Sex Worker and Proud: A Phenomenological Study of Consensual Sex Workers' Lives

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SEX WORKER AND PROUD:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF CONSENSUAL SEX WORKERS’ LIVES

By

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Bachelor of Arts - Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2011

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Science – Marriage and Family Therapy

Couple and Family Therapy Program
School of Medicine
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December 2017
This thesis prepared by

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entitled

Sex Worker and Proud: A Phenomenological Study of Consensual Sex Workers’ Lives

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science – Marriage and Family Therapy
Couple and Family Therapy Program

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Abstract

Ten consensual sex workers who were currently working in Nevada were qualitatively interviewed in an effort to explore their perceptions of the adult industry. Interviews specifically focused on their experience disclosing their profession to others and the potential effects that it has on their personal relationships, and access to effective treatment. The Moustakas method of phenomenological inquiry was used to analyze data from ten participants who self-identified as direct sex workers. Seven essential themes emerged from this analysis: (1) the adult industry provides professional and personal agency, (2) the industry is often transient, (3) disclosure is an impactful and ongoing process, (4) professional and personal lives often are compartmentalized, (5) Sex work can be an isolating, (6) therapy often involves factors that do not involve their work, (7) Sex work can provide an opportunity for self-exploration. Participants rejected the absolute victim narrative that is commonly reflected in media, film, and government sanctioned actions surrounding the adult industry (Nielsen, 2009). The results of this study emphasize the need for future research on the relationships of people in the adult industry and provides couple and family therapies with a critical understanding of how authenticity, genuineness, and judgement can impact clinical treatment when working with this population.
Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for all of the hard-work and dedication that my committee chair, Dr. Carissa D’Aniello, contributed to the completion of this thesis. Without her constant support and willingness to take a chance on me, I would have never had the opportunity to bring this thesis to fruition. Whenever I was in doubt of my abilities she believed in me and pushed me to do and be better. I can never express to her how much her involvement in this process influenced my entire perception of what a mentor and professor could be.

From the beginning, we knew that this project was going to be a major undertaking and would challenge my abilities as a clinician and researcher but the faculty at UNLV believed in me and gave me the space to complete this passion project. I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Barbara Brents, Dr. Markie Twist, and Brandon Eddy for their dedication to this process and ability to be flexible and understanding. Dr. Brents and Dr. Twist shared their wealth of knowledge and experience in regard to working with sex workers and how to navigate discussing consent with the adult industry. Brandon’s expert insight into the topic of qualitative research was invaluable as he generously shared his resources and knowledge with me which were critical to the execution of this thesis.

In addition to my formal committee, I must also acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Gerald Weeks, Dr. Stephen Fife, and Dr. Ryan Earl for their insight and willingness to provide their expertise whenever requested. Coreen Haym also served as a major contributor to the actualization of this thesis. She has served as an informal mentor to me for years and is a major reason why I even entered the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. She taught me how to be a better student, educator, clinician, and, more importantly, person. She showed me that education
must me fought for and earned and that once you find something you love, it doesn’t feel like work.

I would also like to individually thank each and everyone one of my cohort members for their consistent support, and abilities to make me laugh and challenge me intellectually: Alison Gelles, Allison Sender, Ashley Lucas, Aubrey Wadman-Goetsch, Brittany Donaldson, Brittany Farrow, Christian Stewart, David Johnson, Derek Holyoak, Devin Stong, Erin Sullivan, Gabriella Chong, Jade Mack, Janna North, Jennifer Bolick, Jennifer LeGree, Jennifer Zbejczyk, Kimberly Rubalcava, Mandy Christine, Maria Pelczar, Mary Phenix, Matthew Butler, Melissa Yzaguirre, Monica Munoz, Sarah Hechter, Sarah Scott, Wendy Corado, and Zaida Gomez.

Lastly, I’d like to thank the participants who took time out of their day to sit down and be interviewed by me. I am beyond thankful for their willingness to share extremely intimate aspects of their lives and I hope that by them sharing their stories that they can help make the experiences of those better.

.
Dedication

I’d like to dedicate this thesis to my family. As a first-generation African-American college student, they believed in me when no one else did and taught me that, while there may be barrier to my success, breaking through barriers is not impossible. My mother, Annie Annette White-Curtis, who sadly passed before this the completion of this thesis, was one of the strongest people that I have had the pleasure of meeting and she pushed her children to rise above our circumstance. My father, Michael Gerald Curtis Sr., taught me the value of education and hard-work and that showing love is not a weakness. He would walk to the ends of the earth for his children and make no qualms about it. My siblings, Freddie Sims, Shanita Sims, Thomas Sims, and Tityana Curtis, were always there to provide support and critical feedback when I needed it. My best-friends, Brittani Williams, Candace Watkins, Marnae Martin and Shaquia Givens-Peterson, helped keep me company on those late nights writing my papers and were always a welcome audience for me to practice my presentations and bounce ideas off of. Lastly, my partner, Vernon Keith Atchison Jr. was one of the major reasons I was able to complete my program. Every time there was any doubt in my heart, he was always there to push me forward and never allow me to take the opportunity that I had for granted.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

There has been limited research focused on the experiences of consensual sex workers in the United States. In the United States, selling sex is illegal in most states, therefore legality presents a unique challenge to conducting research on this population. However, there are counties in Nevada where selling sex is legal. Legal adult entertainment in Nevada is loosely regulated and generates millions of dollars in annual revenue, (Brents & Hausbeck, 2001; Morris, 2016) making Nevada an ideal location to conduct this research. The majority of the research on the adult industry is rooted in HIV prevention, safe sex practices, and/or the relationship between sex workers and their customers (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001a). This limited focus of the current research, has resulted in little awareness of the societal, familial, and romantic lives of the men and women who work in this dollar industry. Additionally, scholarly literature, much like mainstream culture, all but ignores the subject of consent and the existence of consensual sex workers.

The term sex worker refers to any person who exchanges services of a sexual nature for anything of value (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; Dalla, 2001; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001a). While this definition is broad, some argue that it does not adequately address the issue of consent (Rivera, 2016). Various prostitution abolitionists groups and scholars argue that at its core, sex work is exploitation because of the buying and selling of a human body (Akee, Basu, Bedi, & Chau, 2014; Della Guista, di Tommaso, & Strøm et al., 2009; Immordino & Russo, 2015; Primoratz, 1993; Pateman, 1999). Some would argue that even when people believe they are entering the industry of their own free will they are being coercive by a patriarchal society (Raymond, 2004). In contrast, organizations such as Vixen Collective, and C.O.Y.O.T.E. (Call Off Your Old Tired
Ethics), who fight to decriminalize prostitution, argue that sex can be completely consensual (Rivera, 2016). The word *consensual* refers to a person’s agreement or consent to be a part of the adult industry without being coerced by an external force. Although consensual sex workers have made a conscious decision to monetize their sexuality and bodies, they are commonly grouped with those who are forced into the industry against their will. These individuals are commonly categorized as victims of sex trafficking.

Literature often focuses on sexual servitude as a primary form of human trafficking in lieu of other forms such as forced labour, military soldiers, and organ trafficking which creates a lack of consensus regarding the definition of human trafficking (United Nations, 2008). In comparison to the other various types of trafficking, forced labour is believed to be the most common form, as estimates of sex exploration have been criticized for to weak methods, gaps, and discrepancies with research studies (United States Department of State, 2010; General Accountability Office, 2006). Human trafficking has also been repeatedly confused with high-profile cases of kidnapping and sexual abuse (Lerum & Brents, 2016). Commonly, any instance of undocumented migration, regardless of level of consent or coercion, is considered human trafficking (Chuang, 2014; Weitzer, 2014; Zhang, 2012).

Regarding all sex workers as human trafficking victims fails to acknowledge the myriad of experiences of working in the adult industry. The coercive nature of human trafficking is projected upon the entire industry, thus silencing the voices of consensual sex workers within scholarly literature, media, and legislation. Silencing the voices of consensual sex workers’ does a disservice to anti-sexual exploitation initiatives, as it removes the possibility for them to serve as allies (Boyd, 2012). Consensual sex workers are entrenched in the culture of the adult industry and often witness the commercial sexual exploitation that takes place (Boyd, 2012). If given a
voice, consensual sex workers would have the ability to better equip scholars, advocates, lawmakers, and law enforcement to identify and serve victims of human trafficking (Bergquist, 2015).

**Research Aims**

The aim of the present study was to explore the lives of consensual sex workers in Nevada by examining how their profession potentially impacts their familial and romantic relationships. An additional aim of this study is to inform marriage and family therapists’ understanding of the lived experiences of consensual sex workers, to understand their unique relational and therapeutic needs. To reach this aim, I interviewed consensual sex workers about their experiences working in the adult industry, the factors associated with the disclosure of their profession to others, their familial and intimate relationships, and perspectives of mental health treatment.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Sex work is commonly defined as services that are sexual in nature, and are exchanged for anything of value (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; Dalla, 2001; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Researchers have identified two main categories of sex work: direct and indirect (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). The distinction among these categories is how the transaction of services originated, negotiated, and executed (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005).

Direct sex work refers to the traditional definition of prostitution where sexual services are performed in exchange for a set fee (Casas, 2010). Examples of direct sex work can include but is not limited to escort services, street-based prostitution, and call boys/girls (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005).

Indirect sex work refers to three types of sexual services. The first type are services that are opportunistic in nature; they are spontaneous, and often involve a prior non-sexual transaction. For example, “sugar babies” usually have a primary supporter known as a “sugar daddy” or “sugar momma”; these individuals tend to be older and provide financial support in exchange for adult services (Roche, Neaigus, and Miller, 2005). While sugar babies are more likely to be in riskier relationship because the couple is less likely to practice safe sex, it does reduce the sex risk because they allow sex workers to sustain themselves on fewer sex partners (Roche, Neaigus, and Miller, 2005). (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). The second type is services where sex is secondary to a primary service offered, such as a massage (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). In other words, the client pays for the massage, not sex, but sex occurs in conjunction with the primary service. The third type of indirect sex work involves exchanges where there is little to no genital or physical contact such as being a pornographic actor or actress (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005).
The History of Sex Work Research

Beginning in the 1970s, early research on the adult industry focused on the problem of *prostitution* and finding explanations for the criminal and deviant personalities prostitutes were perceived to have at the time (James & Meyerding, 1977). During the 1980s and early 1990s, the trend of sex work research turned from trying to fix the problem to trying to understand the origins of why people, primarily young adults, enter the sex industry (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001a). This research served as the basis for the current understanding of the industry by historically linking prostitution to physical and sexual abuse, dysfunctional families, parental substance abuse, sexual precocity, and frequent victimization (Brannigan & Van Brunschot, 1997).

During this time, the narrative of sex workers as victims took root. For example, a study by Newton-Ruddy and Handelsman (1986) proposed that up to 95% of young prostitutes were victims of childhood incest or sexual abuse. One of the common theories of the time asserted that abused children drifted into prostitution as a response to informal labeling, and stigmatization that arose from factors such as running away, the need for money, and lack of employment opportunities (McCarthy, Benoit, & Jansson, 2014).

The HIV epidemic of the late 1980s had serious ramifications on the sex industry, which was reflected in the literature of the time (Darrow, Boles, & Cohen, 1991; Elifson, Boles & Sweat, 1993; Gattari, Spizzichino, Valenzi, & Zaccarelli, 1992; Lurie, Eugenia, Fernandes, Hughes). Since this time, a large sector of sex work research stems from occupational hazards such as higher rates of HIV risk (Surratt, 2007; Goldenbeg et al., 2014; Goldenberg et al. 2012; Reeves et al., 2017). Often, these studies assert that sex workers have disproportionately higher rates of HIV exposure without controlling for multiple sexual partners who may have requested unprotected sex (Shannon et al, 2015). Additionally, research conducted with female sex workers
demonstrated that they were at the highest risk for contracting HIV when they were engaged in unprotected noncommercial sexual activity as opposed to their professional activities (Albert, Warner & Hatcher, 1998). Their results indicated that female sex workers were more likely to contract HIV within their own personal sexual experiences than within professional ones due to less stringent condom use in their personal relationships (Albert et al., 1998).

This data contradicted the social stigma of sex workers being vectors of disease at the time, which continues to persist in scholarly literature (Albert et al., 1998; Beyrer et. al., 2011; Steen, Jana, Reza-Paul, Richter, 2015). This contradiction was further reinforced by a study conducted in San Francisco, CA in 1991 which showed that only 2% of non-injection drug using sex workers tested positive for HIV (Darrow, et al., 1991). Higher rates of HIV prevalence in the adult industry can be correlated with the presence of intervenes drug use as the chance of being HIV positive significantly increases from 2% to 15% when this factor is considered (Darrow, et al., 1991; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001a).

