Independent Escort Work and Motherhood: Case Studies of Toronto and Edmonton

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the complex relationship that exists between lone motherhood and sex work. Utilizing the idea of particularism, I argue that it is important to understand the environmental context of mothers and the variety and uniqueness of women’s experiences in order for the state to respond with directed policies for lone mothers. In order to discover whether or not sex workers who are single mothers have unique needs and experiences, I conducted 15 semi structured interviews with independent escort workers from Toronto and Edmonton.

The interviewees reported leading a double life characterized by shame, fear, stigmatization and discrimination. It was discovered that the double life which many of women live is not only stressful, but it also a serious impediment to their ability to effectively parent. I argue that it is the current legal status of sex work which poses barriers to these women in achieving financial stability, equal rights, social comfort, access to quality services, and child support; all of which are points that are integral to effective parenting. As such, I assert that decriminalization and the recognition of sex work as work, grants these women access to the support that other working mothers may have, but also directs attention to the societal stigma and discrimination that moralizes and punishes sex workers. Ultimately, I contend that when sex workers are granted equal rights and access to supportive institutions they are capable of effective parenting.

Beyond decriminalization, I make a series of recommendations based on the needs expressed throughout the interviews. The implementation of these recommendations could be hastened by decriminalization and a strong sex workers union.
They include: flexible child care, altered service delivery, a non judgmental legal system and sensitivity training.
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Summary:

In the first chapter I review literature significant to my research, introduce the research sample and articulate my methodology, procedures and constraints experienced in the field. The second chapter is devoted to the discussion of the 15 semi-structured interviews that I was able to conduct. I pay special attention to what the women site as barriers to effective mothering and the unique stressors that sex workers as mothers face. This chapter illustrates in what ways the stigmatization and illegal nature of sex work often force these women to lead double lives characterized by shame and fear and how this double life poses barriers to effective mothering. Faced with the threats of stigmatization and/or parent-child separation upon discovery of their occupation, many of the women interviewed refuse to seek professional, legal and/or social help. As the chapter unfolds it becomes clear that the double life which many of the women live is not only stressful, but is also a serious impediment to their ability to effectively parent.

The third chapter discusses the current legal status of sex work, which causes many of these mothers to live the “double life” and which unjustly criminalizes them in their efforts to support their children. Within this chapter is the argument that the current legal status of sex work poses barriers to these women in achieving financial stability, equal rights, social comfort, access to quality services, and child support; all of which are points that are integral to effective parenting. I argue that decriminalization and the recognition of sex work as work, provides for the most supportive framework in which mothers who are sex workers can raise their children. This not only grants them access to the support that other working mothers may have, but also directs attention to the societal stigma and discrimination that moralizes and punishes sex workers.

Chapter 4 discusses the opposition to decriminalization and the recognition of sex work as work. While I discuss the philosophical and political arguments against sex work, I assert that they distract much needed attention away from the everyday lives and needs of these women. I argue that, as a result, scholars and policy makers need to focus not on the idea of sex work but rather the improvement of the everyday lives of individual sex workers and their families. It is only when we remove ourselves from the debate about how best to protect them that we can actually move towards empowering them and better assisting them in their efforts to be effective parents and provide for their families. Ultimately, I contend that when sex workers are granted equal rights and access to supportive institutions they are capable of effective parenting.

Beyond efforts directed towards decriminalization, the sex worker’s rights discourse strongly supports sex worker unionization. Unionization is seen as a way to better gain workers rights and access to institutions. By briefly drawing on other international examples of sex workers’ unions, I show how sex work can be, and has been, recognized as a legitimate form of work. It is only when sex work is recognized as
work and the individuals involved in the industry are granted rights and protections on that basis can we achieve the levels of well being that are integral to effective parenting.

The last chapter discusses my recommendations that were developed based on the needs expressed throughout the interviews. The implementation of these recommendations could be hastened by decriminalization and a strong sex workers union. They include: flexible child care, altered service delivery, non judgmental legal system and sensitivity training.
Chapter 1

Introduction and Literature Review

Between finding a daycare, maintaining my website, keeping clients or keeping up on my bills, I am really busy. But tell me what single mother isn’t? At the same time, we [sex workers who are mothers] are different. The hardest parts of the job are the risks and the stigma. I feel that a general acceptance in the social service field would be helpful. I feel that women are often stigmatized when they are out about their profession… they are more thoroughly supervised and assessed. Being a sex worker is seen as the primary basis for a woman to have her parenting skills and custody of her children scrutinized…There are a lot of things that make motherhood harder for us [sex workers who are mothers].

- Aelishcia, a sex worker and mother of two young children. (Interview 12: 01/26/006).

Aelishcia is able to draw many parallels between her own life and the lives of single mothers who are not sex workers, but at the same time, she acknowledges that her profession uniquely affects her experience as a single mother. According to Aleischia, and the other fourteen sex workers involved in this study, sex workers who are single mothers face many of the same difficulties as single mothers who are not sex workers, yet they are additionally marginalized by the stigmatization and illegal nature of sex work. Because of the unique social position of sex workers who are mothers, the everyday lives of these women merit academic attention.

This chapter will identify some of gaps in the research on prostitution and lone motherhood within Canada. It will also demonstrate to what extent this research intends to fill that gap and why this is an important area of research. Lastly, this chapter will show what I argue to be the flawed methods of research on prostitution, and will explain how I hope to correct for at least some of these flaws. In doing so, this chapter will explain my feminist approach to research and my chosen research methods.

Purpose:
The purpose of my thesis is to examine the complex relationship that exists between lone-motherhood and sex work. Given how little is known about the impact of sex work on lone motherhood, my research will aim to address the lack of research done in Canada. I hope to discover what hardships and barriers these women experience in their everyday lives as mothers and to what degree their hardships as mothers are related to their occupation, if at all. Does society’s reaction towards sex work limit the number of resources that are offered (day-care, social assistance, family support networks etc.) to help them in their everyday lives as mothers? How does being a sex worker affect lone parenting? What issues arise for pregnant sex workers? Does sex work provide well for them and their child/children? What are the barriers that these women face, and what are their parenting needs that are not met?

Failed Needs Assessments:

There is no shortage of academic literature on sex work. The “Prostitution Question” generates input from all fields and many feminist scholars have developed a position or in some way contributed to the debate. However, a flaw I believe to be evident in much of the academic literature on ‘prostitution’ is in the failure to touch on the personal lives (including familial, intimate, etc.) of women who work within the industry and how these relationships affect their professional lives, or how their professional lives affect their personal lives. While the relationship between ‘public’ and ‘private’ life is often considered in studies of other working women, the dualities that manifest from the cross over from sex work to personal life are rarely explored by scholars. There are very few detailed studies which closely examine the social dynamics of sex work, including an assessment of interpersonal, cliental, familial and intimate relationships and as such, conclusions and observations about sex work and about sex workers’ needs may run the risk of being disconnected from a sex worker’s lived reality. For a full account of sex workers’ lives it must be recognized that women
who engage in sex work hold multiple roles. One of the roles in which these women place considerable importance is that of being a mother.

