations, I aim to secure event spaces with greater foot traffic; exhaust advertising efforts; invite relevant classes to visit the exhibit; and, if possible, host a formal opening and closing event to encourage larger crowds to attend the event within an allotted time. Although I have considered the benefits of recording the exhibit for a virtual format, I do believe the exhibit has a more profound impact when attended in-person so I would continue prioritizing efforts to host an in-person installation, only considering otherwise if attendance continued to be limited. Should the exhibits not allow for ample feedback from

audiences, I would consider additional measures to implement into the scope of my analysis, such as relying on participant observation or hosting focus group forums.

4. Become a larger advocate for publicly accessible and free research. These practices aren't just beneficial to the sex work community; they can hold value across all social sciences. The best way to learn more and refine my own practices could include creating a like-minded community of colleagues, learning from and supporting each other in producing accessible and free research in our community. My initial efforts in establishing this community have included volunteering my time to act as a peer-advisor to other graduate students interested in hosting exhibits of their own, providing advice on how to access necessary resources. From this, I hope to continue learning from peers' successes and obstacles in hosting their exhibits, to refine my original approach and maximize attendance, accessibility, advertising, and fundraising efforts. These lessons will play a pivotal role in my ongoing reflections and considerations for conducting de-stigmatizing and publicly accessible research.

5. Recognize your achievements. This wasn't something I learned on my own; rather was strongly voiced to me by my committee. Yes, the response to my exhibits may have been underwhelming, but that doesn't mean my exhibit didn't impart an impact on my local community. For instance, despite resistance from the library, I was able to address their stigmatic concerns and attempts at censorship by proving the project's relevance and significance. Not only did I advocate for this research to take up physical space in the library, but also, was able to dispel their stigmatic assumptions regarding sex workers' capacity for consent. These efforts may also have had a local impact on other graduate students and researchers on campus--encouraging others to take similar steps and consider ways in which their work could be presented in publicly available spaces. Regardless of any failures or shortcomings I may have

experienced, these fundraising exhibits still upheld small, localized interventions, sparking the possibility for greater social transformations. And that's still worth celebrating.

Concluding Remarks

For what it's worth, sometimes the best experience you could ask for as a researcher isn't that the project goes smoothly or that the project meets all your initial goals. Sometimes the best experience is the intrinsic, difficult, ambiguous, and tedious project, the project that pushes you to grow and overcome challenges you never anticipated. Sometimes the best research experience as a graduate student is the one that forces you to step outside of what's typically expected, knowing that the courage to fail far exceeds the feelings of imposter syndrome that come with really challenging work. Sometimes it's the research that taught you lessons that aren't explored in any methodology book, or the project that helped you carve out your own space to pursue what you are passionate about.

For me, regardless of the challenges, the financial costs, the time it took to organize, and feelings of failure I grappled with, this project and the fundraising exhibit taught me more than any other research endeavor has in the past. If anything, I am more prepared, motivated, and curious now than I ever have been before. I'm no longer caught up in feelings of doubt or failure; instead, I take pride in having the opportunity to challenge other people's doubts and learn from my shortcomings. I'm no longer focused on my limitations; I would rather utilize my weaknesses to identify future questions and critical considerations I can adapt into my research practices. In the wise words of Margaret Atwood (2003), "*there's always something to occupy the inquiring mind*" (p. 221), however, it's up to you to decide what that may be. It's up to us, as researchers, to recognize progress and challenges as being an integral part of doing research-- growth which exceeds the value of any 'gold star' within reach.