While this research has been helpful in addressing and providing resources for issues faced by those in the adult industry, it has also been clouded by the use of the terms sex worker and human trafficking victim interchangeably within scholarly literature (Inguane et al. 2015; Goldenberg et al. 2014; Essack, 2015; Marcus, 2014; Urada et al., 2014; Bergquist, 2015). By confounding these terms there is an implication that these research studies can be generalized as representations of the entire adult industry. The primary aim of this study is to further understand the underrepresented group of consensual sex workers.

**Online Sex Work.** As technology has advanced, the adult industry has shifted and changed to meet the demands of its customers. A new set of professions have emerged and
flourished to create an online adult industry where sex workers potentially have more autonomy over the clientele they see or content that they provide (Jones, 2015).

Online sex work is defined as the commercial sale of sexual services using technology (Jones, 2015). This usually involves using the Internet to solicit sexual services that are then delivered physically offline or sexual activities that occur strictly visually and auditory through an electronic device (Jones, 2015). For sex workers, this medium has limited barriers to entry and anonymity is easily achieved (Hertlein & Piercy, 2005). Additionally, sex workers can service multiple clients at once with minimal risk of physical injury or harm. However, they may face breaches in personal information or harassment (Jones, 2016). Alternatively, customers can interact a sex worker in real time without fear of legal recourse (Jones, 2016).

The occupational benefits and challenges of engaging in each type of sex works often breeds competition, as workers strive to be successful within one of the more desirable types of work. This has led to the adult industry adopting its own implicit hierarchy based on several factors including physical risk, proximity to clients, and income earned (McNeill, 2012).

**Sex Industry Hierarchy**

Within the adult industry, there is an unspoken hierarchy often defined by the following criteria: the profit earned, the level of safety, and how services are marketed and solicited (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; see Table 1). Often referred to as the *whorearchy*, this hierarchy consists of permeable boundaries, and professionals often fluctuate between tiers depending on the number of clients served, profit earned, and level of danger they are in (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; McNeill, 2012).

Sex workers in individual arrangements are at the top of the hierarchy of sex workers because this work is lucrative, and safer than other forms of sex work (Dalla, 2001; Ngo et al.,
2007). They tend to have limited physical proximity to clients or have a small number of regular clientele thus lowering their overall risk for violence and contracting HIV or STIs along with mandated STI testing by companies (Dalla, 2001; Ngo et al., 2007). Included at the top of the hierarchy are pornographic actors/actresses and erotic performers due to them often being subjected to mandated STI testing by their employers, which lowers their risk of contracting or spreading HIV or STIs (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008). They also must provide proof that they are of legal age to consent to sex thus lowering the risk of performers being trafficking victims (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008). While at the top of the hierarchy, there is a level of risk in that individuals in these professions are frequently harassed by their agents and managers, are often stalked by clients or fans, and may be violated by disruptive or intoxicated patrons (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008).

Escorts and call girls/boys provide sexual services to a regular client base in another business assume more risk and make less money than the previous tier (Dalla, 2001; Ngo et al., 2007). They generally meet with clients who have been screened and perform acts inside a hotel room or at a location of their choosing, which increases the overall safety of the sex worker (Ngo et al., 2007). Brothel, Massage and Bar workers fall lower in the hierarchy because they serve more clients, and earn the same amount of money as the tiers above (Ngo et al., 2007).

Street work is at the bottom of the hierarchy because it is reportedly the most undesirable form of sex work because of the physical danger, unpredictability, and high stigma (Roche et al., 2005). Street workers incur the most danger due to the clientele’s anonymity and privacy inherent in street work (Ngo et al., 2007). In addition, street work is unregulated, and clients are unscreened (Oselin & Blasyak, 2013).
Street workers face risks such as client using threats or acts of physical violence to coerce them into providing cheaper or free services, additional risk of arrest, and high risk of contracting HIV and STIs (Roche et al., 2005). Finally, street work is commonly associated with human trafficking because of its link to pimping culture, which is exploitative and coercive in nature (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2016; Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2017). Frequently, pimps create an environment of extreme behavior expectations that carry harsh and unpredictable punishments that often include physical punishment, sexual assault, or torture techniques (NHTRC, 2016). However, pimp culture is not consistent throughout the adult industry (Sanders, 2005). Regardless of the mediating circumstances, consent is the defining factor between a person being trafficked into the adult industry and a person actively and consensually engaging in sex work (Sanders, 2005).

**Sex Work in Nevada**

There are places in Nevada where prostitution is legal, and specifically Las Vegas has garnered a reputation as being *Sin City*, as it has come to symbolize the sex industry in the United States (Heineman, MacFarlane, & Brents, 2012). Contrary to this common understanding, sex work is not legal in Las Vegas or Reno, (Heineman, et al., 2012; Brents, Jackson, & Hausbeck, 2010) however, it is legal in the state’s licensed brothels (U.S. Department of State, 2008; NRS 201.354). Legal brothels are loosely regulated with few laws currently in place that govern their policies and procedures (Brents & Hausbeck, 2001).

The Nevada brothel system has been criticized by both sex work advocates and sex work abolitionists for different reasons. Sex work advocates oppose the Nevada system mainly due to licensing requirements which creates a permanent record that may lead to discrimination later (Anderson, 1995). They also identify the presence of a large power difference between brothel
owners and prostitutes offering prostitutes little influence over their working conditions (Anderson, 1995). Lastly advocates believe that current regulations have been designed to protect customers and not prostitutes by requiring prostitutes to undergo legal and health background checks while their clients do not (Anderson, 1995). Abolitionists oppose the Nevada system due to its legalized nature and restrictive rules (Farley, 2007).

While brothels have been heavily criticized, sex workers report experiencing less violence and having a higher sense of security when working legally (Brents & Hausbeck, 2005). They attribute their increased safety to working in a secure community and the legality of their work (Brents & Hausbeck, 2005). The legitimacy of prostitution in Nevada makes it an ideal place to assess the social and therapeutic needs of sex workers who work both legally and illegally as it is common for individuals to engage in both types of sex work (Brents & Hausbeck, 2005).

**Sex Work and Consent**

Though there has been an increase in research addressing rape culture and sexual-assault, there is still a limited research that addresses sexual consent within the adult industry (Beres, 2007; Jozkowski, 2015). For the present study, sexual consent is defined as an explicit agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2016). Additionally, consent can be revoked at any time with the understanding that giving consent for one activity, one time, does not mean giving consent for increased or recurring sexual contact (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2016).

Since the mid-1980s, discussions surrounding consent in the sex industry have been difficult to conduct due to the complexity involving the intersectionality of these two factors (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001a). The commonly adopted *YES Means YES* affirmative-consent policy
implies that there is an underlying desire from both parties to engage in sexual activity, however, this underlying desire may not be present as providers may not be sexually attracted to their clients (Jozkowski, 2015; Kontula, 2008). This dynamic presents a unique question, “If a person consensually chooses to engage in sexual activity with someone they are not attracted to due to the promise of compensation, could that interaction be punctuated as sexual assault?” Scholarly literature tends to adopt a dichotomous perspective on this topic (Doezema, 1998).

Some argue that sex work re a product of a patriarchal society where women are often disempowered and disenfranchised (Ekberg, 2004; Farley, 2004; MacKinnon, 2005; Dempsey, 2011). Raymond (2004) asserts that the vast majority of women in prostitution do not make a rational choice to enter the industry. Rather, women enter the adult industry because they do not have any other viable means of providing for themselves (Raymond, 2004)

While abolitionists acknowledge the exist of, what they believe to be, a small population of women who choose to be sex workers, they claim that these women are being forced into the industry due to a lack of resources and meaningful alternatives and in turn, regret their decision to enter the industry (Lim, 1998). In turn, they punctuate any sexual activity that doesn’t include sexual desire as sexual assault, as summarized by Yen (2008):

Even porn stars and prostitutes who supposedly engage in the sex trade industry voluntarily and defend the practice are often abused and controlled by pimps or domineering husbands or forced by economic constraints to engage in the industry. Worn down by abuse and degradation and fear of their pimps, many women finally submit to their fate and that submission is erroneously viewed as their consent or choice to engage in the industry (p. 665).
Abolitionist may also argue that when discussing the definition of human trafficking, the concept of consent should be completely irrelevant as they claim that it is oversimplified and inaccurate in its scope (Raymond, 2004). They assert that by including consent in the conversation, lawmakers are unknowingly creating an avenue for traffickers to escape prosecution, as they would have the ability to use consent as a defense (Dempsey, 2011). This would place traffickers in control of evidence by placing the burden of proof on the victims (Raymond, 2004). A critique of this perspective is that it removes autonomy from the sex worker’s perspective (Dempsey, 2011).

One of the critiques of this perspective is its conceptualization of consent. Through this lens, sex work and human trafficking is used within scholarly literature interchangeably, reinforcing the idea that sex work is a form of exploitation (Rivera, 2016; Hanson, 2015). Several human rights groups and sex work advocates argue that this approach is damaging to individuals in both groups by perpetrating the idea that the entire adult industry is composed of individuals without the freedom of choice (Hanson, 2015; Yen, 2008). Using these terms interchangeably assumes that consensual sex workers and human trafficking victims have the same experiences (Hanson, 2015).

Organizations such as SWOP (Sex Worker Outreach Project) conceptualize consent in the adult industry as a spectrum of agency. As explained by Boyd (2016), at one end of the spectrum there are individuals who have high levels of agency and choose to become sex workers. On the other side of the spectrum, there are individuals who do not have personal agency and are directly or indirectly coerced into sex work out of fear or manipulation (Boyd, 2016). In between these two extremes are people who became involved in the sex industry due to circumstance. Individuals who could fall under the category of circumstantial sex workers range
from those who believe that they should have the agency to provide for themselves in whatever way they see fit to those who enter the industry out of necessity due to financial hardship, drug and alcohol addiction, a history of abuse, or co-dependency (Boyd, 2016). This spectrum approach paints a more realistic view of consent as it accounts for individuals who, if not for certain circumstances or experiences, would have never entered the sex industry.

**Clinical Work with Sex Workers**

There is currently a lack of literature surrounding clinical considerations when working with those in the adult industry. Beauregard (2015) discussed their experience clinically working with sex workers and emphasized that clinicians should approach this population with respectful curiosity in regard to if the client’s profession influences their mental, emotional, psychological, or relational health. This can be achieved through the utilization of various supportive psychotherapy modalities such as cognitive-behavioral or solution-focused therapy, which emphasis the usage of the support and trust that is built within the therapeutic alliance to address maladaptive functioning and therapeutic resistance (Anklesaria & Gentile, 2012). They also identified the importance of creating an active and ongoing dialog with clients on the subjects of safety, boundaries, work-life balance, benefits of the profession, legal issues, available resources, and sources of support (Beauregard, 2015).

These topics become critically important as clients may struggle with the challenges that they face while working within industry and the barriers that they may face if they decide to transition to life outside of the industry (Murphy & Venkatesh, 2006). When working with clients in the adult industry it is vitally important that clinicians are aware of their own perspectives and effectively manage countertransference as clients may disclose thoughts and beliefs that run counter to the dominate cultures perspectives (Anklesaria & Gentile, 2012).
Reacting negatively or unsupportively to these instances of disclosure can result in less of a willingness for clients to disclose in the future and access social support and resources (Lievore, 2005).
Chapter 3: Methodology

I used transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) to understand participants’ lived experience of being a consensual sex worker in Nevada. In transcendental phenomenology, researchers emphasize participants’ own descriptions of the phenomenon over their own interpretation of the data (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology is distinctive in that it employs a fixed sequence of steps to aide researchers in identifying and setting aside biases, stereotypes, and preconceived notions of both the phenomenon and the participant (Moustakas, 1994). This strategy, known as Epoche, enables transcendental phenomenologists to separate their own beliefs and values from the data analysis process; therefore, allowing less researcher interpretation to take place as compared to other phenomenological approaches (Coy, 2016). While Moustakas acknowledges that no researcher can completely diminish their prejudices, biases, and preconceived notions, but with practice, Epoche can guide a researcher as close to a presuppositionless state as possible (Moustakas, 1994; Moustakas, 1994).