To develop a greater understanding of women involved in the sex industry and develop more appropriate and effective services, one must understand the numbers of sex workers that have children and the types of challenges that these women face when they are pregnant, parenting, or separated from their children. Researchers and service providers must therefore attempt to depart from a traditional compartmentalized approach of these women as simply sex workers to a more holistic, contextual view, which takes into consideration the many roles that these women play within partnerships and families.

According to a study of 1,963 street-walking sex workers, more than two-thirds of the 1,963 women had at least one child (69.4 percent) (Weiner, 1996: 99-100). The average number of children was 2.25. About one-third of those with children had one child (35.8 percent), about one-third had two children (31.7 percent), and about one-third had more than two children (32.5 percent). As Weitzer argues, this particular study focuses only on street-level sex workers and as such it could potentially overestimate the numbers of children (Weitzer, 2005: 934). This argument, however, is based on the assumption that street-level sex workers are more likely to have children than are other female sex workers due to variations in their economic situation, access to services, victimization, or substance use (Weitzer, 2005: 934). Other studies, however, show that the majority of those involved in the sex industry have children regardless of what type of sex work they are in (Dalla, 2004; Sloss, 2004; Walker, 2002; Weiner, 1996).

While many of the articles on sex work state the number of sex workers with children, they do not attach much significance to the presence of these children in sex workers’ lives nor do they recognize the interdependencies and interpersonal relationships that are related to lone-motherhood
which, one would assume, have a significant impact on the needs of these women. It is imperative then, that we consider what effects motherhood has on the welfare and the satisfaction of the basic needs of sex workers. What does being an escort worker mean when you are also a lone-mother and do specific needs manifest from this relationship?

**Literature Review:**

While the separate consideration of both lone motherhood and sex work generates a great deal of scholarly debate, little to no research considers lone motherhood and the effects of one’s occupation as a sex worker on being a lone mother within Canada. In order to illustrate this divide, I have organized this literature review into two parts, the first of which explores the literature on lone-motherhood and the relationships between the state and family and the second which addresses the literature on sex work which has touched on issues of motherhood, but for the most part is not based in Canada and remains focused only on street-level sex workers.

**Lone-Parent Families and the State:**

To best identify and understand the needs and lives of sex workers who are also lone-mothers it is important to situate these women within their specific political and social contexts. Both gender and the relationship that the state has with the family are important components of the social contexts of lone-mothers who are also sex workers.

Feminist literature is rife with analyses of the relationship between the state and the family. Given the increase in women’s participation in the labour market, the provision of services for working mothers, such as child care, is an increasingly significant point of departure and debate. While child care is also a serious issue for dual parent families, it is of particular importance to lone-parents who may face a more difficult situation than dual-parent families in that they do not have two people to potentially share child care tasks. Nonetheless, all family forms are affected by the
lack of access to adequate supports and resources such as quality child care provisions which make labour market participation an affordable option.

Because of this the state and the public have become increasingly interested in the issues of child care and the relationship between work and the family. In our most recent federal election, for example, both the Liberal and the Conservative parties scrambled to be the most work/family-friendly party. However, while these debates were evidence of at least a minimal concern on behalf of the state for women who work, the same problems and issues for working mothers remain. In Who Will Mind the Baby? Geographies of Child care and Working Mothers, England illustrates the current lack of child care facilities and affordable day care in Canada. She argues that this is a result of a lack of national child care policies, an emphasis on local and provincial provision for social services and traditional ideologies surrounding child care (1996: 315). England asserts that the lack of state provisions and attention that the state has historically paid to the issue of child care shows that the state is not distanced from the mainstream gendered culture nor traditional and gendered beliefs about the family. Rather, cultural, economic, and traditional historical contexts directly and indirectly shape the state-family relationship and the extent to which mothers are able to participate in the market.

Similar to England, Tracey argues that central to an understanding of the relationship between the state and the family, is an understanding of the traditional role of mother and the way in which it has been ideologically, historically and socially constructed (1999: 1). Expectations and beliefs surrounding the role of mothers are complex, not to mention gendered and have been shaped over many years. Even as women take on increased responsibility in the ‘public sphere,’ culture has been slow to change its assumptions and expectations in the ‘private sphere.’ The traditional idea of a mother’s responsibility for child care and the preference for home-care versus care that can be
provided by the market are strong components of the gendered order (Tracey, 1999: 3). These
gendered rationalities and their resulting policies have significant implications for lone-mother
families. For example, the current government’s emphasis on home-care is made clear by Harper’s
new child care policy which “aims to put $100 in the pockets of parents with children under six
years old” (Caledon, 2006: 1). To some, it will allow for parents who stay home to receive pay for
doing so, for others it puts an emphasis on private child care rather than public and favors upper to
middle class dual-earner parent families. As the Caledon Institute illustrates:

The new scheme comes with a hidden price – higher income taxes and lower payments from
geread-to-income programs which will substantially diminish its true value. Because the
Allowance will be taxed according to the income of the lower-income parent or lone parent,
affluent couples with a stay-at-home spouse will get a much bigger net benefit than lone
parents earning below average income (2006: 1).

Such conservative policies are wrought with traditional social assumptions, expectations
and ideological constraints. The ‘ideal’ of the dual-parent family is one of these traditional social
assumptions which has greatly influenced policy formation and the relationship that the state has
with the family. Lone-parenthood, by virtue of the challenge it poses to the traditional dual-parent
family and its assumptions, is a salient topic amongst policy makers and scholars. Scholars such as
Tracey (1999), Silva (1999) and Louise (2003) argue that policy discussions about support for lone-
mothers often advance the idea of the dual-income or nuclear family as the best and most sought
after family model. They contend that in many social policy discussions, lone-motherhood is viewed
as problematic and it is this view which is reflected in most state welfare policies and in the lack of

Similarly, Pocock argues that the deficiencies in state support for working mothers is because
many social policies remain aimed at the nuclear, heterosexual family which ignores the changing
dynamics of the family and the increasing number of lone-parent households. Despite the public
discourse and pressure Pocock argues that key institutions, such as child care, remain unchanged in the face of women’s increasing participation in the labour force and the rise of lone-parent families (Pocock, 2005: 7). Duncan and Edwards add an interesting dimension to the debate and argue that in Sweden, for example, lone-mothers are supported first as mothers before they are as workers (Duncan and Edwards, 1997: 126). This is done through active labour market policies which recognize the specific needs of single mothers, such as flexible working hours, paid leave when their children are sick and affordable day care. With these needs satisfied, it is hoped that single mothers will be able to participate in the labour market to the same extent as people who are not single mothers. As a result of this non-traditional view, the state in Sweden has enabled many lone-mothers to maintain their labour market participation, by providing public child care and other parental supports.

In contrast, in cases where lone mothers are treated as mothers and not as workers, usually in cases with a history rich in traditional views of the family, the state provides weak to no support for labour market participation of lone mothers. This is what Pocock refers to as an institutional lag, in which women’s paid work behaviour has changed, along with work itself. However, “[the] … institutions (especially workplace structures and child care) have channelled much of women’s paid work effort into either insecure part time work or full time jobs in the image of the care-free male worker, while unpaid labour has not changed much at all” (2005: 12). Pocock, makes the effective argument that a highly masculinized gender order has caused “the state and balance of class forces to marginalize both women and care and to restrict the role of the state in providing universal forms of support for carers or care itself” (2005: 9).