Chapter Nine: Concluding Remarks

Throughout this dissertation, I examine fourteen sex working mothers' narrated and photographic experiences of their dual roles, with the over-arching question: *how do these womxn navigate and negotiate the daily work of social reproduction and paid work in stigmatized and precarious conditions?* In doing so, these womxn identify stigma as dictating their capacity to disclose their occupational status to friends and family, in addition to informing their empathetic approaches to mothering. Further, participants expressed that their occupational choice and the flexibility of sex work enables as them to be more present in their children's lives. Most crucially, these womxn regard their occupational choice as being beneficial to their family's well-being, enabling mothers to financially support their families and fulfill the demands of both roles with fewer constraints than typically experienced by working mothers. These experiences of stigma inform present gaps in the literature, illuminating how sex workers experience stigma in relation to their dual roles. Despite the repercussions of stigma, marginalization, and criminalization these mothers share, all participants credited their choice to engage in sex work as enhancing their capacity to engage in unpaid care work, an occupational choice that enables them to be better mothers and overcome mainstream challenges of working motherhood.

The images participants captured, as well as the images that participants could not share, provide visual insight into their accomplishments, capabilities, struggles, and experiences navigating their dual roles—demystifying cultural images that otherwise portray sex working parents as being risky, inadequate, abusive and/or neglectful mothers (see *Born into Brothels* 2004; *Watchmen* 2006; *Fifty Shades Darker* 2017). For some participants, the autophotography component of this research was most compelling, enabling them to share their lived experiences

through visual mediums and to be accurately represented in public formats as good mothers. For others, sharing images was a more difficult and riskier task due to the risks of stigmatization and criminalization—acting as a contributing factor for some potential participants’ decision to not volunteer for this study. The risk of visibility associated with autophotography must then be regarded as a potential limitation, hindering some participants’ ability to share images relevant to their experiences, while also discouraging some womxn from participating in this research altogether. This is particularly true for those most marginalized—including but not limited to criminalized, trans, im/migrant, racialized, and Indigenous sex workers—who face disproportionate repercussions of stigma and criminalization. The same can be said for mothers navigating surveillance efforts from CAS, the precarious status some people have under the legal system, and womxn navigating hardships with custody agreements—as the repercussions of where stigma can impose lasting effects on their personal lives and responsibilities of motherhood. The images participants captured, edited, and shared provided unique educational opportunities for broader audiences and for destigmatizing sex work more broadly, as they were on display for the public to view. The fundraising exhibit I hosted at MacOdrum Library further demonstrates how research can be more accessible in distributing findings and advocating for sex workers’ voices, experiences, and lives to be accounted for. For those visually impaired, an audio recording of the exhibit was made available, providing detailed image descriptions and captions to maximize accessibility efforts for all in attendance. These images, the absence of images, and the fundraising exhibit played an essential role in upholding the priorities of my dissertation overall, ensuring this project was conducted *by*, *with* and *for* sex workers. All funds raised towards grassroots organizations have profound impacts on sex workers’ lives, ensuring these organizations can continue providing workshops, legal supports, healthcare, mutual aid

relief, and resources for sex workers within their respective communities. This was especially true for Maggie's Toronto Sex Worker Action Project, one of Canada's oldest sex worker support organizations that has programs and resources specific for supporting sex working parents, and experienced immense loss of resources because of a fire neighboring their office on September 8th, 2023. These funds raised have contributed to Maggie's rebuilding and advocacy efforts, providing stigma-free services to sex workers across Canada.

Addressing My Findings and Research Questions

To understand how these womxn navigated and negotiated their dual responsibilities of mothering and sex work in stigmatized and precarious conditions, this dissertation was guided by four sub-questions. In response to the first question, *what are the daily practices associated with navigating stigmatized paid work and unpaid care?*, participants' narratives inform us that sex work enhances their capacity to prioritize their unpaid responsibilities of social reproduction over that of paid work, engaging in fewer hours of paid work and having flexible working schedules that accommodate their children's needs and wants. Given the lack of affordable and adequate childcare services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, these mothers were able to prioritize being their children's primary caretaker with few constraints on their paid work. For those who required informal childcare support during their paid working hours, they were able to accommodate their paid working schedule to rely on spouses, partners, co-parents, neighbours, and their children's grandparents when needed. Some mothers also engaged in remote work exclusively, enabling them to engage in paid work while their children were sleeping or were being cared for by their co-parents. For mothers whose children were school-aged, they were able to prioritize their paid working schedule around their children's school schedules. This

flexibility played a pivotal role in mothers' navigation of their dual roles, in addition to having to work fewer paid working hours compared to mainstream 9-5 occupations.