The Researcher

This study was conducted by a cisgender male, African American student as a master’s thesis in the context of a graduate-level COAMFTE accredited program at a large western university. I was drawn to this topic due to a deep personal connection with someone who has consensually chosen to be a part of the adult industry. Through my years of knowing this individual, I have watched them struggle in a society that either sees them as a victim who needs to be saved, or as a deviant whose thoughts and behaviors need to be corrected. This study was developed to give sex workers the opportunity to share their experiences and contribute to scholarly literature that has largely ignored or muted their voices. Throughout the duration of this
study I was aware of my sex-worker affirmative biases and took appreciate steps to mediate the
effects of this perspective as outlined below.

**Recruitment**

Online and printed materials were distributed by email to local organizations and
professionals in the mental health field by providing them with flyers and the electronic survey
link to share with potential participants. In total, 10 flyers were distributed to local organizations
that had a history working with or providing services to sex workers including, Vixen Collective,
Sex Worker Project, Cupcake Girls Inc., Sex Work Research, Desiree Alliance, The Gay &
Lesbian Community Center of Southern Nevada, and Sex Workers Anonymous (See Appendix
D).

The Internet was used to advertise the survey, via posts and emails. Posts were made on
websites where sex is often sold such as craigslist.org, backpage.com, and adultspace.com. Posts
asked participants to express interest through an email sent to a dedicated email address and were
then provided with the electronic survey link (Appendix E). Email was also used to schedule and
confirm the dates and times of the interview.

Direct emails were retrieved from sites such as Bigdoggie.net, Eroticreview.com,
tnareview.com, Daddyreviews.com, and Eroticmonkey.com which advertise profiles for sex
workers who may or may not work independently or for agencies. A letter was sent to each direct
email only once (see Appendix E). In total 1,304 direct, unduplicated email addresses and 14
business/organization email addresses were sent.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for this study due to the secretive and
protective nature of the adult industry (Patton, 1990; Suri, 2011). The researcher purposively
sampled known associates who were sex workers, and contacted sex-work affirmative
organizations such as the Las Vegas Sex Worker’s Outreach Project, the Vixen Collective, websites run by active sex workers such as titsandsass.com and local outreach organizations that frequently have contact with sex workers, i.e. Cupcake Girls Inc.

**Participation Criteria**

The inclusion criteria for this study are: (a) being at least 18 years of age old or older, (b) currently working full-time in the adult industry with primarily physical sexual contact with clients in Nevada, (c) define most of their work in the adult industry as consensual and (d) have considered attending therapy or have attended therapy. Participants identified the consensual nature of their experience for themselves. Additionally, participants were not asked to specify the exact type of sex work that they were involved in due to the permeable boundaries that exist between professions in the adult industry. Participants in this study were limited to those who have primarily physical sexual contact with their clients as a means of researching similar experiences in the adult industry.

**Sample Size**

Several authors have written about the issue of samples sizes in qualitative research (Dworkin, 2012; Sandelowski, 1995; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). There is limited consensus on the sample size needed to reach saturation (Sandelowski, 1995). Bernard (2012) suggests that saturation cannot be quantified in numbers yet, Giorgi (2009) asserts that only three participants are necessary to capture the essence of the phenomenon. This study achieved saturation with 10 participants. Thirteen individuals signed the informed consent but only 10 participants completed the interview (Table 2; Table 3). Two participants did not initiate the interview upon follow-up from the primary investigator while one participant was unable to complete their interview due to technical difficulties. Multiple mediums were utilized for the
Purpose of conducting the interviews: in-person (20%), telephone (20%), and video chatting (60%).

Procedure

Participants were provided with a link that forwarded to the homepage of the survey. On the homepage, the study purpose and the time commitment were explained, participants were instructed to read and sign a consent form and were informed that they could skip questions that they feel uncomfortable answering and could end the interview whenever they chose. Participants were originally asked to complete a one-hour interview, however interviews lasted 30 minutes on average. Contact information for the primary and secondary researchers were provided if participants had questions. After reading the consent form, participants were required to agree that they meet the inclusion criteria before moving forward. Participants completed a demographic survey (Appendix C) and provided their preferred day and time for the interview. Participants were also given the option to take part in an in-person, telephone, or webcam interview.

Once this information has been submitted to the researcher, participants received a confirmation email stating the date and time of the interview based on the availability that they listed (Appendix F). If participants chose to do an in-person interview, they were asked for a location they preferred the interview take place in with the researcher suggesting a secluded yet public location such as a library (Appendix H). Before the in-person interview began the participant was given an opportunity to review the consent form and were offered a copy for their records. If the participant chose to do a phone interview, a copy of the consent form was emailed to them before the start of the interview. The researcher transcribed the interviews using Nuance Dragon Diction 13, a premium speech to text software, to prepare the data for analysis.
Interview

Interviews were conducted using a three-phase model of interviewing (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The first phase served as a review for the participant on the nature of the study while establishing a rapport between the main researcher and participants and took place before recording began (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The second phase of the interview involved the gathering of data through open-ended minimally structured dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Appendix B). Participants were not prompted to speak on another subject until they “ran out of steam” to produce data that would have otherwise be missed (Osborne, 1990). Participants were asked to clarify and expand on topics that needed further elaboration. The interview protocol was piloted with the first four participants with one alteration being made to the protocol. The protocol was amended to include a question in regard to how participants entered the adult industry and what influences them staying within it. This question was added as a means of building rapport between the interviewer and interviewee as well as to provide a narrative that describes the factors that influenced the interviewees perspectives. The last phase of the interview took place after the recorder was turned off and provided participants the opportunity to ask any questions that may have had in regard to the research study and provide feedback to improve the interview process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Confidentiality

No identifying information was collected from the participant. Participants were offered the opportunity to use a pseudonym or fictitious name throughout the entirety of the study. Specific names, dates, and locations were changed from those originally reported to protect the identity of the people involved in the event. Participants were also told that they could skip any part of the study that they felt uncomfortable answering without penalty; all participants
interviewed completed the interview without skipping any sections or questions. The consent form also stated that the participants could stop their participation in the study at any time without penalty; all participants completed the interview protocol. After the study was completed, the data was securely stored on an encrypted drive and will be kept for at least three years. After this period, all electronic and print materials will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

For the purposes of this study, the primarily research conducted epoche by first writing down his own beliefs and experiences with sex workers and the adult industry before the start of data collection. After each interview, epoche was continued by the researcher journaling about their thoughts, feelings, and emotions that arose before, during, and after the course of transcribing the interviews and analyzing the resulting data.

In the second step the primarily research used *horizonization*, which involved reading each interview transcript independently while highlighting significant statements that were relevant to the phenomenon. In the third step, the primary researcher created clusters of meaning by grouping significantly identified statements into themes or meaning unites while removing overlapping and repetitive statements.

The fourth step involved the primarily researcher writing textural meanings by describing each participant’s personal experience with the phenomenon in their own words. Next, the primarily researcher wrote structural descriptions for each participant, which describes how the participant experienced the phenomenon while considering their experience within the larger culture context of humanity.

The final step required the primary researcher to integrate and reduce the textual descriptions and structural descriptions of participants down to create the essence of the data,
which was a narrative account of the shared experiences and perceptions of all participants (Coy, 2016). The essence was then used to discern essential themes to present the data concisely (Coy, 2016).

**Credibility**

The purpose of transcendental phenomenology is to obtain a deep, rich understanding of a person’s perception, perspective, and understanding of a situation or phenomenon. Rigor was established utilizing the principles of credibility (Eisner, 1991), dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), transferability (Creswell, 2007), and trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003). Credibility was ensured by using analytic triangulation. A second coder reviewed the codes, and attempted to mediate researcher bias in the interpretation of results and ensure that the conclusions drawn could be supported by the raw interview data (Daly, 2007). Epōche was used to establish dependability to aid in remaining consciously aware of the researcher’s own biases related to the subject (Moustakas, 1994). Memoing and journaling throughout data collection and analysis were used to prevent presuppositions from influencing results (Golafshani, 2003). The inclusion of descriptions related to the research’s setting as well as descriptions of the participants and the primary researcher aimed to institute transferability (Creswell, 2007). This disclosure can be used to judge the transferability of this study’s findings to different settings with different researchers (Creswell, 2007). Finally, incorporating direct interview quotes served to improved trustworthiness though the use of participant’s own deep, rich descriptions of their experience to draw conclusions instead of using the primary researcher’s interpretation of those experiences (Corden & Sainsbury, 2005).
Chapter 4: Results

Participants

Clark. Clark is a 49-year-old, homosexual African American male with an advanced degree. Clark originally entered the adult industry to earn extra money while pursuing his art career. He has had frequent periods of time where he separated from the adult industry, the most recent of which was 2 years ago.

Jean. Jean is a 36-year-old college-educated, heterosexual mother of Puerto Rican and Caucasian descent. At the time of the interview she was living with her partner that she had been dating seriously for 3 or more years. She has been attending therapy off and on since the age of 13 and is close to her mother, the only person in her life who knows about her profession.

Anna. Anna had disclosed her profession to nearly everyone in her life, especially friends and family and believed that by being honest with those around her she can humanize the profession. She is a 27-year-old bisexual Caucasian married female with some training toward an advanced degree. She lived with and is married to her partner that she had been with for 3 or more years.

Rebecca. After being diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, Rebecca sought therapy to cultivate healthy relationships. She is a 35-year-old bisexual Caucasian mother with a technical training degree. Additionally, she was living with her fiancé, who she had been dating for about 6 months to a year.

Heather. Heather became interested in therapy after she experienced domestic violence while working in the adult industry. She is a 32-year-old heterosexual, Caucasian, single mother with a bachelor’s degree. At the time of the interview she was not currently dating anyone. She is close to her grandmother and mother and recently lost her sister due to accidental suicide 3 years
ago. She is an enthusiastic proponent of therapy and believes that a good experience in therapy can change a person’s life.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth is a 32-year-old bisexual African American mother who had been casually dating multiple partners for the past 1 to 3 years. She has earned her high school degree. She is not close to her family due to her involvement in the adult industry and has relocated from her home state to continue to grow her business.

**Emma.** Emma is a 28-year-old heterosexual Caucasian female with a Bachelor’s degree. Although she comes from a close family, she has not disclosed her profession to them. She fears that telling her family would be causing unnecessary stress regarding her safety because she does not reside in the same state. She is currently engaged to a partner she had been with for 3 or more years. She entered the adult industry after she and her finance lost their jobs and moved to Las Vegas.

**Paige.** Paige is a 34-year-old heterosexual female of African American descent. She is a high school graduate who is currently pursuing her Bachelor’s degree in communications. She joined the adult industry while in her 20’s after she was fired from working in a hotel and her friend introduced her to the world of high-end escorting.

**Danielle.** Danielle began working as a sex worker after she lost her job during the recession. Despite having a bachelor’s degree, she continued sex worker because it allowed her to find herself and defy the traditional expectations of her upbringing. She is a 31-year-old pansexual female of Caucasian descent and was not dating anyone at the time of the interview.

**Tessa.** Having worked in the adult industry for decades, Tessa served as a sex worker advocate fighting for the unionization of erotic performers. She is a 50-year-old heterosexual
female of Caucasian descent, with some training towards an advanced degree. Although she was single at the time of the interview she was married and divorced twice.

**Themes**

The following essential themes depict common perspectives shared by participants related to their experiences as a professional in the adult industry and the potential effects that it has on their personal relationships, and access to effective treatment.

**Essential Theme 1: The adult industry provides professional and personal agency.**

Seven out of the 10 participants said their profession allowed them to support themselves financially. Six participants stated that their decision to enter the adult industry was directly linked to the loss of a job. For example, Paige said,

> When I got fired from my hotel job, I thought about doing something different. I overheard a friend talking about the large amounts of money they made in high-end escorting. They could afford all the stuff that celebrities can. I was intrigued by that, and I tried my luck with it.

Emma described a similar experience,

> I was a manager at a strip club for two years. And I had just lost my job. My boyfriend and I were at a point where nothing was working. Nothing. I didn't have a job. And he didn't have a job. And we'd just been hustling, and literally were not making enough money to just live. I still remember my first day I decided to go for it. He tried to talk me out of it, and tried to "We will figure it out." I just told him no. This is what we're doing. And then, two weeks later, he got arrested, and went to prison for three years.

Tessa explained how she was pushed into the industry after a difficult childhood. She said,
It was absolutely, without a doubt, no choice. I was sort of coerced. I'm a victim of domestic violence as well as child molestation. It sort of was the only road. Maybe it was the right road. We don't know, but maybe it was just the moment. I'm almost 50 years of age now, and one thing led to another and my only regret is I didn't help others along the way not feel ashamed for being beautiful, sexy, and smart.