**Feminism and Motherhood:**
Fortunately, recent scholarship, largely based in feminist traditions, provides a new context
within which to view mothering. Each aforementioned author calls for a re-consideration of the
family and a re-conceptualization of motherhood. Secondly, these authors argue that with its use of
social policy, the state has considerable power to step away from these traditional assumptions and
therefore not only has a role in this re-conceptualization but also a responsibility. These feminist
scholars have begun to demand better provision of child care and the enactment of supportive
legislation, in improving the lives of lone working mothers.

There are plenty of ways to go about conceptualizing the relationship between motherhood,
feminism and work. In Maternal Desire, De Marneffe argues that some of the earlier feminist
literature tended to devalue caretaking and the political means to facilitate it. After a lengthy review
of the debates, De Marneffe concludes that “It seems we [feminists] can’t manage to conceptualize
the interdependence of mothers’ and children’s well-being in a way that feels respectable or
consistent with women’s progress” (2004, 262). While criticizing this aspect of feminism, De
Marneffe dissociates herself from what she terms “traditional feminist ideology” (2004: 263).
Rather she seeks a midpoint between those who deny the need to care for children and those who
would exclude women from any interests outside their children. She argues that it is important that
feminists do not neglect to pay attention to those women who have decided to have children and to
fight for the best provisions for these women. This is especially relevant for lone mothers who are, in
many respects, removed from the gendered division of labour within the home, yet by virtue of being
lone-parents are still responsible for the majority of the caretaking.

De Marneffe argues that if we neglect to provide feminist support for caretakers, the joys
aroused by children can easily evaporate in the face of everyday problems. A large part of De
Marneffe’s book looks at how women cope with the tensions of staying at home with the children or
going out to work and the subsequent worries of child care. Too often, she laments, the workplace leaves women with little flexibility in terms of reconciling motherhood with a career. Similar to England, De Marneffe shows that child care decisions are a source of considerable stress for lone mothers and can influence a woman’s decision to take employment, the type of employment, the location of employment, how many children to have, etc. (2004: 264). The stress of deciding on child care is exacerbated by the limited provision of affordable daycare, all of which make it difficult for lone-parents to stay attached to the labour market full time.

De Marneffe provides an excellent feminist overview of the difficulties of combining motherhood and work, as do many other scholars, but they fail to differentiate between various occupations and their sometimes different relationships with parenting. Can we assume that a lone businesswoman with a healthy financial situation and who is supported and recognized by the state as a legitimate worker has the same difficulties in combining work with child care as a sex worker who is stigmatized, and has no access to employee or labour protections of any sort? Utilizing the idea of particularism, Dalla evaluates the differences between parenting practices of different women, which suggests that different social environments can have an effect on parenting capabilities.

**Occupational Specificity? Experiences of Sex Workers who are Mothers:**

Particularism, as a concept, argues that “cultural, racial, economic, and historical contexts directly and indirectly shape mothering activities [e.g., Baca Zinn, 1990; Collins, 1994; Dill, 1994a, 1994b; Glenn, 1994; Stack & Burton, 1993] and the extent to which women are able to engage in child-centered activities” (Dalla, 2002: 1). According to this theory, it is important to understand the environmental context of mothers, their responses to it and the variety and uniqueness of women’s experiences in order to effectively respond with directed policies and principles for lone-
motherhood. In other words, it is important to understand the state’s treatment of lone-mothers and the ideology that shapes that treatment, but that not all lone-mothers can equally take advantage of the limited amount of supports that are provided and may have different needs and demands. Following from this idea, it is possible to see how sex workers, by virtue of their social location, have, to a certain degree a level of occupational specificity which may affect one’s lone-parenting capabilities.

Dalla relates her idea of particularism to the foundations for the National Council on Family Relations Effective Mothering Family Policy Recommendations (NCFR Policy Brief, 2002). These recommendations are based on the parent as provider model and argue that effective mothering is only possible when mothers experience emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. While parents are, first and foremost, responsible for nurturing, protecting, and advocating for their children, individual, community, and societal factors exert profound influence on maternal ability or motivation to effectively parent children. As such, political advocacy on behalf of disenfranchised populations and marginalized communities is a necessary first step in ensuring the optimal development of our nation’s children.

The following points are what the NCFR Policy Brief considers to be integral to achieving those levels of well being, and ultimately, effective mothering.

- Economic stability is a basic foundation for caring for children.
- Effective mothering is promoted by a just society that provides equal rights and access to quality institutions, goods, and services. In the absence of equality, low income mothers are expected to provide for their children even though they do not have the resources available to other mothers.
- Effective mothering is only possible in the context of institutional integrity — that is, when public institutions can provide a decent quality of life for all citizens, including residents of low-income communities.
- Effective mothering requires a commitment of resources to build local institutions capable of promoting public health and safety. Mothers from low-income and working poor families face critical challenges in fulfilling their role as effective mothers. These challenges include:
• Providing for children’s basic nutrition, shelter, clothing, health and safety needs.
• Overcoming the multiple stressors that impede the ability to parent effectively.
• Guiding and supervising children’s developmentally appropriate activities.
• Seeking out beneficial learning experiences for their families, in public schools, libraries, and community.
• Strengthening supportive and safe relationships in families, neighborhoods, schools and community groups.
• Building a mutually respectful and supportive relationship with their children’s father.

While the NCFR’s focus is on assisting poor single mothers, these recommendations can be extended to otherwise marginalized groups of people. For instance, Dalla agrees with NCFR that many working lone-mothers face greater degrees of stress and have a more difficult time in achieving “effective parenting” relative to dual parent families, regardless of occupation, but also argues that there are stressors that appear unique to being both a sex worker and a mother (2002: 198).

Essentially, Dalla contends that economic self sufficiency and societal support best allow for effective mothering and that sex workers have a harder time, relative to other lone-working mothers, in achieving these. In a discussion of the barriers that Dalla believes are unique to sex workers in achieving economic stability and/or societal support; she contends that sex workers are often unable to keep a job because of severe drug addictions (some from birth) or cannot get a job because they have no previous legal employment history and have a lack of skills and employment related competencies. This view, however, purports that the only ‘effective’ mother who is a sex worker is one who develops her skills outside of sex work and tries to get away from sex work. Secondly, this research wrongly assumes that all sex workers are economically instable and, in most cases, addicted to drugs. This assumption may be because Dalla’s research focuses on street level sex work, which is shown to afford less autonomy, and is associated with higher levels of victimization (Lowman, 2000:1).
While I may utilize the theory of particularism, unlike Dalla, I will seek to determine what the sex workers themselves self identify as the barriers to their preferred styles of parenting, rather than taking a quick overview of these women’s lives and then assuming what the barriers are to what I personally define as ‘effective mothering’. While I will utilize NCFR’s list of points which are deemed integral to effective mothering, I will only give voice to those barriers the women themselves identify as preventing them from achieving these points. This will shed light on whether or not the barriers of women who work as escorts are the same as street level sex workers, and will determine to what extent their needs as parents are shaped by their social context.