In navigating these dual roles however, mothers stressed the importance of and obligation to employ stigma management tactics in their everyday lives. These experiences of stigma and stigma management inform my project's second question, *how do participants negotiate, manage, and or/experience the stigma associated with their paid work?* For those most marginalized, stigma management involved maintaining their occupation a secret from their family and friends—ensuring they and their children were protected from the repercussions of stigma, or more specifically, the repercussions of facing legal consequences. For others, engaging in tactics of selective disclosure enabled them to distance themselves from the stressors of living double lives, while also reducing their children's exposure to courtesy stigma. For some, selective disclosure was also pivotal in protecting themselves from potentially losing their “civvy” employment, dictating who in their lives could be trusted with knowing about their involvement in the sex work industry. Some had little choice in disclosing their status as sex workers—rather, they were faced with the violent repercussions of having been outed, managing those repercussions to the best of their abilities. Other womxn had the privilege of being out as sex workers and mothers—with some doing so in resistance to whore stigma, and others wanting to prioritize their mental well-being by living authentically and maintaining relationships with only those who accept them for their occupational choice. Regardless of whether these mothers were out as sex workers, one thing remained true for all, stigma was an informing factor behind their choice to disclose (or not), as well as the reactions or anticipatory reactions they shared. Stigma management was thus regarded as routine practice, or rather, a “*responsibility*” (J.J.) employed by these womxn in mitigating the impacts of stigma for their families. These

experiences of stigma played a central role in these womxn's approach to mothering practices overall, ensuring their children were raised empathetically, while also prioritizing raising their children to be empathetic humans-- conscious of the impacts that stigma, patriarchy, racism, ableism, capitalism, and criminalization have on various communities.

Participants expressed varied experiences regarding their navigation of mothering, sex work and COVID-19, relative to my third sub-question *how has COVID-19 and health restrictions associated with the pandemic influenced their engagement in paid work, unpaid care, and navigating these dual roles?* COVID-19 presented unique challenges for some womxn and their families and imposed fewer challenges on others. For Victoria, stripping was no longer an option for her to earn money during lockdowns, and her full-time position in healthcare became more demanding and riskier than ever—forcing her to reduce contact with her daughter to care for patients with COVID-19. Other womxn relied on their savings to put their engagement with sex work on pause and reduce their family's exposure to COVID-19, prioritizing their mothering responsibilities and their children's transition to remote learning. The ability to take time away from their paid work to focus on their family's needs was necessary in ensuring their partners could adjust to the changes in their paid work responsibilities, and for some, maximize their capacity to co-parent. For mothers who engaged in sex work remotely, the impact restrictions had on their navigation of these dual roles were minimal, highlighting how online sex work enabled them to overcome traditional challenges and constraints associated with working motherhood, even amidst a global pandemic. It is important to acknowledge that some womxn did not have the finances to take extended periods of time off from their paid work, and they continued business as usual with additional health precautions.

Finally, this dissertation addresses the question *how might the use of autophotography contribute to or challenge cultural stereotypes and stigma associated with sex work?*

Autophotography was credited by some womxn as directly enabling them to address and combat the stigmas affiliated with their paid work, giving visual insight into their capacity to be better mothers as sex workers. The inability to capture and share select images was just as profound, highlighting how sex workers' experiences with stigma, criminalization, and marginalization were so pervasive that they could not fully engage with some autophotography prompts suggested to them. Granting space to the images that could not be shared was thus just as important as displaying those captured—illustrating how select experiences remain in the margins of the sex industry. Fortunately, this was echoed in the few anonymous responses collected from exhibit attendees themselves, crediting the photographic narratives as having 'powerful' impacts on their own internalized assumptions regarding sex work. Although I anticipated some anonymous feedback being negative or imposing further stigmas on sex workers lives, I was relieved to find this was not the case.