After years of working as a stripper, Tessa had gotten married and transitioned out of the industry when an accident occurred, causing her to reenter the industry. She said,

My entire penthouse apartment had flooded. My whole family was on vacation and I didn't know what to do. So, I headed down to this really nice bar where they had a piano because I'm a singer, and I sang my song "You are My Candy" and a gentleman came up, put $100 in the tip jar. He looked like he was about 80 years old, huge Rolex and said,"Young lady, would you care to have a beer with me?" and I go "Yes I would." And That's how I met this most incredible person, a very controversial guy who was partners with a man who owned one of the most well-known brothels in Nevada.

Six participants identified personal agency and financial freedom as barriers to leaving the industry. Paige candidly spoke about frequently turning to sex work as a back-up solution to financial difficulties when she is traditionally unemployed,

It's pretty hard. I really do different things, not intentionally, but if something is not working out for me than I'm going to do the other. I was unemployed for a while, and I had to support myself so I just went online, and went to find an adult job, any type of adult job. Like video gigs maybe or escorting

Tessa also said,
What were we going to do to pay our bills? Put a roof over our heads? Feed our children? Continue to do what they had to do to get on with our lives. The adult entertainment dancing industry, whatever, should be a bus to get from point A to B, and then they're going to kick us off that bus, lot of people had to do what they had to do.

Clark also had a similar experience,

There were times I'd left. In fact, recently it was two years ago when I had a full-time job. That didn't work out, and it was just sort of the most convenient thing to return to really quickly...You know, it's convenient in terms of setting my own schedule, time, and I'm not profligate with money, which is a danger a lot of guys get into, I've discovered, having talked with so many people over the years. I wasn't such a profligate that if I had to do something else that I couldn't get by. But, for dollars-to-hour working, it's not so bad

Six participants discussed benefits of the adult industry. Danielle provided a unique perspective of how the adult industry provides opportunities to gain power,

Sex work gives you the money to leave an abusive husband, or to finally deal with your health issues from childhood, or to work through some sort of debilitating disease… many sex workers have health issues, and suddenly having the money to deal with those. And we can be our own boss, if I can't go to work because I'm sick today.

Having created her own company, Emma also had a unique perspective,

I know the girls, like the girls in my class that I work with, we all do it because we want to, because we enjoy it, we enjoy meeting people, and it's our choice. I feel like most people, like I said, there's always that weird stigma attached to it that we're victims…There's definitely more girls who are independent now, than there are girls that
are trafficked and stuff like that. Most girls realize now that they can do it on their own, they can do it on the computer. They don't need to give somebody their money to help them do it. And girls like me will help you out, and give you information to help do it safer.

Clark discussed times when he enjoys his career,

I like people, and I actually like sex. I'm not necessarily sexually attracted to everybody I have sex with. In fact, I have what I call the bar scale, like, would I pick that person up in a bar. 95% of the people, No. But occasionally you go, "Wow. I just got paid for that. Wow! That was fun. He was hot, and I got paid for that."

**Essential Theme 2: Working in the adult industry is often transient.** Seven participants spoke about being aware of a limited window of time where they could work in the industry as exemplified by Emma,

I help girls with their booking, and posting, and photo shoots. Just all aspects of it. I figure, I like what I'm doing. I enjoy it. I like meeting people, and traveling... In like 8 years. I figure in that time, that'll give me enough time to transition, and save enough money, and build up my business.

Anna’s mother frequently reminded her about this window, “My mom makes comments asking what I'm going to do later in life because, and ‘You know you can't do this forever.’ But I just smile and nod”.

Clark saw this occur with new professionals in the industry,

I know a guy here. He lives in a luxury high-rise apartment. I know he drives a fairly new car. He just started a year ago and I'm thinking, "Oh, God. You don't know." Because it's
always good to be getting when you're the new guy. I spoke to him recently and he was like, "God, it's been slow as fuck." I was like, "Yeah, that happens in January."

Paige was in the process of transitioning out of the industry,

I'm getting older, I'm 34, and nobody wants to rep for anybody who's at that age. It's like late age. I don't know, I just decided I really need skills. Society is changing now, and as long as I live in Las Vegas, it would not happen for me. I'm just focusing on getting a career, and getting my finances straight, so I won't really have to just chase after this, chase after the money, trying to look for clientele or just trying to take the money in that business.

In contrast, three participants had no intentions of leaving the industry. Danielle presented herself as committed to being in the industry as long as she could. She said,

I'm working on the evolution of my persona because I want to keep doing this until people stop buying it. I have to figure out how to grow and change and adapt and not get stuck in any one area, because girls that started 4 years before me, some of them are still working and busy and have fantastic careers right now, and those are the girls I look up to.

Tessa was even writing a book about her experience of the industry,

One girl came and she had worked at a well-known brothel, beautiful woman, and she had 10 kids and a pickup truck, and her husband was on the side. I'd drive up in my Corvette and, you know, I can't dance anymore. It was my only chance. I couldn't get a job. It broke me. I lost all my money. I saw her go out and give her husband a kiss. "Bye, mommy. We'll see you in two weeks, and I said "There's a story here. There's a story here." So, I'm writing a book.
Essential Theme 3: Disclosure is an impactful and ongoing process. All 10 participants spoke about the effect of disclosing their profession on their romantic, familial, and social relationships. Six participants were transparent about their profession with nearly everyone in their life. The other four participants disclosed differently to different people in their lives.

Anna felt compelled to disclose her profession in effort to humanize the profession,

I am out to nearly everyone. My friends and family certainly. I don't tell complete strangers, but when someone transitions from stranger to acquaintance it will probably come up. I think it is very important to humanize the profession. I believe that is how we achieved universal gay marriage and legal recreational marijuana. By making sure that everyone knew someone who was gay or smoked pot. When you know someone like that and know then to be a good person they want them to be safe and happy. I want everyone to know someone like me. I am very comfortable with who I am and, as mentioned, I want to get other people comfortable with it as well. I usually don't discuss it on a first or even second meeting, but by the third it has usually come up and I answer their many questions. I want people to see me as normal.

Additionally, Emma found it fairly easy to disclose to everyone except her family,

Well my family doesn't know. Only two people in my whole family know. And I'm pretty honest with everybody I meet as far as telling them what I do. Even when I bought a car, I told them what I did. To me, it's not like a big deal. But I also grew up, my mother was a 25 year stripper. I grew up semi in the sex industry, so it's not ... I never feel like it's a big deal. I just feel like I should tell people. I mean, I've been dating the same guy for
close to eight years. He knows, he has no problem with it. Everybody I tell ... I live in Vegas. You can't really have a problem with it living in Vegas. Everybody's a hooker. She hadn’t told her parents because,

My mom is a fucking basket case. That's just all. Like that's it, that's all. She worries about me if I don't talk to her for two weeks. All of my parents are super sex positive, so I don't think that it would be a big issue if I told any of them. They already worry about me living out in Vegas, because all my family is from Seattle. I feel like why give them more to worry about, when they already have enough to worry about, you know?

Tessa’s activism hindered her from being able to conceal her profession,

Well, I think after I hit national television news saying, “I'd rather be a whore than being a damn beaten wife. God forgive me. I will do my clan proud as a life well lived.” I think you can imagine the complete shock, not to say of all my friends, customers, my ex-husband, everybody who’s ever met me for 25 years walking around with dental floss up my rump, Band-aids on my nipples, and high heels and a cowgirl hat [didn’t already know].

In contrast to this perspective, four participants deliberately refrained from disclosing their profession to people outside of the industry who would not know them professionally. Rebecca feared the potential legal implications of disclosing, “I don’t like talking about it especially with clients. You could incriminate yourself and it can be used against you in court”.

Clark elaborated on this matter as well,

I feel bad lying to people. But I actually found for me it's very clean, so I'm never worried about, "Oh, did I tell that person? Does that person know? Does that person not know?" If you're a friend of mine, you don't know. If you're somebody that I have worked with
professionally, outside of this profession you don't know. If you have hired me, then you
know. Those lines are very separate.

Paige spoke about her hesitation to tell her family,

They would feel awkward and like, I don't know. They would probably feel funny about
it, like ashamed of me. They would never, you know I'm a choir person. They would
never think I would do something like that, actually. I've been doing this for a long time,
like about 10 years, but I never, ever, ever confessed that I've done this stuff, ever.

Sophia even feared telling her therapist, “I was very scared and afraid of not only how
she might view me but how it could affect my family being that I am a mother”.

All 10 participants recounted having a fear of being judged solely on the basis of their
profession. Paige elaborated,

Well, it was with my first husband. The first time we met, I told him I was in the
business, and he didn't feel right about it. He had a lot of sympathy for me, but at times I
think he was a little bothered by it, because whenever we would get into an argument,
that's what he would try to bring up that I was in the business, or that I was messed up,
and he would just bring it up for a moment to make me feel bad.

Jean spoke about this feeling related to therapy,

Sex workers are used to being on the defensive when talking to people outside of this
industry, so it's important to not be judgmental. We're also all different. I honestly believe
that in some cases this work is damaging, but not always. It's important to figure out
when that might true, but it's just as important to not jump to the conclusion that it is.

Even when participants did not relate their fear to an actual experience of being judged or
marginalized, they were aware of the societal perception of their profession. As Tessa said, “The
connotation with the adult entertainment industry is that we're lesser than, lower than. We are low class or whatever, but obviously, not everybody agreed with the lap dancing law and all that.” These societal perceptions could seep into therapy as Anna explained, “I have considered therapy many times. So far I have not because I don't think a therapist will be able to separate my job and lifestyle from the things I need to work on”.

These experiences, whether personally or professionally, may have contributed to all 10 participants stating that they had actively sought out or would seek out therapists who “I can tell anything too without judgement” (Elizabeth) and who familiarized themselves with the adult industry. Heather emphasized this point, “I would recommend that they be open-minded, non-judgmental, and don't try to push their beliefs during therapy”. Jean’s experience in therapy changed as her therapist’s stance changed,

My next therapist was a Gestalt therapist, and reacted very differently. He had no reaction about where I worked and allowed me to talk about it freely without judgment. Rather than focus on what I was doing, he encouraged me to come to terms with how I felt about my work.

Several participants refrained from telling the people most important to them about their profession out of fear that they would disappoint the people around them. Clark articulated how his profession does not align with the expectations that people have for him since he has successfully completed his degree and attended graduate school,

It is not, I think, what was expected of me. I think people would judge me negatively. It would disappoint some people. I'm not necessarily ashamed of it. I'm not necessarily proud of it either.
Conjointly, trust was a major contributing factor to how, when, and to whom participants disclosed their profession. As Paige explained,

I told my younger sister. She just turned 18. I told her when she was 16, though. I don't know what possessed me to tell her. I just felt like body else knew. And I knew that she would keep it secret until somebody had to know. So I told her. She was very gracious about it. It's still my secret two years later. And my little sister is just my little sister. I know she's not going to say anything.

Danielle openly discussed her fear of consequences related to being “outed” as a sex worker and how that fear became problematic as others had power and influence over her,

We had a very tumultuous relationship, trying to find parental love in a partner. He actually threatened to tell them that I'm a sex worker, so instead of letting him do that I told them myself. I wasn't going to let him use that against me. I've always been a very open person so once that happened it was just like it finally that was a big deciding point. Like, am I going to let this other person terrify me, control me, or am I going to control the narrative and be the best version of myself and see where that takes me? And I have no regrets.

**Essential Theme 4: Professional and personal lives are compartmentalized.** All participants indicated a separation between their personal lives and their professional activities. This theme became overtly apparent when participants discussed their romantic relationship as evident by Emma and her relationship with her finance,

It's my business. What I do is my business. I don't come home and I'm like, "So, I sucked so many dicks today." Never say that. But like, I'll come home and tell him about a conversation I had with a client. There's a balance, a super fine balance that you have to
kind of tow the line.” And you kind of have to figure out where the line is. Are you okay with me talking about the sex we had, or me sucking dick? Or do you just want to know about our conversations? It's like a weird balance. Because, I don't know, I just don't want to tell him. Like I don't want to bring it to him and be weird about it. I don't want him to feel uncomfortable. In the beginning, I would try to tell him what was going on, but then I felt weird even telling him. Then I feel like I'm not being faithful to you, even though I am. It's just a weird thing to talk about.

Clark expressed this separation as a definitive barrier in his life,

I don't necessarily want people to know or judge or think or have access to that part of me. For me, it also makes it easier to be successful because it's separate from other aspects of my life. It feels a little strange sometimes lying to people. "What do you do?" "Oh, I tutor." Which, actually at times I do that at the same time. I just wasn't doing that exclusively.