Sloss and Harper’s “When Street Sex Workers Are Mothers,” is another one of the few published articles that directly discusses both sex work and motherhood and the unique relationship between the two. It identifies several stressors that are unique to street-level sex workers who are mothers. According to Sloss et. al., sex workers must contend with possible incarceration, separation from their children, stigmatization, various levels of societal victimization and lack of government protection and job security amongst other stressors (2004: 329). In all cases it was discovered that pregnancies and parenting responsibilities altered their working productivity and practices as well as their mental and sometimes physical well-being. In fact, several of the “participants said that they experienced greater stress and anxiety in being sex workers after and/or because of having children” (Sloss et. al., 2004: 334).

Sloss and Harper argue that the greater levels of stress and anxiety reported result from leading a double life and living with the fear that they would become separated and/or unavailable to their children (2003: 334). In addition, the participants shared feelings of anxiety when working because they feared that their children would find out about them working the street through other sources (2003: 335). In this sample, the sex workers worried that being ‘discovered’ by their
children might cause their children to get hurt or lose respect for them, and/or might influence them towards working the street (or engaging in other street activities) themselves.

Similarly, Castenada et. al.’s “Sex masks: the Double Life of Female Commercial Sex Workers in Mexico City” is a qualitative study that seeks to address the complications that arise when leading the so-called ‘double life’. The central research finding was that women who are both mothers and street-level sex workers live in a constant double bind perpetuated by society’s stereotypes. Castenada et. al. argue that women are pressured to conform to society’s double standard for women divided between the mother/"saint" and the traitor/"prostitute." The participants’ reactions included justifying sex work as a better paying employment opportunity for women, as a necessary evil and as a type of social service. At the same time, it was discovered that the majority of these women hid their professions from their families and that these dualities caused considerable stress for the women. These articles are important because they have conceptualized and defined the double life that sex workers may live and the hardships that they may face as a result of these dualities.

Access to Services:

Another important point that Dalla makes is that by virtue of their socio-economic/political position, many sex workers lack the formal provision of services and societal support that other more ‘legitimate’ working mothers may have. Dalla’s research also demonstrates that even if sex workers were to have access to certain provisions that other workers have access to, they may potentially feel uncomfortable using them because of stigmatization and/or discrimination or would be unable to use them because of their non traditional work schedules. Sloss et. al.’s research shows similar findings: “researchers have observed that female sex workers’ fears of being discovered as mothers who work the street also prevents them from accessing needed services or legal protection (Perkins and
Bennett, 1985; Shedlin and Oliver, 1993; Sloss, 2002; Weiner, 1996), thus perhaps increasing their vulnerability to victimization, as well as to parenting problems” (Sloss et. al., 2004: 338). Weiner’s research also shows that sex workers are unlikely or at least less likely to approach agencies for help or are reluctant to seek prenatal care or medical attention because they fear that their children will be removed from their care upon disclosure of their profession, that they will be arrested or because they lack information on the benefits or access to such services (1996: 102). Weiner argues that non-judgmental community outreach programs by and for sex workers are necessary to access the populations that are not likely to seek services on their own.

From these articles several unique needs and experiences of mothers who are sex workers were identified. The trends and findings that were highlighted have informed many of my own research questions about sex work. However, as I will discuss later, the findings and expressed needs for street-level sex work may be very different from those of independent escort workers. Secondly, while each of the articles identifies several unique needs and ideas, they are removed from the Canadian context. This limits our understanding of the issues that pertain to sex workers who are mothers within Canada because both the laws/policies that are relevant to prostitution and the political and social environments are distinct from the United States and Mexico. Within Canada, little to almost no research has been written directly on the specific issues facing sex workers who are also mothers. Rather, scholars that are well-known as Canadian prostitution experts, such as Brock, Lowman, Lewis and Tyndale and others that work within groups such as Sex Trade Advocacy Research, tend to only touch on the issues of motherhood in their studies of sex workers while remaining focused on different themes related to sex work. Thus, there exists a need for new research that deals directly with the relationship between sex work and motherhood.

Research Method:
This section will explain the reasons for my research on this segment of the sex worker population, my feminist approach, the difficulties in researching this subject and the obstacles to gaining access to this particular group of women. It will conclude with an elaboration of terms that will be used throughout the body of this thesis.

Research Participants:

In order to figure out how informants view their own experiences/needs as mothers and sex workers I carried out 15 semi-structured narrative interviews, lasting between 30 minutes and two hours with women between the ages of 23 and 78. The sample was drawn purposively to include women who self-identify as lone mothers and independent escort workers. The women either provided me with a pseudonym, or agreed that their working names could be used. While this may not seem like a large enough sample to draw any conclusions from, absent the ability to gain a random sample of sex workers (given that we do not know the parameters of sex workers), not to mention the difficulty in gaining access, the best we can hope for in sex work studies are medium sized samples of women that represent different geographical locations and various levels of sex work.

Edmonton and Toronto were chosen as the sites for the interviews because of their large-size, the fact that they are both Canadian cities and therefore are both subject to the Criminal Code of Canada and because they have active sex workers’ rights organizations operating within them. The greatest value in studying these two cases, however, lay in their differences. By looking into the two different municipalities we are able to gain better insight into the effects that different social and political contexts have on these women’s lives and whether or not the licensing of escort work has an effect on parenting or the ability to parent. In Edmonton, for instance, escort licenses are available for independents whereas in Toronto, escort agencies are not licensed but "body rub
parlours" are. 6 The effect of licensing, however, is not the primary focus of this paper, but it does add an interesting dimension to discussion and opens up room for potential future research.

**Heterogeneity of Sex Work:**

I chose to limit my research participants to independent escort workers, rather than all sex workers. The focus on the lives of independent escort workers is to counter what I believe to be a common overgeneralization in research on sex work. In the feminist discourse on sex work, sex workers are frequently assumed to be a homogeneous group. However, sex workers represent a complex group of individuals who have diverse professional and personal experiences. The sex industry, like any other industry, is a highly stratified industry and has many different levels of power. These different ‘levels’ of power are the result of different pay-scales, different levels of organizational power, different relationships with outsiders (whether positive or negative), different relationships to insiders (such as pimps) and different social and cultural contexts. As Sunder Rajan argues, feminist scholars must contend with the variety in…

"levels" of prostitutes in terms of clientele, income, work and life-styles (from call girls to street-walkers); differences in the function and social prestige of sex work due to cultural variations, or to the practitioners' skills and accomplishments; and, above all, international differences in sex work systems, broadly between those in First World and Third World countries: these facts have been repeatedly invoked to account for the widely different ways in which sex work is read (1999:12).

On Sunder Rajan’s last point, she argues that it is important to recognize the different forms that sex work takes, especially in relation to the forms it takes in different parts of the world. Conflating a Mexican sex worker’s experience with a Canadian sex worker’s experience, therefore, is not only problematic but with regards to sex worker activism, any recommendations that are based on these experiences run the risk of misplacement as they may be inappropriate in different cultural contexts. As such, Sunder Rajan contends that the demands of contingent description are urgent in the context of sex workers rights activism and legislation (Sunder Rajan, 1999: 15).
reason, it is important that I make distinctions between the various levels of sex work and the locations I will be looking into so that I do not generalize my findings across an entire industry or continent.