Key Contributions

Examining the ways in which sex workers adapt the management of their stigmatized paid labour and parenting practices, one of the goals of my research was to identify how macro-level structures influence participants' experiences of both forms of work within the context of capitalist society, under the provincial and federal health restrictions associated with COVID-19, and in relation to gender, class, and racial inequalities. In addition to producing an empathetic understanding of the daily practices involved in womxn's navigation of stigmatized paid work and their second shift of unpaid care, one of the key contributions of this qualitative research study is that it draws attention to the obstacles and benefits associated with managing mothering

and sex work. This project also provides insight into how stigma operates in these womxn's daily lives, both as mothers and as sex workers. In doing so, this project examines how sex working mothers fulfill their dual responsibilities, crediting sex work as enabling them to engage in all-encompassing mothering practices and overcome traditional constraints affiliated with working motherhood. This research further illustrates how sex working mothers were able to navigate the precarious and stigmatized conditions of their paid work to achieve goals in line with post-work and anti-work debates, granting them time to care for themselves, engage in quality time with their children, and secure a rewarding life not exclusively defined by their labour.

Drawing attention to state and social supports available in Canada to mothers navigating paid work and unpaid care, this study also demonstrates how the conditions of social reproduction influenced my participants' ability to manage their dual roles. Illuminating the negotiation of mothering practices and the work of social reproduction situated in stigmatized and precarious conditions, this qualitative study contributes to growing literature focusing on the experiences of womxn's second shift, engaging in sexualized forms of paid work, sex work, unpaid social reproduction, and mothering. This research contributes to widening the concept of working mothers in contemporary literature, drawing attention to the experiences of mothers engaging in stigmatized, precarious, and unconventional forms of paid work.

Lastly, by incorporating feminist and visual methodologies into this research specifically, this dissertation contributes to producing accessible and multidimensional knowledges, as well as destigmatizing literature, drawing attention to how autophotography and visual methodologies can aid researchers in their pursuit of addressing stigma and broader social inequalities. The use of public fundraising exhibits enhances this project's aim of conducting research that best supports sex workers themselves, as well as grassroots organizations' access to necessary funds

that play a primary role in their advocacy efforts for decriminalization overall. Hosting exhibits also grants broader audiences the opportunity to read and view first-hand accounts from sex workers themselves, acknowledging the work of destigmatization cannot solely rely on the realms of academic papers and sex worker collectives. These exhibits provide unique opportunities and considerations for researchers working with stigmatized or marginalized communities, shedding light on the necessity of expanding their project's audience to provoke social change and engage in active advocacy efforts.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Although this research resulted in some limitations that were unavoidable for me as a researcher, given the severity of stigmatization and criminalization of sex workers more broadly, there are some limitations this project faced that could be addressed for future research. For instance, participants were only compensated \$50 for a portion of their time, meaning their ability to volunteer significant time towards their autophotography practices was also limited. This research also did not focus on fathers engaging with sex work, which would provide additional insight into how sexism operates within the context of whore stigma and parenting. Further, this research only captures these womxn's accounts on how stigma and courtesy stigma impacts their partners and children—limiting our understanding of how children or teenagers with sex working parents experience and negotiate their parents' occupational stigma. An additional limitation that requires future attention is that of the feedback received from the exhibit, which could be resolved through hosting opening events, having the exhibit tour at additional locations, having the exhibit be hosted for longer periods of time, and/or hosting the exhibit on campus during busier months to increase foot traffic. These are just some considerations to improve and address the limitations this study faced.