Clark’s ability to draw strong boundaries may have come from his upbringing,

I think it was more impacted by being raised by a mother who was very clear, did not want a homosexual son. I think the aspect of sex, sexuality, anything related to that has always been for me something I knew, until I was 18 and came out, or 17, was something that was not going to at least make my mother happy. I didn't have a personal negative feeling about being gay when I was 12 and realized it. I mean, a lot of people go, "Oh my God! No! I'm gay! This is awful!" It was funny, there was this sort of bifurcation, so that I knew I was gay, I didn't have a problem with it, I didn't think it was unnatural, but at the same time, my plan was never to come out; was that I was going to go to the right college, go to law school, have this political life, have a very brilliant wife who was also
a lawyer, and the big conversation was going to be, "Which of us is going to run for
president first?" Right?

But all along, even with that as my internal plan, as an adolescent I always knew that I
was going to be a pro-gay politician, just not come out myself. So, like some gay
politicians who retreat deep into the closet and then they start doing negative things. I
never had this negative view toward homosexuality with myself. That probably made it
easier also then to get into sex work. I think also at the time that I was coming out was
still early in the AIDS crisis, but we were already having very sex-positive conversations
because sex-negative conversations weren't getting them to change their behavior.

For Paige, cognitive separation began early on in her career,
I was a little shaky, but I did not show that emotion that I was nervous. I just, you know.
It's like putting your foot in the water. As you go, sinking yourself in more into the water,
you know you go to the deeper end. That's how I did it, and that's how I went with it. I
really didn't think about anything happening to me or something didn't feel right. If I
didn't feel like something was right, I have to just leave.

Danielle theorized about why the fundamental understanding of this separation was so
important within a relationship,
I have a theory that we are naked waitresses who deliver sex. So if you wouldn't be mad
at your partner for eating a meal that someone else has cooked and delivered to them, or
drinking a coffee that someone else has served and brought to their table and poured and
walked away, then it's the same as what we do. So, you can't blame the work, and when
you try to you're not valuing physical labor the way you do with professional athletes.
And it's just delivering a cup of coffee naked. It has different risks, sure, but so does all
manual labor, and that's really all it is. If you don't have that fundamental understanding it's not going to work. That's why many sex workers fight with their partners, why there's often an abusive dynamic. They have problems because it's hard for people not to be attached to it, I guess.

Anna discussed how she went about the process of creating this boundary,

At times through our lives I have made transitions in the industry and we have taken time to discuss the ins and outs of what it means and how it changes our circumstances, if at all. He may hold a different opinion than me and we discuss it at length until we are both satisfied by the direction I plan to move.

Five participants spoke about how a lack of understanding this concept negatively impacted their relationship taking the form of jealousy. Clark illustrated this point with an incident that took place with his ex-boyfriend,

I remember one Saturday, this was in Seattle years ago. I hadn't thought about this in years. This was in the phase of pagers. So he had my phone number and my pager. My pager was strictly for my escorting. He was working late in his office, and he kept calling me just to say hi. I realized what he was doing. It was like, "Oh, he's making sure I'm home and not working." Then, I got a call for professional, for escort work, and then he couldn't reach me for 2 hours and he freaked out a little bit because he knew what I was doing. That was just not comfortable for him. My response was like, "You knew. This is how we met. I did not say I was going to stop this."

Jean faced similar issues in her current relationship,

I spent the first three years of my current relationship arguing with my partner about what I do. He did not handle it well. There was a lot of jealousy, and because I am from the
Midwest, I was gone for long stretches of a time. He also thought it was fair to sleep with other people while I was away working, and that caused a lot of friction in the relationship.

Elizabeth ended a relationship over this issue,

I tried to carry my profession while dating someone and it worked for a month or so before things went bad. Jealousy got the best of him and I picked my profession over him.

Tessa shared an experience with her ex-husband where she may have been used as a tool to cause jealousy and envy in others,

My husband at the time was very much a manipulator. I think that being the partner, boyfriend or husband of a woman in the industry is more like a trophy. So it's a sense of prestige with these certain types of men to have a beautiful model that worked in that industry and everything, was "Well I must be really something because I've got this beautiful girl also. Therefore, I'm ..." Trophy just means I've got to be special. I am the best because of what I've got. So I think it was a tool in his life to help him feel good about himself or maybe raise his self-esteem. I didn't stay married because ... What happened is one thing led to another. He was very, very adamant about getting me as a trophy and "if you love me", and a lot of manipulation and everything, you'll do this and this.

In an effort to create clear boundaries, 4 participants discussed the creation of professional personas that often times does not accurately reflect the participant’s true-self. As Paige described,
In this business, you can't really be yourself. You really have to be something else, like another person. You have to be animated, bubbly, happy, excited, and at the same time you would have to be salacious, and sneaky.

Emma also discussed the creation of her professional persona, Aurora, and how that avatar allowed her to successfully compartmentalize her life,

This has kind of been the only thing in my life that I just draw a line in the sand. This is me over here. When I go out and do this, I'm Aurora. But when I am at home, I'm Emma. It weirds me out, like if he were to call me Aurora. It would weird me out. They're literally the same person. I don't like ... But when I come home, I don't bring my work with me. I like to be the person I am. I don't like to be my work person when I come home.

While thoughts on disclosure where divided, participants respected the privacy of others, I'm pretty ambitious with it, but I'm also not overly concerned. One is being in Las Vegas, almost everyone knows someone connected to the sex industry, whether it's they're a stripper or, I guess mostly strippers and sugar babies is what a lot of Vegas is. There's that, and then there's the fact that I show my face in my marketing, so to me it's like I'm always a little paranoid that people will know anyway, so then it's just about whether or not I tell the truth. And it doesn't really come up a lot. I have friends that are other sex workers that they're not out to their families. So around their family and friends, I pretend like I'm a web designer. (Danielle)

Clark refrained from talking about his profession,
I don't talk about this with anybody. I've never told any of my friends, certainly no family members. I'm not particularly close with my family, so I never told anybody. The people who've known have been either clients or other escorts I may have talked to.

**Essential Theme 5: Sex work can be an isolating.** All 10 participants discussed feeling a sense of isolation from society. As Elizabeth explained her disclosure led to her to being estranged from her family, “[they] do not speak with me because they are not happy with my lifestyle and the fact I relocated from the state to continue my work. The incident never resolved itself. Family tried to get me to quick and I declined. They talked very badly about me throughout the family and cut ties with me.”

Tessa expressed the underlying hesitation that she felt,

The truth sets you free, but they were afraid because, yeah, it's bad, it's shameful, oh my God. The connotation with the adult entertainment industry is that we're lesser than, lower than. We are low class or whatever, but obviously, not everybody agreed with all that.

Even though Danielle had been honest with her parents they were unable to process the revelation,

I have friends whose parents find out that there's sex workers and they care about their well-being. And my parents pretend like I never told them. So, there is a denial of reality. And that's a delusion that I don't want in my life and I've been fighting against that delusion my whole life. I mean, my parents are people that love Trump. It's head scratcher around work.

Another contributing factor to this feeling of isolation was a wariness of new people, as Paige commented, “Everybody wants something from you when they figure out what you do.
Well, you make money, you have sex. Then everyone wants something from you. And all of a sudden, I'm no longer a person. I am a bank basically”.

However, this isolation was sometimes coupled with a sense of shared community. All participants found it easier to communicate and connect with other sex workers. Specifically, Heather felt she could “share similar experiences in the profession and regarding family and friends”. Emma endorsed Heather’s experience with her own stating “it's easier to not judge, and to be judged obviously. If you've been there, and you understand the trials and tribulations of it”. Jean felt that, “the girls are the only ones who understand the unique aspects of this work”.

Danielle shared a similar experience where her profession created a moment where her profession creates a type of exclusive community,

There was the one time that we were all, it was me and a couple girlfriends, at Pilates and we were joking around with the teacher because I just had this crazy rapport with her because we grew up not very far from each other in Austin. And we were all laughing about something in Pilates, it was something about how we're always wearing really high heels because we're experts, of course we wear high heels, it's part of the uniform. And we were giggling about it in a way that she knew she didn't really have all the information. She was like, "what do y'all do?" And we just start laughing and we never even answered the question. Because me and a lot of the friends are out, but the other one isn't so it's just funny to laugh instead.

**Essential Theme 6: Therapy often involves factors that do not involve their work.**

Several participants’ experience in therapy had little to do with their profession. Rebecca explained, “I began therapy when I was told I have borderline personality disorder. I knew I had to seek therapy because I couldn’t keep regular normal relationships.”
Jean explained,

Well the last time seeking therapy it was ... well I was dealing with a lot of anxiety and depression. But I have been dealing with those problems really since I was twelve but I'd never had the funds to get therapy until I started working. So, the coincidence was that suddenly I had the money to treat myself.

Paige had recently sought out a therapist,

I was actually just looking for a therapist about six months ago… I was more looking, because I was having trouble with another girl. And I kind of just wanted to vent about it, because this girl's been kind of in and out of my life for several years. She's been nothing but problems. And so I just kind of had wanted somebody to talk to about it, and get the best way to go about it.

Danielle had never been to therapy to discuss her profession,

I don't really have job problems. Like every once in a while I have an issue I'll ask my girlfriends for help with, but my work is the simplest part of everything I do. And I would say that's always been true of anything I've done. Work is just, it comes easy to me, and so I don't have any issues with that. And sex work is the same way. It's not unlike working at a clothing store, or waitressing or whatever.

Every participant in this study disclosed that they had looked or would look for a therapist who understood that they are more than just their profession and had experience working with people in the adult industry out of fear that they would be categorized and marginalized. Clark even fired a therapist on this basis,
I fired the first therapist after a month. It happens, yes. Like, "No, you have more insight than I do, but you're not a guru. I'm sorry. I feel judged here. I shouldn't feel judged." So I'm like, "I'm not seeing you anymore."

Jean elaborated on an experience such as this,

My first therapist immediately took the position that what I was doing was harmful, given my history, and was visibly uncomfortable with the topic. I feel it's important to note that I am from the Midwest, and many people there do not know of the existence of legal prostitution in the US. I spent the rest of my sessions with her being very defensive, and eventually stopped seeing her.

Danielle paralleled Jean’s experience with feeling as though therapy was hindered by the disclosure of her profession,

It's like they know that they can't say it out loud that I can't do this job, but they try to lead things there. They make it known that they think you can't be stable and be a sex worker. And so essentially you end up dancing around the topic so much that you end up talking about it more than you should. And that's how it felt with my first therapist, and with my second one it was less of the judgment but it was definitely like I could tell she was hooked on that.

Often participants were aware that their profession may have contributed to their current situation but wanted the freedom to explore the impact of this concept themselves instead as illustrated by Jean who sought out therapists who “does not start with the assumption that what [she is] doing is damaging”.

Clark also spoke about his experience,
Well, with John, who was the therapist who I told, he wasn't judgmental about it at all. So, that was helpful. He did ask ... The reason I was, interestingly enough, the reason I was seeing him was because I had become obsessed with somebody who was not a client, who I'd dated far too briefly to get obsessed about. I knew that whatever was causing that obsession wasn't necessarily connected to him. It had to be something else. I needed to figure out what that was. Occasionally my experiences would come up and he would ask about it in terms of another job, so that was kind of helpful. It kind of validated that it was the way in which I made money, and that although I didn't tell other people, that it wasn't necessarily a dirty secret, but it was my information to keep and mine to share if I wanted to. So, that was helpful.

**Essential Theme 7: Sex work can provide an opportunity for self-exploration.** Aside from financial support, eight participants stated that sex work provided them with an opportunity to explore different facets of their identity and sexuality. For Danielle, sex work provided an avenue for her to explore and strengthen her personal boundaries. She said,

> What keeps me in is, I found myself. For some reason it was easier to find myself in sex work than in anything I'd ever done before. I think because it was so different than my upbringing. I was raised to be a submissive housewife, so I had all these ideas about who I was and what I wanted to be and sex works continually lets me be myself on the inside, not what society tells me I should be or what someone said to my parents. It's like ... the only way I can describe it is like a touchdown for me.

I finally started to realize that Tianna has higher standards for who spends time with her than I do. If my clients treated me the way my ex-husband used to, I would never meet them again. I would blacklist them and tell my friends not to meet them. But for some
reason in my personal life I let them walk all over me. That's just one of the many ways I have learned so much about not only how the world works, but how I should love myself. I mean, my God, my personal life is much more valuable than my work life. Someday I might retire.