While it is difficult to separate the economy of sex work into its various levels and any line drawn between these levels risks inaccuracy, it has been attempted. Kesler, for example, estimates that street level prostitution only comprises 20 per cent of the sex industry (2002: 232). However, Kesler argues that because of the degree of visibility of street level sex work, this small sector receives the most attention from scholars, the media, the law and the police (2002: 233). It is also this segment of the industry that is most commonly associated with physical and sexual victimization, pimping, heavy drug usage and lower pay scales.

In a report by Wahab on violence in the sex industry it was reported that 100 percent of street-level sex workers experienced violence as compared to 68 per cent overall of all the women studied (2005: 264). It has been argued that street-level sex workers face greater levels of violence because they do not have a safe location to practice (rather they often get into unmarked cars and are left with no access to help) (Lowman, 2002: 4). Street-level sex workers also differ from other types of sex workers in the relationships that they maintain with insiders, such as pimps, who are often abusive and demanding. This is different from escort workers, who often work independently or within an agency, using their own devices such as pagers and their own telephone numbers. In addition, there are many part-time sex workers varying from exotic dancers, to housewives to students who pick up a client only on occasion, to women who get in contact with their potential clients during their work as waitresses or hotel workers.
Street-level sex workers are also distinct from other forms of sex work in that they face a different relationship with the law. As Lewis and Tyndale make clear:

While Canadian criminal law makes it difficult for street prostitutes (who solicit in a public place) and in-call prostitutes (who work in a “bawdy house”) to practice their profession without violating federal statutes, it does not necessarily impede the work of escorts, who work on an out-call basis (Lewis and Tyndale, 2000: 441-442).

As such, a sex worker’s legal status is often determined by the location in which they sell their sexual services. The different locations which sex workers base their transactions, however, affects more than a sex worker’s legal status according to Moffatt and Peters. Rather, Moffatt and Peters argue that the location of sexual activities is a variable in the pay-scales of sex workers. As they explain: “arrangement for provision of the service also has a very strong effect on price, with ‘hotel’ visits carrying the highest premium, and visits to ‘walk-ups’ being the cheapest arrangement” (2004: 12). Moffatt and Peters argue that since street-level sex work is mostly a walk-up arrangement and the transaction and interaction occurs more often than not in a car or in a public space, it is often the cheapest, whereas out-call escort workers is usually the most discreet, comfortable and hygienic and therefore is the most expensive form of sex work (2004: 12). These different pay levels also affect the social context of the sex industry, creating a hierarchy of respect amongst sex workers. As Dalla explains, those who are free from pimps and those who elicit the highest pay usually acquire the most respect, whereas those who trade sex for drugs (most often crack cocaine) elicit the least amount of respect from other sex workers (2002: 91).

For these reasons, some comparative studies, have found significant differences between street level sex workers and escorts in terms of job satisfaction, self esteem, physical and psychological health and occupational practices (Weitzer, 2005: 944). The greater victimization of street level workers may also be the reason why the majority of the rights-based literature focuses on
sex workers working the streets, whereas few studies address the lives of out-call, independent escort workers. As Weitzer shows, the majority of samples used in sex work studies consist of people who contacted service agencies, were approached on the street, or were interviewed in jail…Generalizing from prostitutes in custody to the population of prostitutes is also improper, just with other types of incarcerated offenders. Yet the implications of this sampling bias are neglected in the published reports (2005: 938).

While I greatly respect the importance of studies on street-level sex workers, the academic focus on street-level sex workers may tend to overstate incidents of violence, exploitation by pimps and heavy drug use (Kesler, 2002: 232). Moreover, the literature tends to not only generalize the findings across the entire industry, but concludes with recommendations that would not necessarily benefit all sex workers. For example, my research and the following recommendations may be accused of romanticizing sex work, because they are based on selecting only the ‘best available examples’-upscale call girls- to argue that sex work can be empowering and lucrative. Conversely, street sex workers are more vulnerable to victimization than escorts and are more likely to have entered into sex work at a younger age (Weitzer, 2005: 934). Because of this, if this group of persons is used as a sample on which to direct policy it is likely that policy makers will aim their efforts at preventing sex work altogether, or ‘helping’ sex workers to remove themselves from the industry. The resulting policies may have negative impacts on escort workers, however, because they paint sex work as a profession that is abusive, coercive and high-risk. This further stigmatizes and undermines the sex industry making the working lives of escorts more difficult. In sum, “these ‘best examples’ are no closer to the norm in prostitution than the ‘worst examples” (Weitzer, 200: 935). Because of this, there exists a need to correct for this bias and gain more knowledge and a better understanding of other groups of sex workers by addressing each sector separately or in comparison.
In sum, sex work varies significantly by type, and it is disingenuous to generalize from one level of sex work to the industry as a whole. A more nuanced investigation of sex work will contribute to a more sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of contemporary sex work and will result in more directed and effective recommendations. As such, I have chosen to research only one sector of the sex industry, being independent escort workers. These women, as I will show, maintain a higher social position and greater levels of independence and agency than street-level sex workers. The sample I have drawn from are sex workers that in most cases: 1) are in a higher pay bracket, 2) have a degree of greater safety and a greater degree of independence 3) are less visible, and therefore less stigmatized than street-level sex workers and 4) are less likely to get arrested.

Research Method: Feminist Perspective and Approach

My research design rests on the belief that the perspectives of those whose lives my research explores need to be valued. This means that in research on issues of sex work, legitimacy must be accorded to the perspectives of the sex workers themselves (Kesler, 2002: 220). My approach is guided by my understanding of a particular feminist methodology. Influenced by Storrie (1988), McKenna (1992) and Behar 1996 and other feminist researchers; I greatly value the perspectives of those women whose lives my research explores. Overall my intention in writing this thesis is to listen to and to try to determine how sex workers view their own experiences and their own needs (McKenna, 1992: 19). Most scholars agree that there is no one method that can be termed feminist; nevertheless, in-depth interviews as a method of gathering data have been commonly associated with feminist research. I believe that involving sex workers in discussions about their own lives will create the most effective research because it will “accommodate the realities of [the sex worker’s] environment” and will address the self identified needs of the sex workers (McWilliam, 1998: 72). According to this approach, it is imperative that as ‘outside’ researchers we make a commitment to
including sex workers’ perspectives and avoid making assumptions that support and legitimize
outside political and social interests at the cost of alienating the concerns of the research participants.

As a researcher, I was specifically interested in exploring the women’s day to day
experiences with both motherhood and sex work. My intention in the interviews was to give the
women the opportunity to tell me what was important to them and to allow, as much as possible,
their own perception of their needs and demands to emerge. This aspect of my methodology was
influenced by Wendy Hallway and Tony Jefferson’s (2000) work on the narrative interview
method. I employed this method by using broad questions such as “Can you tell me about what
you think needs to be done for sex workers who are mothers? Can you tell me what it is like to be a
lone mother who is also a sex worker?” “What would improve your situation?” Such broad and open
ended questions allowed interviewees time and space to construct their own stories, within which
meaning and values generally unfolded. My more specific questions were reserved for ‘probing’
where I would elaborate if the interviewee was unsure how to answer a question. The interviewees
were informed of their right to not answer questions and to withdraw from the study (including
removing their transcripts) at any time.