In conducting this research I've become aware of the need for further research to focus on more intersectional and diverse experiences from mothers navigating unpaid care work and sex work, especially in relation to im/migrant relations, disability, Indigeneity, and racialization. Building upon this dissertation, it is my goal to pursue research that focuses on more intersectional accounts of sex working mothers to widen and deepen a critical theoretical and empirical analysis of the connections between macro-level structures, mothering and sex work, racialization, ableism, and shifting public debates about sex work and the possible effects of these debates on womxn's everyday lives. In doing so, I hope to pursue a post-doctoral project that engages with autophotography or other forms of visual methodologies that enable marginalized potential participants to maximize their capacity to share their experiences and participate in this research, in ways that align with their priorities to protect themselves and their children first. In doing so, I hope to utilize these findings to elaborate on participants' experiences of navigating mothering and sex work from my dissertation, and discuss how ableism, racism, and colonization operate in combination with stigmatization for sex working mothers and their families.

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Appendix A



Office of Research Ethics
4500 ARISE Building | 1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6
613-520-2600 Ext: 2517
ethics@carleton.ca

CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A) at Carleton University has renewed ethics approval for the research project detailed below. CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

Title: Stigmatized (M)Others: Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada

Protocol #: 116958

Project Team Members: **Michelle Lesley Annett (Primary Investigator)**
Prof. Megan Rivers-Moore (Research Supervisor)

Department and Institution: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences\Sociology and Anthropology
(Department of), Carleton University

Funding Source (If applicable):

Effective: February 07, 2023

Expires: February 29, 2024.

Please ensure the study clearance number is prominently placed in all recruitment and consent materials: CUREB-A Clearance # 116958.

Restrictions:

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-A via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal or closure of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. During the course of the study, if you encounter an adverse event, material incidental finding, protocol deviation or other unanticipated problem, you must complete and submit a Report of Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems Form.
5. It is the responsibility of the student to notify their supervisor of any adverse events, changes to their application, or requests to renew/close the protocol.

6. Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please email the Research Compliance Coordinators at ethics@carleton.ca if you have any questions.

CLEARED BY:

Date: February 07, 2023



Natasha Artemeva, PhD, Chair, CUREB-A



Augustine Park, PhD, Vice-Chair, CUREB-A

Appendix B



Seeking Research Participants
"Stigmatized (M)Others: Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada"

The purpose of this photographic project is to examine the experiences of mothers who are sex workers, with the over-arching question[s]: *how do womxn navigate their dual roles in stigmatized and precarious conditions?* In collecting these narratives, this project aims to host public fundraising exhibits to challenge cultural images that reproduce stigmas present in sex workers' daily lives.

Participant's Involvement:

- Self-capture photographs highlighting your experiences navigating mothering and sex work
- Participate in an audio-recorded, virtual interview (1-2 hours in length) to discuss the images captured

Eligibility:

- Lives in Canada & has identified as both a mother and sex worker at the same time

For participating in this study, you will receive \$50 compensation. All proceeds raised from each photography exhibit will be donated to Maggie's Toronto and POWER to support their ongoing initiatives.

If interested in participating and would like to receive additional information, please contact Michelle Lesley Annett at michellelesleyannett@cmail.carleton.ca.

This research has been cleared by Carleton University Research Ethics Board A, Clearance #116958. Should you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact the RER Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board A at 613-520-2600 or by email ethics@carleton.ca. During COVID, the Research Ethics Office staff are working from home without access to their Carleton phone extensions. Accordingly, until staff return to campus, please contact them by email. For all other questions about the study, please contact the researcher. Publically interacting with this post may compromise measures of privacy and confidentiality.

Appendix C



Invitation to Participate

Title of Research: **Stigmatized (M)Others: Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada**

Principal Investigator: Michelle Lesley Annett (PhD Candidate)
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University

To whom it may concern,

My name is Michelle Lesley Annett and I am PhD Candidate in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University. Under the supervision of Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore, Associate Professor in Pauline Jewett Institute of Women's and Gender Studies at Carleton University, I invite you to participate in a research project entitled "*Stigmatized (M)Others: Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada*".