Tessa’s largest audience experience derived from her adult industry career,
It was fun in the beginning, but I never fit in because I don't dance like those people because it's different when you're formally trained. I was very lucky and blessed to be trained by some of the best entertainers in the States, and also Europe. I just didn't fit in with their crowd because not everybody is formally trained. I said "Well, I'm going to be a lawyer, I'm going to be a star. I need to work out my act. So, they let me sing, dance, and I was the opening act for Jenna Jameson. It was wonderful. The smoke, smelled like greasepaint, the lights, 3,000 men, I mean I was lighting. I got that shot and that chance but they never knew it was me? But I did it. I got to meet all those people and stuff.

Furthermore, Paige’s personal experience in the industry led her to feeling a deeper connection to her own sexuality, as her “sexuality really, really grew when I first came, when I first stepped into the industry. I really liked the other sex stuff, not just regular sex in the bedroom. Like my level of sexuality really, my interest in sexuality really, really grew”.

Additionally, Emma drew parallels between her relationship with her own sexuality and her upbringing as the child of sex workers,
I never had the weird taboo around sex work, because it is what it is. You're going to do what you need to do to support your family, and that's kind of how it always has been in my life. My mom was a stripper for 25 years. And then she was a manager at the strip club for 10. My mom was a hooker at some point in time, too, for several years. It was
never a weird thing. Like and my step dad, he was a male dancer for almost 10 years.

And my dad is dating a chick with a dick, like is married to her. I mean, sex has always been like a really fluid thing in my family.

Clark presented a unique perspective on the physical validation that sex work provides for him,

I do think that for me there will be a little transition I'll have to make from this identity and the sort of immediacy of walking into a room, being something men like, or men finding me online and being something they like, and willing to pay me hundreds of dollars an hour for it. There's kind of an immediate validation in that. I do think that there's a part of me that really likes that.

The essential themes derived from the experiences of the participants in this study represent a diverse span of opinions and perspectives that serve to clarify marriage and family therapist’s understanding of consensual sex workers. As Anna states succinctly,

Sex workers are as varied as the general population. That we are normal people with a job. That some want out of their job and need therapy directly related to being a sex workers and some are perfectly happy with their job and need therapy related to external things and don't need to focus on the job nearly so much.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This research was unique in that it explicitly incorporated the term *consensual sex worker* in the inclusion criteria, serving to explore the unique experience of this population and distinguishing it from human trafficking research. Within the framework of consent, circumstance, and coercion utilized by this study, the vast majority of the participants could be considered circumstantial sex workers due to their experience of entering the adult industry being directly related to the acquisition of financial resources with few alternatives (Boyd, 2016). This research is distinct from other scholarly works as it does not avoid the topic of consent in the adult industry, but instead, allows participants to define that for themselves (see Rubini et al., 2017; McCucheon, Mustaine, & Tewksbury, 2016; Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014; Jeal & Salisbury, 2007). The inclusion of such criteria was critical to the results of this study as it allowed space for the voices of sex workers who oppose the archetypal narrative of the absolute victim that needs rescuing as commonly reflected in media, film, and government sanctioned actions (Nielsen, 2009; Bergquist, 2015). Participants opposed this narrative, as they were often educated and held a high degree of agency regarding their profession.

The results of this research were also unique in that it is one of few qualitative studies that explore the lived experience of consensual sex workers who were currently active in the industry and how their career choice impacts their familial, and romantic relationships. Furthermore, this research is distinct in that previous literature often utilizes samples of individuals who have transitioned out of the industry or are incarcerated (Sanders, 2007; Abel & Fitzgerald, 2008; Parvez et al, 2013; Strathdee et al., 2015). Unlike previous literature, participants in this study were still active in the adult industry hence many of them were still
currently experiencing the aforementioned themes which may have enhanced their ability to discuss certain topics.

Previous research on the relationship between sex workers and their clients demonstrated a relationship between sex workers’ ability to obtain a level of self-confident sexuality and the level of control that they may wield within transactions (Kontula, 2008). While sexual pleasure was not always present, sex workers often cited feeling as though they were in the dominate position within those transactions as they controlled and influenced its parameters (Kontula, 2008). Additionally, some reported using their profession as a means of sexual pleasure and fantasy exploration that they may not have had a chance to explore in their personal relationships (Laukkanen, 1998; Eriksson & Knutagård, 2005). Similar results were found in this study as participants cited using their profession as a means of exploring their own sexual identity, and personal boundaries.

Several participants in this study related their entrance to the adult industry as a means of financially supporting themselves or their family often times due to a drastic change in employment. This result was congruent with previous literature that often cites economic resources as the most common reason for people entering the adult industry (Roberts, Bergstrom, & La Rooy 2007; Betzer, Kohler, & Schlemm, 2015). The adult industry often provides individuals who have significantly less access to financial support the ability to access certain resources (Svedin & Priebe, 2007; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). For example, scholars estimate that the prevalence of college students involved in the adult industry at one point or another during their tenure to be upwards of 10% (Pedersen & Hegna, 2003; Roberts et al., 2007; Lavoie et al., 2010; Betzer, et al., 2015). Participants in this study also used their new-found ability to access
resources as a means of obtaining an education, exploring their own personal interests, or gaining access to therapeutic treatment.

Regardless of the reason that they entered in the industry, participants often found themselves drifting in and out of sex work as it became a fallback solution to financial difficulties. Often, sex workers find it difficult to transition out of the adult industry due to the wage discrepancy between their earning potential as a sex worker and their access to comparable traditional employment as sex work tends to be more lucrative (Murphy & Venkatesh, 2006). Work experience was also identified as a major hindrance to transitioning out of sex work as sex workers often have large gaps in their work experience (Sanders, 2007). Often, they struggle with whether or not they should be transparent with potential employers about their history in the adult industry as it could make them vulnerable to work related judgement or discrimination (Law, 2011).

In conjunction to speaking about their status in the industry, participants spoke candidly about the impact that disclosure had on their familial and romantic relationships. Several participants openly disclosed their profession to the people closest to them, often at the detriment of that relationship. Sex work is often highly-stigmatized due to its illegal status and perceived moral flaws (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001a). This frequently places sex workers as outsiders even within the greater in the criminal community where the social rights and rules of society are normally mute (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001a). This stigma often results in sex workers being neglected or abused with limited access to education, poorer economic circumstances, and less access to resources (Benoit, McCarthy, & Jansson, 2015).
Stigmatization & Isolation

El-Bassel et al. (1997) suggest that stigmatization is a contributing factor to psychological distress that is commonly associated with the adult industry. These psychological stressors can cause sex workers to appear more suspicious, mistrustful, hopeless, lonely, and isolated (Simon, Morse, Osofsky, Balson, & Gaumer, 1992). These factors can also cause sex workers to be secretive about their profession as one in five female prostitutes report not disclosing their profession to anyone besides their partner (Venicz & Vanwesenbeeck, 2000). In contrast, male sex workers reported high levels of emotional support from family and friends as it relates to their profession, suggesting that there is a gender difference (Snell, 1995).

Vanwesenbeeck (2001a) suggests that these differences stem from the extreme levels of stigma and “deviance” associated with female sex workers, which can cause them to allocate more energy to managing their identities making them less likely to seek out resources.

Most clients and sex workers are fearful of reporting violence because they fear public identification or because they anticipate or have experienced poor treatment by police or public officials (West & de Villers, 1993). Perkins and Bennett (1985), inferred that many times violence against sex workers is a product of members of society believing that they were doing a service for the community. These individuals view sex workers as having a bad reputation or a spoiled identity thus placing them outside of the protection of the law. Sex workers are frequently attacked for this very reason; perpetrators believe that their acts of violence will not be met with consequences because they are socially sanctioned to do so (Perkins & Bennett, 1985). Increased rates of violence among sex workers are a by-product of this mindset (World Health Organization, 2013; Karandikar, & Gezinski, 2012).
To overcome this stigma, participants compartmentalized their experiences in the adult industry from their personal lives. This division has been shown to be especially beneficial in romantic relationships as partners struggle to separate sexual acts from intimacy (Bellhouse, Crebbin, Fairley, & Bilardi, 2015; Syvertsen et al, 2013). Often relationships fail because the partner of a sex work is unable to create a barrier between their relational intimacy through sex and their partners career of monetizing sexuality which was echoed in the results of this research (Rossler et al, 2010). To aide in the process of compartmentalization, sex workers reported using several techniques for creating physical, mental, and emotional boundaries including living far away from where they practice, taking regular breaks, keeping to time during sessions, manufacturing a work persona, and avoiding emotional relationships with clients (Fick, 2005; Sanders, 2005; Wolffers, 1999). Participants in this study also discussed the usefulness of such techniques as a means preserving the relationships important to them.

Consequently, one of the issues with this separation is that it often resulted in participants feeling isolated from partners and families as they attempted to maintain their secret or the confidentiality of their peers and clients. Feelings of isolation can lead to problems associated with dissociation and denial which can have adverse effects on a person’s mental health (Brody et al, 2005; Vanwesenbeeck, 2005b). Furthermore, a significant psychological burden may develop as they become hypervigilant against others finding out their secret which can result in a level psychopathology (Wegner, Lane, & Dimitri, 1994; Law, 2011). The decision to not disclose is perhaps related to a desire to shield their relationships from the negative emotions repeatedly experienced by partners of sex works including anger, jealousy, and inadequacy (Jackson et al., 2009; Bellhouse, Crebbin, Fairley, Bilardi, 2015; Syvertsen et al, 2013).
Implications for Clinical Practice

The results of this study highlighted several critical issues that are relevant to the psychotherapeutic treatment of sex workers. First, participants explained that the most important quality they seek in a therapist is someone who can obtain and maintain a nonjudgmental stance. For many clinicians, it is difficult to completely separate their personal values from their clinical practice, and participants in this study were aware of that dynamic (Jackson, Hansen, & Cook-Ly, 2013). Participants were also aware that they worked in a profession that is not widely accepted by society, leading them to hide their occupation out of fear of negative consequences. Therefore, participants may have been less likely to disclose their occupation to their therapist.

From a humanistic perspective, hiding their occupation from their therapist stands as a barrier to treatment as it can hinder clients from being authentic and genuine as they try to maintain their secret (Wolfe, 2016). Authenticity and genuineness is an important factor in treatment as secret keeping has historically been linked to weaker therapeutic relationships (Jung, 1933; Hill, Gelso & Mohr, 2000; Kelly, 2002; Kelly & Yuan, 2009). In-turn, weak therapeutic relationships can impact symptom change (Strupp, 2001; Del Re et al., 2012). Therefore, one of the major goals of humanistic therapies is to aide clients in the development of an authentic and meaningful sense of self through the building of the therapeutic relationship with the implication that it can influence their well-being (Schneirder, 2016). Wood et al (2008) demonstrated that authenticity can be strongly be related to self-esteem and subjective and psychological well-being. The humanistic perspective may be useful when working with this population because of its emphasis on intrapersonal well-being as sex workers may hold values and beliefs that clash with dominate narratives (Myers, 2014). Intrapersonal congruency may be obtained through therapists working with clients to accept that they hold values and beliefs that
may conflict with the dominate societal narratives, which may result in higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Shin Wong & Ng, 2008).

Additionally, authenticity is of vital importance for marriage and family therapists because it can impact their ability to conceptualize presenting problems and create effective treatment plans (Allan & Ungar, 2014). Often, the inclusion in assessing employment and financial stability is important as it may influence a client’s ability to gain access to resources or explore new avenues for change (Woodside, Caldwell, & Spurr, 2006). While the presenting problem may have nothing to do with the adult industry, the stigma of the industry nevertheless permeates throughout the client’s systems as they carry with them the burden of having to keep their secret or having to consistently deal with the judgements and presuppositions that others may have about them (Wegner, Lane, & Dimitri, 1994; Law, 2011). Thus, authenticity is key as marriage and family therapists attempt to conceptualize effective treatment goals and strategies as they are then empowered to address micro and macro influencers on the presenting problem (Platt & Laszloffy, 2013).