Each of the women’s answers and stories that developed as a result of the interviews were
unique, but patterns were also found. Interpreting and assessing the generalizeability, patterns and
commonalities across these interviews is where the role of the researcher comes in. As any feminist
scholar would be quick to point out, getting the interviewees’ points of view on their own situation
and then writing about it academically can be quite difficult. The researcher is in a difficult position
in that they are supposed to enmesh themselves in the interviewees viewpoints as a listener, while at
the same time relating it to bodies of knowledge which are ‘relevant’ to their discipline. Behar
describes this difficult situation:
Lay down in the mud in Columbia. Put your arms around Omarira Sanchez. But when the grant money runs out, or the summer vacation is over, please stand up, dust yourself off, go to your desk, and write down what you saw and heard. Relate it to something you’ve read by Marx, Weber, Gramsci or Geertz… (1996: 5).

The relationship between researcher and ‘researched’ and between the researcher and her discipline has a heavy impact on the outcome of the research process. It is because of this that Behar argues that it is important to acknowledge the role that the researcher plays in the interpretation of the interviews and in the involvement with the material (1996:7). While the researcher may abruptly leave the field, they do not leave the material gained from the field. Rather, the researcher’s viewpoints, knowledge and position of power/control/authority are integral to the material and the outcome of the research process.

To this end, Behar encourages researchers to engage in a level of self-reflexivity, to acknowledge the subjective nature of all social knowledge and to explore the dilemmas of positions of power and negotiation of entry into the field (1996: 12, 15). Behar posits that an understanding of these power dynamics requires a rethinking of objectivity of the researcher, because “the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of the research. This evidence must also be open to critical scrutiny not less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence” (1996: 16). Thus, I realize that it is important that as an academic and as an outsider to the sex worker community, I speak to how my position as an outsider/academic/young female has influenced the ways in which insiders reacted to me and has affected my access to the community. And as this piece developed, I hoped not to shy away from my known biases or opinions, but rather make them and my positions explicit.

*Access to the Sex Worker Community:*
As an outsider trying to gain access into the sex worker community I was treated with both hostility and kindness and varying degrees of each. In Toronto, the first two interviews I arranged were with women that were referred to me by Maggie’s, a sex workers’ rights group located in downtown Toronto. While going through an agency risks restricting your findings to people that access agencies, and therefore those people whom are more likely to be distressed, it was my hope that after I met with the two women, they would refer me to other women that may be interested in the project that were not in contact with an agency. The participants responded to my emails and were keen on helping me in my research but they were hesitant to give me contact information for other women or give other women my contacts.

Because of these difficulties, I was forced to abandon the use of the snowball sampling technique and I turned to cold-calling women after finding their ads in city magazines or on the internet. When I finally spoke with the women, I briefly explained my research and my position on sex work. I was turned down several times upon request for an interview and was not called back several times. The reasons varied. Some women told me that they simply did not have the time to meet, others disliked academics, others did not want to risk their identities being exposed, and others simply did not provide me with a reason. However, I did eventually manage to gain three more interviews in Toronto and five interviews in Edmonton via this technique (cold-calling).

Cold-calling can be considered to have a selective sample bias because the researcher chooses which women to call from a list of advertisements. However, I called every advertisement for independent escort workers in Edmonton’s SEE magazine and VUE Weekly, Toronto’s NOW magazine and the Toronto Sun. I would have happily interviewed any one of the women that expressed interest, but only 15 of the women contacted chose to participate. Thus, the selective bias was not on behalf of the researcher who chose who to interview, but was limited to those who chose
to participate. Furthermore, I quickly learned that cold-calling is extremely informative. For example, by searching escort advertisements for women to call not only was I able to gain insight into one of the primary methods of advertising for escort work, but I was able to actually decipher the numbers of independent escorts in Edmonton and Toronto relative to escorts that work for agencies.\(^{11}\)

In addition, cold-calling from advertisements in the newspapers/magazines was informative because it made evident to me that many sex workers live in an atmosphere of fear. Unlike cold-calling, working through the organization for the first two interviews gave me a degree of credibility because I was screened by the administrative persons within the organization to the level that those being interviewed were confident that I was working with the purpose of research and not, for example, the aim of ‘catching them’ for an offence. The distrust of outsiders comes from the often negative relationship that these women have with the police and the Children’s Aid Society, to cite only two examples.

The relationship between insiders and outsiders in the sex industry is made more sensitive by the fact that sex workers have been traditionally marginalized by research and the academic process and that most of the scholarship on sex workers is of external origin (not written from a sex worker’s perspective). I can not say I was not warned about the difficulties of access. When I first approached the administrative coordinator at Maggie’s with my thesis idea she warned me that participation may be hard to elicit because “sex workers have been researched to death.” The opinion that academics are exploitive has been voiced on many blogs and chat rooms run by sex workers and sex workers’ groups. According to this view, academics enter the community, take what they want, gain grant money, publish and profit, offer nothing in return and then leave, never to be seen again.
This following excerpt was taken from a sex worker’s online forum in Toronto. It is a response to a posting by a university student asking for help in her upcoming paper:

Re: University Paper

I am so tired of you squares making money off of us or using us to further you careers. Hello there [Name of an academic]. We working girls should write the research. [Name of an academic] is an academic who is living off our avails, she should be charged. GO away dumb little school girl, we sluts will not write your paper -current sex worker, Anastasia. \(^{12}\)

As the above quote illustrates, this particular sex worker’s lack of willingness to engage with an outside researcher is not because she is unsure of the interviewer’s identity or that she fears her words may be taken out of context, but that she is simply tired of being interviewed and exploited. I was cognizant of my position of power as a researcher and this disdain for researchers/outsiders in my quest for interviews. I was extremely straightforward and honest in my initial phone calls. I explained my curiosity in the industry, what I stand to gain from my research (a master’s degree) and was both respectful of their time and their profession. Once the women had agreed to be interviewed they were eager to share their stories with me and were extremely helpful. \(^{13}\) How I chose to contextualize the stories they shared with me is another aspect that is central to the feminist method I am employing.

Definitions:

Given that my research design is based on the belief that women’s experiences (although varying) are important it is crucial that their experiences be addressed on their own terms. To this end, definitions and terms used by sex workers to explain their own work and their profession will be used. Using the terms of the industry within my research, allows for women to reinterpret research not as something that is done on them but something that they are also involved in and that they can make use of themselves. I now turn to my explanation of the terms I will use.
One thing that the “prostitution debate” will teach you, is that time spent on definitions is never wasted. Often descriptions/definitions used in the “prostitution debate” are normative, or biased, meaning that they embody a viewer’s reactions and their desire either to support or condemn “prostitution.” In anti sex work campaigns for instance, the terms “prostituted women” are used instead of sex workers and customers are often labelled as “prostitute users” or “sexual predators” (Weitzer, 2000: 935). Obviously, with the use of such definitions comes a particular opinion and as McElroy makes clear, “words define the parameters of the debate. They control thought itself…I think we ought to be very suspicious of these distinctions insofar as they are put forward as moral distinctions” (1995: 49).