The purpose of this research is to examine the narrated and photographic experiences of womxn in Canada, who identify as both mothers and sex workers, with the over-arching question[s]: *how do these womxn navigate and negotiate the daily work of social reproduction and paid work in stigmatized and precarious conditions?* Focusing on a total of 15-20 womxn, this study aims to make sense of these day-to-day experiences in relation to Canada's current labour market, gender, and class inequalities. By incorporating visual methodologies and the use of autophotography into this research specifically, my dissertation also aims to co-construct accessible and multidimensional knowledges while demystifying cultural images that reproduce stigmas surrounding sex work and broader social inequalities. Given this, it is my goal to host public fundraising exhibits featuring data collected, in order to raise monetary donations for both POWER and Maggie's Toronto. This is essential in ensuring that this project is conducted *by, with and for* sex workers.

This study invites womxn who are currently, or have in the past, managed both roles of motherhood and sex work at the same time. 'Womxn' refers to and extends this invite to cis, trans and non-binary individuals who identify as both mothers and sex workers. Should you chose to participate, you will be asked to partake in a series of photographic prompts (approximately 5-10 images); capturing your daily routines, experiences, emotions and environments through the use of photography. Participants are welcome to create their own prompts, or adapt the given prompts to best suit the experiences they wish to share. After capturing these images and sending them to the researcher electronically, you will be asked to partake in one semi-structured photo-elicitation interview to discuss the symbolic representations and narrated experiences captured in the photographs, coming to a common understanding of the context behind the meanings, experiences and feelings being conveyed. Interviews will be

conducted by the principal investigator, Michelle Lesley, and are expected to last 1-2 hours in length. Due to Covid-19 health regulations, these interviews will take place via video chat or by phone. Each interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy throughout the data collection. To protect your identity and the identities of others mentioned in your interview, pseudonyms will be used throughout the research project and all images will undergo extensive editing to ensure your identity, and the identities of those you mention, are best protected. As compensation for participating in this study, you will receive a \$50 e-transfer or \$50 e-gift card of your choice.

All participants obtain the right to skip questions or prompts they wish not to answer, as well as the right to withdraw their voluntary participation at any given moment, up until 14 days after receiving the transcribed copy of their interview and edited images. If at any time you decide to withdraw your participation from this study, you will be given two options: 1) you can opt for the data that has already been collected to be included in the analysis of this project or 2) you can request for all of your data to be excluded from this study and immediately destroyed. If you request for your data to be excluded from this study, you will receive confirmation via email that all images, audio-recordings, transcripts and any other information pertaining to your participation have been permanently erased. There are no penalties for those who have chosen to withdraw from the study. If you withdraw from the study once your photo-elicitation interview has begun, you will still receive the \$50 compensation for your time.

All research data, including consent forms, contact information, images, and audio-recordings and will be saved in a password-protected folder on my work computer. Audio-recordings will be transcribed to text by me, in which this document on my password protected computer will also contain a separate password to access it. Only Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore and Michelle Lesley Annett will have access to this data.

This research has been cleared by Carleton University Research Ethics Board A: Clearance # 116958. Should you have any **ethical concerns** with the study, please contact the REB Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone: 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or by email: ethics@carleton.ca).

As a potential participant, I ask you to go over this invitation and the consent form to make an informed decision regarding your participation. **If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions regarding this project in particular, please contact me directly at michellelesleyannett@gmail.com .**

Sincerely,



Michelle Lesley Annett

Appendix D

Research Consent Form (Oral Consent)

Title of Research: Stigmatized (M)Others: Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada

Researcher: Michelle Lesley Annett
michellelesleyannett@cmail.carleton.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore
meganriversmoore@cunet.carleton.ca
 613-520-2600 [ext. 3201]

Overview

My name is Michelle Lesley Annett and I am PhD Candidate in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University. Under the supervision of Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore, I invite you to participate in a research project entitled *Stigmatized (M)Others: Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada*. The purpose of this research is to examine the narrated and photographic experiences of womxn in Canada, who identify as both mothers and sex workers, with the over-arching question[s]: *how do these womxn navigate and negotiate the daily work of parenting and paid work in stigmatized and precarious conditions?* Focusing on a total of 15-20 womxn, this study aims to visually capture and make sense of these day-to-day experiences in relation to Canada's current labour market, gender, and class inequalities.