Often sex workers have a fear of being authentic with figures of authority out of fear that it may be used against them in some way (Jones & Newburn, 2001). Therapeutic resistance could originate from clients feeling as though their decision-making ability is being called into question because of their choice in profession, which often occurs in other aspects of their life (Newman, 1994). When working with this population, therapists may be required place greater emphasis on attuning and assessing clients within the client’s own socio-cultural lens to build trust and enhance the joining process. This sociocultural attunement would encourage therapists to listen for moments where client’s personal thoughts and feelings on a matter that conflicts with societies shared ideas, link these moments to maladaptive emotions and behaviors and
validate the client’s personal perspective and experience (Pandit, Chen-Feng, Kang, Knudson-Martin, & Huenergardt, 2014). Utilizing attunement in this way can result in client’s resonating with their therapist thus encouraging the clients to be more forthcoming with events and emotions (Pandit et al., 2014).

**Person of the Therapist**

It is nearly impossible for clinicians to completely distance themselves from their own preconceived notions about the adult industry and those who work within it (Linn-Walton & Pardasani, 2015). Often times, sex workers are believed to be vulnerable, victims of human trafficking; however, results of study show that this assessment may not always be accurate. Participants in this study were often educated individuals in their mid-to-late thirties with various functional interpersonal relationships with family, significant others and/or children. They highlight the need for clinicians to stay open to understanding the migrate of experiences that permeate the industry. To aide in understanding these experiences Cassandra Avenatti of the Sex Worker Outreach Project (2013) provides clinicians with a list of topics for clinicians to consider when working with sex workers:

- Engaging in the adult industry is not necessarily the result of a mental illness or cause of mental illness.
- Do not make assumptions about the level of risk that clients may face on a daily basis as it varies across different types of sex work.
- Experience within the adult industry are varied so it is important that intersectionality is kept in mind as every experience is a collection of complicated, interrelated systems of identity attributes and experiences.
• Allow clients to set goals as the adult industry may not be an important issue they want to discuss in therapy.

• Be cognizant of the different types of stigma-neutralization techniques that sex workers may utilize (ie. creating a persona or keeping secrets) and be careful to avoid statements, questions or recommendations that may undermine these techniques, unless they are causing harm or distress.

• Become aware of barriers to leaving the adult industry, and aide clients understanding it as a process by allowing them to set and reassess their own goals over time.

• Clinicians should reflect upon how their own personal attitudes and knowledge about sex work may influence the assessment and treatment of sex workers and seek consultation to resolve any conflicts.

It is also critical for therapists to ensure that they are actively aware of any conflicting values that they may have with the adult industry and the clients that maybe in that industry as research has consistently demonstrated a strong therapeutic alliance as a predictor of client outcomes (Safran, Muran, & Eubanks-Carter, 2011). Furthermore, when these conflicts do arise, therapists should engage in active discussion regarding these differences as a means of strengthening the therapeutic relationship by being transparent in regard to where their perspective and professional opinion on certain topics originate. These discussions would also serve to clarify goodness of fit and relieve some of the anxiety that the client may be carrying with them regarding being judged by their therapist.

Limitations

The current study had a number of limitations. Even when all appropriate methods of Epoche are utilized it is nearly impossible to completely remove researcher bias (Moustakas,
In an effort to counter these influences, data triangulation and the use of participants verbatim accounts were utilized as a means of enhancing the likelihood of capturing participants authentic experiences. Nevertheless, it is possible that the primary researcher’s own attitudes, values, and beliefs may have influenced the interpretation of the data and the conclusions drawn from the data.

Secondly, participants who engaged in this study self-identified as consensual sex workers thus their experience of the industry may differ from those who entered the adult industry under different circumstances. Moreover, there is no clear operational definition of consensual within the adult industry in regard to participation criteria. This would impact the transferability of these results as that may not be applicable to individuals who entered the adult industry through coercion.

Additionally, due to the qualitative nature of the study and its emphasis on retrieving in-depth, rich narratives a smaller sample was utilized thus reducing the likelihood of generalizability to a larger population of consensual sex workers. The aim of this study, however, was not to provide generalizable data but to rather serve as an exploratory examination of the phenomena to further expand the literature surrounding the lived experience of consensual sex workers. This study’s sample was also limited by geographic location as participants had to have currently been working in Nevada at the time of the interview, which could have influenced participant’s experience of the adult industry.

Due to the anonymous, self-report nature of this study it may be possible that there was a responder or social desirability bias as participants may have sought to provide answers that they felt would be the most desirable. However, the anonymous nature of the study may have also resulted in participants feeling more comfortable to speak candidly and honestly. The primary
researcher took active steps to avoid such biases by attempting to remain open-minded and unbiased while avoiding leading questions and allowing participants to speak until the retelling of their experience was completed.

Further, to qualify for participation in this study participants must have had either experienced therapy before or thought about going to therapy before. This may have resulted in skewed results as participants had to be willing to discuss their experiences in therapy or their route to therapy, which can be deeply personal and perceptive to be invasive. Qualified participants may have refrained from participating due to the aforementioned factors.

Lastly, the participants were recruited through purposive sampling the primary researchers preexisting personal relationships, specific sex worker affirmative organizations, and public websites. This could have resulted in data that is not representative of every element of experience related to this phenomenon, which could have impacted the results of this study.

Future Research

There are several areas for additional inquiry in relationship to voluntary sex work. Firstly, researchers should closely explore the disclosure process and the burden that such a process has on an individual’s level of stress and anxiety. The ability to disclose or a lack thereof may impact on a person’s ability to build strong, adaptive relationships. Additionally, further research should be conducted on the experience of men within the adult industry as it was much easier for the male participant in this study to draw clear divisions between his professional and personal self than his female counterparts. Future qualitative research on these factors may provide researchers with a better understanding of male identity creation and maintenance.

Research should be conducted on the way in which sex workers navigate maintaining adaptive romantic relationships while still active in the adult industry as several participants in
this study were in committed relationships or had previously had one while active in the industry. While briefly discussed in this study, further qualitative investigation on this topic would provide therapists with more actionable strategies for working with couple’s where one partner is in the adult industry.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of being a consensual sex worker in Nevada with an emphasis on the way in which individuals navigate their familial, and romantic relationships. The results of this study should serve as an introduction to further exploration in the lives of individuals who enter the adult industry consensually or by circumstance as their experience greatly differs from the experience of human trafficking victims. It also illustrates need for future research into the romantic relationships that these individuals cultivate as these relationships often experience high levels of jealousy and feelings of inadequacy (Bellhouse, et al., 2015). Further research in this area would equip therapists with the ability to address these unique presenting problems.

This study demonstrated that the adult industry contains a vast spectrum of experience. People enter the industry from all genders, races, ethnicities, ages, and experiences. For some the industry simply provides a means of financial support until they can transition into another industry while others plan to never retire. This does not have to result in sex works having to put cultivating a positive intimate relationship or children on hold because they work within an industry that isn’t societally accepted. However, often they fear telling the people important or accessing resources out of fear that they will be judged or punished. This may result in therapists seeing clients who are sex workers but have not been forthcoming with the mental burden and stress of having to hide a major factor of their life. This secret keeping can have ramifications on the therapeutic alliance and client outcomes (Kelly & Yuan, 2009; Del Re et al., 2012). Therapists should be cognizant of the power and station that they hold within the therapy room and model the acceptance and validation that clients may be unable to receive in other aspects of their lives.
### Appendix A: Table 1. Types of Prostitution and Associated Characteristics (Weitzer, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Business Location</th>
<th>Prices Charged</th>
<th>Exploitation by third parties</th>
<th>Risk of violent victimization</th>
<th>Public visibility</th>
<th>Impact on community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call girl</td>
<td>Independent operator, private premises/hotels</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low to none</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort</td>
<td>Escort agency, private premises/hotels</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothel Worker</td>
<td>Brothel</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None, if discreet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massage Parlor worker</td>
<td>Massage parlor</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Little, if discreet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar or casino worker</td>
<td>Bar/casino contact, sex elsewhere</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Equivalent to impact of bar or casino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streetwalker</td>
<td>Street contact, sex in cars, alleys, parks, etc.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Adverse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Table refers to female sex workers. The brothel and massage parlor workers described here do not include those who have been trafficked against their will or otherwise forced into prostitution, whose experiences differ from those who have entered this work consensually.

b Exploitation by third parties means that a third-party received at least some of the profits.

c Risk of violent victimization refers here to victimization of the prostitute, not the customer.

d Impact on community refers to effects on the surrounding neighborhood’s quality of life.
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Before recording has begun:

Script
Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Michael Curtis and I am a graduate student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and I will be conducting your interview today. This interview will take about 60 minutes and will involve me asking you a few questions regarding your experiences in the adult industry and in therapy. Please know that there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers to these questions. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know.

To protect your confidentiality, I would like to offer you the opportunity to select a false name that we can use for the duration of the study. I will start the recorder now.

Once the recorder has started:

Topic – The Adult Industry
What brought you into the industry and keeps you in the industry?

Topic – Obstacles to Seeking Therapy
Describe a time when you thought about seeking therapy. What factors did you consider?

Probe for obstacles that maybe related to the adult industry.

Did your experience in therapy change the way in which you view your profession?

What would you recommend Marriage and Family Therapist’s do to make it easier for adult industry professionals to go to therapy?

Topic – Experiences in Therapy
What do you look for in a potential therapist?

Describe your experience of telling your therapist that you are a sex worker, and what was that experience like?

What do therapists need to understand/know about working with adult industry professionals?

Topic - Social Relationships
In your personal life, what factors do you consider when deciding who to tell about your profession?

Describe a time when you had an argument or disagreement with partner because of your job.

Follow-up: How did that incident resolve itself.

Probe for obstacles to closeness and intimacy

What factors would you consider when deciding to seek (or not to seek) couple therapy?

Describe your relationship with your family (i.e. parents, children, siblings).

Describe a time when you an argument or disagreement with a child or family member because of your job.

Follow-up: How did that incident resolve itself.

Probe for obstacles to closeness and intimacy

What factors would you consider when deciding to seek (or not to seek) family therapy?

Who do you feel comfortable openly talking about your profession with? Why?

Topic – Conclusion
Is there anything else you think I should know to understand your experiences in therapy better?

**Script:**
That concludes our interview. Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences with me. Do you have any feedback for me or anything you would like to add?

**Once the recorder has been turned off:**

**Script:**
Again, that you for participating. I’d like to ask you about the interview process, I will be making some notes so I can better the interview for future participants.
Do you have any suggestions to improve the overall interview process?
Were there any questions I did not ask that you think would have been useful?
Do you have any final questions?
Appendix C: Demographic Survey

How old are you? _________

Sex:
- Male
- Female
- Prefer Not to Answer

Gender:
- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Genderqueer
- Prefer not to answer

Sexual Orientation:
- Heterosexual (Straight)
- Homosexual (Gay)
- Bisexual
- Other: ____________________
- Prefer not to answer

Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
- No, not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin
- Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
- Yes, Puerto Rican
- Yes, Cuban,
- Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, Print origin: ______________

What is your race? *Race categories include both racial and national-origin groups*
- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Asian
- Asian Indian
- Native Hawaiian
- Pacific Islander
- Multiracial, please provide origins: ____________________
- Some other race: ____________________
- Prefer Not to Answer
Do you have children?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer Not to Answer

What is the highest level of education you completed?
- Grade school
- High School Graduate
- Associates degree
- Technical Training degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Some training toward Advanced degree
- Advanced degree
- Prefer Not to Answer

Current relationship status:
- Not dating anyone
- Casually dating multiple partners
- Seriously dating one partner
- Seriously dating multiple partners
- Engaged
- Married
- Prefer Not to Answer

How long have you been with your partner (if applicable)?
- Less than 3 months
- 3 - 6 months
- 6 -1 year
- 1 - 3 years
- 3 or more years

Do you live with your partner (if applicable)?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer Not to Answer

In your current relationship, has your partner ever abused you physically? Examples of this may include but are limited to punching, kicking, biting or restraining.
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never
In your current relationship, has your partner ever abused you emotionally? Examples of this may include but are limited to bullying, insulting, degrading language, shouting, threatening, or humiliation.
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

In your current relationship, has your partner ever abused you sexually? Examples of this may include but are limited to sexual assault, unwanted sex acts, unwanted touching of genitals and other body parts or rape.
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

In your current relationship, has your partner ever abused you financially? Examples of this may include but are limited to stealing, fraud, hiding money, or forcing the sale of belongings.
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Preferred Email: _________________

Preferred Name: _________________

Do you prefer an in-person or telephone interview?
- Telephone
- In-Person

Please select a date and time when you are available:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11am</td>
<td>11am</td>
<td>11am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12pm</td>
<td>12pm</td>
<td>12pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Advertisement Flyer

RESEARCH STUDY:
Sex Worker and Proud

We are seeking volunteers to participate in a research study examining the experiences of sex workers while seeking mental health treatment.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lives of consensual sex workers in Nevada. Specifically, we aim to understand how sex workers navigate their social relationships while being in adult industry to give therapists a better understanding of their needs.