My first inclination when I began writing was to use the terms that sex workers themselves use. This was not, however, because I had thought long and hard about the implications of such terms, but only because I decided that those whose lives are in question should be able to set the parameters for the debate with words they were comfortable with. However, my terminological confusion was not cleared up with the quick replacement of a few terms. Instead I continued to be corrected on several occasions by sex workers when I used terminology that they did not agree with. I quickly realized that my own vocabulary concerning “prostitution” was engrained, influenced primarily by what I had read in the media or in academic literature, the majority of it not written by sex workers or even sex workers’ rights advocates. As I absorbed the explanations given behind using different terms, I realized that I would use these terms not only so sex workers could set the tone for the debate, but I also realized that these terms are more helpful to the advancement of sex worker’s rights.

For example, throughout my first interviews I used the term “sex trade” instead of “sex industry.” I was informed that “sex trade” is too close to “slave trade” and implies that the humans in
it are treated as objects who are forced into the industry and who are in incapable of making a
conscious decision to enter it. “Sex trade,” I was told, only really suites the discussion of human
trafficking. Those who seek to establish supports for sex workers so they can live their lives with
less stress recognize that sex workers have agency and must not use terminology that undermines
this belief. In addition, the sex industry is a multi-billion dollar industry employing millions of
persons and therefore because it operates like an industry more than a “trade” it should be called so.

Secondly, I was asked to use the word “client” instead of “john”. “John” is a term used often
within the abolishment framework. “John School,” for example, is a course designed for those who
pay sex workers to have sex and is intended to deter men from hiring sex workers (Daum, 1996: 1).
“John” is also the word used in police documentation relating to prostitution. Using the term client,
on the other hand, refers to the sex worker as a professional and the customer as a respectable paying
customer.

Lastly and most importantly, is my justification for using the term “sex work” rather than the
more commonly used term “prostitution.” This is for two reasons. Firstly, I believe that prostitution
is work and that this is a fundamental characteristic that is important to any consideration of sex
work. Sex work is an exchange between an employer and employee. The sex worker contracts out
her sexual services for remuneration. Secondly, re-defining prostitution as sex work highlights a
concern about labour issues, such as wages, working conditions and daycare, etc. (Kesler, 2000:
232). Within this approach, therefore, it is possible to apply a labour rights analysis and lobby for
the rights of sex workers, the improvement of their working conditions and their ability to have a
family in combination with the long-term goal of empowering the female sex. And to draw on the
points made earlier in the chapter, it is only when efforts are made to provide equal rights and access
to quality institutions, goods and services, that we enable these women to become effective mothers.
In the absence of established rights, supports and services which recognize the dual roles of these women as both single mothers and sex workers, these women may face excessive difficulty in effective parenting.

Conclusion:

The literature review was divided into two parts, the first of which explores some of the literature on lone motherhood and the second which addresses sex work but, for the most part, fails to touch on the personal lives of women who work within the industry and remains focused on street-level sex work. I argued that with no detailed examination of the social dynamics of sex work and the multiple roles that women hold, including that of mother, conclusions about sex workers’ needs may run the risk of being disconnected from sex workers’ lived realities. For a full account of sex workers’ lives, it is important to understand the numbers of sex workers that have children and the types of challenges that these women face when they are pregnant, parenting or separated from their children. To this end, I discussed how the idea of particularism is useful since it argues that cultural, economic and social contexts directly and indirectly shape mothering activities and the extent to which women are able to engage in child-centered activities (Dalla, 2002). According to this theory, it is important to understand the environmental context of mothers and the variety and uniqueness of women’s experiences in order to effectively respond with directed policies and supports for lone mothers. With this comes the recognition that not all parents can equally take advantage of the limited amount of supports that are provided for lone parents in order to become effective parents.

The second aspect of the literature that I addressed is what I consider to be the over-generalization of its findings. Much of the research on the sex industry is on street-level sex work and often generalizes its findings across the entire industry; however, street-level sex workers are
argued to be particularly more vulnerable to violence and abuse, are paid less and have less agency than other sex workers (such as escort workers). As such, I argued that the academic focus on street-level sex workers may tend to overstate incidents of violence, exploitation by pimps and heavy drug use amongst all sex workers (Kesler, 2002). Following this, I believe there is a need to correct this bias and gain more knowledge and a better understanding of other groups of sex workers. My focus on independent escorts, therefore, is to gain a more nuanced investigation of sex work which will, in effect, contribute to a more sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of contemporary sex work.

The second chapter focuses on the unique stressors that sex workers as mothers face. It will demonstrate in what ways the stigmatization and illegal nature of sex work often force these women to lead double lives characterized by shame and fear and how this double life poses barriers to effective mothering. Faced with the threats of stigmatization and/or parent-child separation upon discovery of their occupation, many of the women interviewed refuse to seek professional, legal and/or social help. As the chapter unfolds it becomes clear that the double life which many of the women live is not only stressful, but is also a serious impediment to their ability to effectively parent.

The third chapter discusses the current legal status of sex work, which causes many of these mothers to live the “double life” and which unjustly criminalizes them in their efforts to support their children. Within this chapter is the argument that the current legal status of sex work poses barriers to these women in achieving financial stability, equal rights, social comfort, access to quality services, and child support; all of which are points that are integral to effective parenting. I argue that decriminalization and the recognition of sex work as work, provides for the most supportive framework in which mothers who are sex workers can raise their children. This not only grants them
access to the support that other working mothers may have, but also directs attention to the societal stigma and discrimination that moralizes and punishes sex workers.

Chapter 4 discusses the opposition to decriminalization and the recognition of sex work as work. While I discuss the philosophical and political arguments against sex work, I assert that they distract much needed attention away from the everyday lives and needs of these women. I argue that, as a result, scholars and policy makers need to focus not on the idea of sex work but rather the improvement of the everyday lives of individual sex workers and their families. It is only when we remove ourselves from the debate about how best to protect them that we can actually move towards empowering them and better assisting them in their efforts to be effective parents and provide for their families. Ultimately, I contend that when sex workers are granted equal rights and access to supportive institutions they are capable of effective parenting.

Beyond efforts directed towards decriminalization, the sex worker’s rights discourse strongly supports sex worker unionization. Unionization is seen as a way to better gain workers rights and access to institutions. By briefly drawing on other international examples of sex workers’ unions, I show how sex work can be, and has been, recognized as a legitimate form of work. It is only when sex work is recognized as work and the individuals involved in the industry are granted rights and protections on that basis can we achieve the levels of well being that are integral to effective parenting.