What will be Required of Participants?

This study involves completing a series of photographic prompts (approximately 5-10 images); capturing your daily routines, experiences, emotions and environments through the use of photography. Participants are welcome to create their own prompts, or adapt the given prompts to best suit the experiences they wish to share. With your consent, all images captured will be sent to the researcher electronically, you will be asked to partake in one semi-structured photo-elicitation interview to discuss the photographs. Interviews will be conducted by the principal investigator, Michelle Lesley, and are expected to last 1-2 hours in length. Due to Covid-19 health regulations, these interviews will take place via video chat or by phone. With your consent, this interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy throughout the data collection. As compensation for participating in this study, you will receive a \$50 e-transfer or \$50 e-gift card of your choice.

Once all data is collected, edited and coded, participants will be granted the opportunity to participate in member-checking the data for approval. Member-checking is critical for this research as it will ensure the validity of the findings for the project, enhance measures of confidentiality and grant participants agency of what they do and don't want to include in the project's findings. Participants will have 14 days to voluntarily member-check their transcribed data, after it has been sent to them. Participants can opt to not participate in this stage of the research process.

With Respect to Potential Benefits and Risks

By incorporating visual methodologies and the use of autophotography into this research specifically, it is my goal to host public fundraising exhibits featuring the photos collected, in order to raise monetary donations for both POWER and Maggie's Toronto. This is essential in ensuring that this project is conducted *by, with and for* sex workers. These exhibits will utilize the images collected to convey sex workers' lived experiences as a means to actively combat the

stigmas surrounding sex work. As a photographic exhibit, these narratives will also be able to reach wider audiences and serve as a way to highlight sex workers lived experiences through art. All images collected will thus aim to demystify cultural stereotypes and images produced in mainstream media, while addressing systemic issues surrounding the regulation of sex work in Canada.

Given the nature of these experiences, however, you may find some of the questions to be sensitive and to cause you distress. If this occurs, I can offer a number of local and national professional services that can offer you aid and/or assistance. It is important to note that as a researcher I am obligated to report any potential instances of child abuse or neglect to legal authorities, which in turn, would breach measures of confidentiality.

Confidentiality

As a measure of confidentiality, this research will utilize pseudonyms for the names of those participating, the names of their children, or names of any other significant personal indicators (i.e. place of work). All images will also undergo extensive editing to best protect all identities. The list linking pseudonyms with identifying information will be stored on my personal computer, with a separate password to access. It is crucial to note that this master list will not contain participants' full names-- only their initials and date that their interview took place. Participants will be given the chance to choose the pseudonyms that will be applied to their data, as well as edit the images themselves prior to forwarding them to the researcher.

We will treat your personal information as confidential, although absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed. "In-session" data, including any photographic, audio and/ or chat transcripts from the interview will be stored locally on the researcher's computer. Operational data collected by Zoom, such as meeting and performance data, is stored in Canada and the United States, but may be disclosed via a court order or data breach. All data collected from these interviews will be stored on Michelle Lesley's personal computer. Only Michelle Lesley Annett, Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore and the Carleton University Research Ethics Board will have access to the data collected. The results of this study may be published, but the data will be presented so that it will not be possible to identify any participants. All research data will be password-protected and any hard copies of data will be locked in a personal filing cabinet. After the study is complete (estimated to be finalized by August 31st, 2024), we will only retain your de-identified data for future research use.

Voluntary Participation

We estimate that your full participation in this project will involve a 1-2 hour long interview, with additional time to complete the photograph prompts and reviewing edited images. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. All participants obtain the right to skip questions or prompts they wish not to answer, as well as the right to withdraw their voluntary participation at any given moment, up until 14 days after receiving the transcribed copy of their interview and edited images. As a participant, you also obtain the right to refuse request particular responses to be kept 'off the record'. This request however does not apply to my legal obligation to report any instances of child abuse or neglect.