You are invited to participate in this study if you:

a) 18 years old and older
b) Currently working full-time in the adult industry with primarily physical sexual contact with your clients in Nevada
c) Define much of your time in the adult industry as consensual
d) Have considered attending therapy or have attended therapy

Participating in this study involves a one-hour interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted in person, in a location of your choice, or by phone.

Participation is voluntary, and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate and your responses are confidential

There are no incentives for participating.

To participate, please use the following link:

[LINK]

For more information about the study please contact
Michael Curtis, at unlvmfthesis@gmail.com, or
Carissa D’Aiello, Ph.D., at Carissa.Daniello@unlv.edu
Appendix E: Electronic Posts

I am a researcher seeking volunteers to participate in a study about sex workers’ experiences of seeking mental health treatment. The purpose of this study is to explore the lives of consensual sex workers in Nevada, and how they navigate their social relationships. This research is intended to help therapists understand sex workers’ unique relational and therapeutic needs.

Participating in this study involves a one hour interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted in person in a location of your choice, or by phone. Participation is voluntary, and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate and your responses are confidential. There are no incentives for participating.

To participate, you must:

a) 18 years old and older
b) Currently working full-time in the adult industry with primarily physical sexual contact with your clients in Nevada
c) Define much of your time in the adult industry to be consensual
d) Have considered attending therapy or have attended therapy

To learn more, please contact us at [LINK](#) or [unlvfmthesis@gmail.com](mailto:unlvfmthesis@gmail.com).
Appendix F: Confirmation Email

Hello {insert preferred name},

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. I am sending you this email to confirm your interview for {date} at {time}.

Since you have agreed to do a phone interview please call {insert phone number} at the allotted time.

**OR**
Since you have agreed to do an in-person interview, do you have a preferred meeting location (i.e. coffee shop or park)?

I appreciate your involvement in completing this study and thank you in advance for your participation.

Best Regards,
INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Marriage and Family Therapy

TITLE OF STUDY: Sex Worker and Proud: Understanding the Lives of Consensual Sex Workers in Nevada

INVESTIGATOR(S): Michael Curtis & Dr. Carissa D’Aniello

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Michael Curtis at unlvmfthesis@gmail.com or Dr. Carissa D’Aniello, Ph.D., at Carissa.Daniello@unlv.edu.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of consensual sex workers and suggest ways in which marriage and family therapists can address their unique relational and therapeutic needs.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria: (a) 18 years old and older, (b) currently working full-time in the adult industry with primarily physical sexual contact with their clients in Nevada, (c) define much of their time in the adult industry to be consensual and (d) have considered attending therapy or have attended therapy.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a one hour interview. Interviews will be conducted in person in a location of your choice, or by phone. Participation is voluntary, and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate and your responses are confidential.

Benefits of Participation
There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, the information gathered in this study will be used to inform the practices of Marriage and Family Therapists to better prepare them to counsel adult industry professionals.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study includes minimal risks as you may become uncomfortable when answering some questions, however you can stop your participation in the interview at any time without penalty.

Cost /Compensation
There may not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take one-hour of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. You can stop your participation in the interview at any time without penalty and you can use pseudonym or fictitious name throughout the entirety of the study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be disposed of.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant  Date

________________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)

Audio/Video Taping:
I agree to be audio or video taped for the purpose of this research study.

________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant  Date

________________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
Appendix H: Table 2. Participant Demographics

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method of Interview</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>In-Person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Chat</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual (Straight)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual (Gay)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
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<td>Pansexual</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, Puerto Rican</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Answer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Level of Education</strong></td>
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<td>High School Graduate</td>
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<td>Technical Training Degree</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
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<td>Some Training Toward Advanced Degree</td>
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<td>Advanced Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
Appendix I: Table 3. Participant’s Relational Demographics

Table 3.

*Participant’s Relational Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Dating Anyone</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Casually Dating Multiple Partners</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seriously Dating One Partner</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of Time with Partner</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Months – 1 Year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 -3 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or More Years</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>Partner Cohabitation</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


doi:10.1080/08975353.2014.939931


Bellhouse, C., Crebbin, S., Fairley, C. K., & Bilardi, J. E. (2015). The impact of sex work on women's personal romantic relationships and the mental separation of their work and
10.1371/journal.pone.0141575


doi:10.2105/AJPH.87.1.66

doi:10.2105/AJPH.83.1.79


Farley, M. (2004). Bad for the body, bad for the heart: Prostitution harms women even if legalized or decriminalized. Violence Against Women, 10(11), 1369-1369.
doi:10.1177/1077801204268607


Jackson, L. A., Augusta-Scott, T., Burwash-Brennan, M., Karabanow, J., Robertson, K., & Sowinski, B. (2009). Intimate relationships and women involved in the sex trade:
doi:10.1177/1363459308097359


doi:10.1111/soc4.12282


Curriculum Vitae
Michael G. Curtis Jr.

Education
M.S. (Anticipated) Marriage & Family Therapy, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Dec. 2017
B.S. Psychology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, May 2015

Clinical Experience
Marriage and Family Therapy Student Intern
The Center for Individual, Couple, and Family Counseling, Las Vegas, NV May 2017- Dec 2017
- Conducted counseling or therapeutic interviews to assist individual to gain insight into personal problems, define goals, and plan action reflecting interest, abilities, and needs
  Under the clinical supervision of a licensed marriage and family therapist
- Provided occupational, education, and other information to enable individual to formulate realistic educational and vocational plans
- Researched and utilized the industry’s best practices to ensure the best possible client outcomes

Student Therapist
The Center for Individual, Couple, and Family Counseling, Las Vegas, NV May 2016- May 2017
- Provided student level counseling to members of the Las Vegas community under the guidance of licensed Marriage and Family Therapists

Victim Advocate
Rape Crisis Center, Las Vegas, NV, May 2014 – Apr. 2015.
- Used a crisis intervention model to counsel a wide range of callers; Helped plan and execute community events; Served as victim advocate in the emergency rooms.

Research Experience
Thesis: Sex Worker and Proud: A Phenomenology Study into the Lives of Consensual Sex Workers in Nevada
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, Oct 2015-Dec 2017
Advisor: Dr. Carissa D’Aniello

Research Assistant
- Leadership positions included: Website Coordinator (FA13-FA14); New Member Trainer (FA13-FA15); Double Entry Team Leader (SPR14-FA15);
  Updated the lab website with in lab member’s information, and posters in progress
  Trained lab members on programs such as Captivate, SPSS, and Dreamweaver
  Trained new lab members on lab procedures for collecting data
  Tracked workshops completed for new lab members
• Facilitated Workshops: Drafting Website Biographies, Assertiveness, Curriculum Vitae, Goal Setting and Time Management, and Factor Analysis
• Aided in the Design of the Double Entry Study
• Screened potential lab members for success using an interview style

**Teaching Experience**

*Co-Instructor*

*HON 401: Special Topics: 1+1=3: An Exploration of Couple and Family Systems*
• Designed and executed a unique curriculum with mentor professor Dr. Carissa D’Aniello

*Guest Lecturer*

*MFT 360: Contemporary Marriage and Family Relationships*
• Designed and delivered a creative and engaging lecture accompanied with a corresponding activity
• Guest Lectured: Raising Children in a Diverse Society (FA16)

*Teaching Assistant, Guest Lecturer*

*MFT 350: Human Sexuality, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Jan 2014- Present*
• Facilitated small group discussions related to the lecture material, and graded assignments and online discussion boards and designing and delivering a creative and engaging lecture accompanied with a corresponding activity
• Guest Lecturing Subjects: Male Anatomy (SPR15), STI and Prevention (SPR16), Gender Identity (FA16), Monetization of Sex (SPR17), Sexual Orientation (FA17),

**Employment**

*Manager of Volunteer Services & Youth Works*

Discovery Children’s Museum, Las Vegas, Nevada, Aug 2017- Current
• Recruited, implemented, evaluated and managed the Adult and Youth Works Volunteer program incorporating appropriate training and resources
• Oversaw and led regular program meetings for youth work-skills training sessions, etc.
• Oversaw the development of each participant’s educational and career plan.
• Maintain and track participant’s records and conduct individual evaluations
• Aided in grant writing and fundraising efforts to support the volunteer program

*Graduate Assistant*

Sales & Marketing – University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Aug 2015-Aug 2017
• Constructed contracts for external entities interested in renting using University services and venues
• Organized and assigning student worker projects
• Maintained Sales and Marketing online presence
• Marketed the different services offered through the department
Community Operations Manager
AVS Housing Group – University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Aug 2011-May 2017
• Responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of dormitory offices
• Managed a staff of at least 15 undergraduate students including their payroll, billing, hiring, corrective action plans and termination
• Conducted presentations that marketed the department at New Student Orientation
• Facilitated semester trainings
• Addressed and resolved resident complaints

Trainings
Graduate Research Certification Program
University of Nevada, Las Vegas – SPR17
A research-intensive program that included attending various workshops and presenting an original research project at an approved research forum
Workshops attended: Tips and Experiences for garnering external graduate funding, Finding Government Information, SPSS Fundamentals, Tools for Literature Review, Identifying External Funding Opportunities, and RefWorks, a New (Re)introduction

Graduate College Teaching Certificate Program
University of Nevada, Las Vegas – SPR17
A teaching intensive program that included the successful completion of EDH 780:
  Seminar in College Teaching, attending 4 teaching based workshops and the presentation of a teaching portfolio.
Workshops attended: How to Address Disruptive Behavior in a Classroom, Making Lecture More Effective/Lecturing for Learning, Syllabus and Assignment Creation, and UNLV Best Teaching Practices Expo

Suicide Risk Assessment
University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Mar. 2017
Professional training workshop presented by Coreen Haym LMFT

An EFT Approach to Infidelity
University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Nov. 2015
Professional training workshop presented by Susan Johnson Ph.D.

Publications


**Presentations**


Curtis, M. G., Tran, T., Ibarra, M., Maxim. B., & Barchard. K. A. (2015, May). *mTurk Studies are Quick and Easy but not Generalizable*. Poster presented at the annual convention of the Western Psychological Association or Association of Psychological Science


**Invited Presentations**

Invited Panelist, Introduction to Marriage and Family Therapy Graduate Student Panel, UNLV, Nov. 2016

Invited Panelist, Please I’d Like to Grow: Conversations and Reflections on Student Activism at UNLV, UNLV, Nov. 2016

Invited Panelist, No Stupid Questions: Black History Month, UNLV, Feb. 2015
Professional and Honor Societies
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
Delta Kappa, Marriage and Family Therapy Honor Society
American Psychological Association
Psi Chi, International Honor Society of Psychology
National Society of Leadership and Success
Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program
Phi Eta Sigma, Freshmen Honor Society

Honors & Awards
AAMFT Diversity Scholarship for Emerging Leaders Award
AAMFT Minority Fellowship Program, Fellow, 2017
Graduate Mentor, Interactive Mentoring Program, 2017
Graduate Student Mentor, McNair Summer Research, 2016
Roosevelt Fitzgerald Outstanding Scholarship and Leadership Award, Winner, 2014, 2015
Thomas Wilson Outstanding Scholarship and Community Service Award, Winner, 2015
Dean’s Honor List, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2011-2013
UNLV Grant, 2012-2013
Bob Davis Scholarship, 2013
The Links Scholarship – Dallas Chapter 2011

Campus Activities and Leadership
Delta Kappa Marriage and Family Therapy Honor Society – Active: SPR16- Current
Vice President (2016-Current); Secretary (2016)

Black Student Organization - Active: FA11-Current
Graduate Advisor (2015-2016); Director of Operations (2014-2015); President (2012-2013);
VP of Administration (2011-2012)

National Society of Leadership and Success - Active: FA13-SPR15
Publicity Chair (2014); Membership Outreach (2014-2015)

Psi Chi Psychology Honor Society – Active: FA12-SPR15
Psychology Club President (2014-2015)

Phi Eta Sigma – Active: FA14-SPR15
Vice-President (2014-2015)

Certifications
CITI Conflicts of Interest Curriculum, 2013
CITI Responsible Conduct of Research, 2013
CITI Human Subjects Protection (Group 1 & 2), 2013
safeTALK, 2014
PsychArmor Curriculum, 2015: Comprehensive PTSD, Veteran 101, Veteran 102, Veteran Healthcare Provider, Barriers to Treatment, Evidence Based Treatments, Military sex trauma,