If at any time you decide to withdraw your participation from this study, you will be given two options: 1) you can opt for the data that has already been collected to be included in the analysis of this project or 2) you can request for all of your data to be excluded from this study and immediately destroyed. If you request for your data to be excluded from this study,

you will receive confirmation via email that all images, audio-recordings, transcripts and any other information pertaining to your participation have been permanently erased. There are no penalties for those who have chosen to withdraw from the study. If you withdraw from the study once your photo-elicitation interview has begun, you will still receive the \$50 compensation for your time.

Publication and Results

Once the data has been collected and transcribed, I will finalize the date, time and location for each exhibit. All participants will be informed of the details for each exhibit, should they wish to attend anonymously. If you are interested in accessing the finalized text, you will be able to upon request through contacting Michelle Lesley. We estimate this dissertation will be finalized by August 31, 2024 at the latest. In consenting to participating in this project, it is critical to note that results from this project may be published in professional journals, hosted in exhibits and/or presented at conferences indefinitely.

Contact Information and Ethics Clearance

This research has been cleared by Carleton University Research Ethics Board A Clearance # 116958. Should you have any **ethical concerns** with the study, please contact the REB Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone: 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or by email: ethics@carleton.ca). You can also reach me at michellelesleyannett@mail.carleton.ca. You may contact my supervisor Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore at meganriversmoore@cunet.carleton.ca or by phone at 613-520-2600 [ext. 3201].

Statement of Consent

Do you have any questions about this study or need any clarification?

Do you voluntarily agree to participate in the study? Yes _____ No _____

Do you agree to share your images captured? Yes _____ No _____

Do you agree to having interview audio-recorded? Yes _____ No _____

Participant's Pseudonym: _____ Date: _____

I have explained the study to the participant and answered any and all of their questions. The participant appeared to understand and agree. I provided a copy of the consent information to the participant for their reference.

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix E

Suggested Prompts:

Participants are welcome to add prompts of their own, completely alter these prompts, or be selective of which prompts they want to engage with. Participants are also welcome to edit these photos however they like, including applying filters, text, cropping the images or adjusting the image itself prior to submitting them to this project. The suggested prompts are as followed:

- an image that sums up your daily navigation of mothering and sex work
- an image that you feel defines you as a mother
- an image that you feel defines you as a sex worker. capture an image that demonstrates the stigma you experience (if applicable).
- an image of what you feel is unique to your experience as a working mother. capture an image that summarizes your experiences as a working mother during the COVID-19 pandemic
- an image that you feel captures YOU
- an image that you feel best combats stigmas or criticism that you have faced.
- an image that represents the qualities you are most proud of
- an image that demonstrates your bond with your children
- an image that you feel showcases your unique experiences as a working parent’.

Appendix F

Stigmatized (M)Others

Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada

This photographic exhibit features images from 14 sex workers, showcasing their daily lives navigating sex work, stigma and motherhood.

**June 8th – July 17, 2023
MacOdrum Library
Carleton University
Free Entrance**

Donations to Maggie's Toronto, Butterfly CSW, SWAN Vancouver, SWAN Waterloo, SWAP Hamilton & more highly encouraged

Appendix G

Stigmatized (M)Others: Navigating Stigma, Sex Work and Mothering in Canada

This fundraising exhibit features self-captured images from 14 sex workers across Canada, showcasing their daily lives navigating sex work, stigma and motherhood. These images aim to provide visual insight to broader audiences of the daily practices, routines and obstacles that these womxn face, and further, demystify cultural images and stereotypes that reproduce stigmas surrounding sex work and broader social inequalities. To best protect the identities of participants and their families, pseudonyms have been used throughout the exhibit.

The analysis of this exhibit relies on participant observation and anonymous feedback to further assess the project's ability to co-produce destigmatizing and empathetic knowledges—*by, with and for* sex workers. If you would like to share your feedback and impressions after visiting this exhibit, require audio descriptions to access the exhibit, or would like to donate to some Canadian grassroots organizations supporting sex workers, please scan the QR code below.