The last chapter discusses my recommendations that were developed based on the needs expressed throughout the interviews. The implementation of these recommendations could be hastened by decriminalization and a strong sex workers union. They include: flexible child care, altered service delivery, non judgmental legal system and sensitivity training.
Chapter 2
Analysis of Duality of Mothering and Sex Work

Occupational Specificity? Experiences of Sex Workers Who are Mothers:

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the concept of particularism is useful when considering the uniqueness of experiences of sex workers who are mothers. Particularism argues that “cultural, economic, racial and social contexts directly and indirectly shape mothering activities and the extent to which women are able to engage in child-centered activities” (Dalla, 2002: 16). Following this idea, my research aimed to discover whether or not sex workers, by virtue of their social location, have a level of occupational specificity which may affect one’s lone-parenting capabilities. As the interviews continued, it became evident that there are several stressors that are unique to being both a sex worker and a mother, which could, in effect, pose barriers to their parenting capabilities and potential.

Throughout the interviews the mothers discussed with me how being pregnant or parenting affected their emotions, their well-being and their work habits. In each of the cases it was discovered that pregnancies and parenting responsibilities altered their working practices as well as their mental and sometimes physical well-being. It was also discovered that the stigmatization of sex work and the hesitancy to disclose of one’s occupation made parenting, at times, more difficult. Similar to Sloss et. al.’s sample of women, several of the participants in my sample said that they experienced greater stress and anxiety in being sex workers after or because of having children (2003: 334). In fact, Sylvia, one of the fifteen women I interviewed had quit working as a sex worker since the birth of her last child (although she occasionally still sees regulars, she no longer advertises). Sylvia informed me that having children was the primary reason for her leaving the industry. Sylvia explained that the complications that arise when combining sex work and parenting were simply too
stressful for her to handle (Interview 1: 03/05/2006). While the other women interviewed may not have left the sex industry after having their children, they certainly did share with me some of the complications that arise when combining the profession with motherhood and what could be done to improve their situation.

This chapter focuses on the unique stressors that sex workers as mothers face. Common concerns and needs emerged from two or more interviews. Firstly, several of the women found the double life hard to negotiate and found this negotiation to be a source of stress. Secondly, many of the women became stressed with the possibility that their children may discover their occupation and be discriminatory and/or judgmental to them or, conversely, that others may discover their occupation and be discriminatory or judgmental to their children. Thirdly, those that worked while pregnant expressed concern that their health was harmed when working while pregnant. A fourth concern expressed by all of the women at some point during their interviews, was that their children would be emotionally or physically harmed because of their work. And lastly, the women equally shared the concern that the need to securely provide for their children may be not met because of the financial instability of their job and its nonexistent benefits.

The Double Life:

Many sex workers have argued that because of the stigmatization of the sex industry, those that participate in it are often forced to lead double lives. The “double-life” is defined as “a veil of secrecy surrounding one’s occupation and a non-disclosure of one’s professional sex work” (Sloss et. al. 2003, Castenada et. al. 1996). Following this definition, Castenada et. al. address the complications that arise when leading the so-called “double life” amongst street sex workers in Mexico City. Their central research finding was that women who are both mothers and sex workers live in a constant double bind perpetuated by society’s stereotypes. In order to come to terms with
this awkward position, many of the participants’ reactions included justifying sex work as a better paying employment opportunity for women, as a necessary evil and as a type of social service. At the same time, it was discovered that the majority of these women hid their professions from their families and that these dualities caused considerable stress and anxiety for the women. My research utilized Castenada et. al.’s conceptualization of the “double-life,” and questioned to what extent the women I interviewed also lead double lives, if at all. I also sought to understand that, if they did lead double lives, why is this so? How do the women maintain these “double-lives”? And what are the consequences of the ‘double-life,’ mentally, physically and emotionally?

When asked whether or not they lead a double life, each of the participants I interviewed reported that they hid their profession from their children and their immediate families. The reasons for not telling their children about their profession were varied. Wendy, for example, explained to me that the non disclosure of her profession to her child was most dependent on the young age and maturity of her child. When asked if she was ever going to tell her child that she works as a sex worker, I was told: “Why would I tell my child that I am a sex worker, when he doesn’t even know what sex is yet?” (Interview 1: 03/05/2006). This reasoning extended throughout each of the interviews because, with the exception of one participant, all of the women had children under the age of 14. Wendy, however, indicated to me that when her son develops an understanding of sex, she would potentially tell him whereas the other women interviewed did not necessarily have this intention. Nonetheless, the age of the child does affect the double-life, as some children are simply too young to be aware of their involvement in the sex industry or to understand what it means.

Whether or not the secrecy surrounding one’s occupation constitutes a double-life, however, was questioned by one of the participants. Sarah assured me that no matter the age of her child, there are simply some things that you just do not share with your children. Following the motto “A mother
is a mother not a friend,” Sarah explained to me: “Everyone has their secrets. I don’t see how this is leading a double life” (Interview 14: 07/27/2007).

To this end, Sarah likens her profession to any other profession, insisting that everyone has their own secrets which they do not wish to share with their children. In this way, hiding one’s involvement in the sex industry is no different than choosing to hide from their children the ‘secrets’ of their dating life or “boring details of their finances” (Interview 14: 07/27/2007).

Annalise took a very different view than both Wendy and Sarah. Annalise’s son is 18 years old, and is very capable of understanding what sex work means, yet Annalise is unyielding on her commitment not to disclose of her profession to her child.

Amee: Does he know what you do for a living?
Annalise: No! No way.
Amee: Why not?
Annalise: Children are impressionable; you cannot subject them to your choices. In fact, you must protect them from your choices. I am an emotionally balanced woman, I am open sexually with my child, but he does not need to know what I do. I have raised a sexual child who is comfortable calling me and asking me certain things about sex.
Amee: If you are sexually open and so is he, then why do you not tell him?
Annalise: Well as you said yourself, sex work is not exactly respected in this society. I don’t want him to face ridicule for what I have chosen to do with my life.
Amee: Do you think he would lose respect for you?
Annalise: I can’t say for sure but I don’t want to take the chance.
(Interview 2: 03/27/2006)

Very aware of societal discrimination against sex workers, Annalise does not disclose her working life in order to avoid putting her son in a position where he could feel potentially ashamed or be discriminated against because of her involvement in the industry. Annalise made clear in a later discussion that her hesitancy to disclose her profession is largely due to society’s negative depiction of sex workers and the lack of respect it has for them. She is disappointed that this is the current case, but does not want her son to face ridicule and be forced into defending her (Interview 2: 03/27/2006). As Sanders explains, “stigmatized individuals are often concerned that their loved
ones will be affected by ‘courtesy’ stigma” (2007: 92). While sex work is, by its nature, a discrete profession, because of Annalise’s need to keep her professional life hidden from her son Annalise goes to even greater lengths to ensure that her profession remains discrete (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).

To prevent her son from finding out about her profession and involvement in the industry, Annalise takes several practical steps. Firstly, she only posts pictures of herself on the web that she insists do not look like her, but rather closely resemble her (with regards to body shape, hair color and “level of attractiveness”). In addition she has a different phone number listed than her home number at and she has a separate lap top computer that she uses to contact clients with and that is not accessible to her son. Moreover, she only does outcalls (meaning she does not bring men into her home) and she is wary of whom she tells about her occupation (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).

When I asked Annalise if her friends knew of her profession, she informed me that only those women who also work within the industry know, and she does not have many friends within the industry. Annalise does not have many friends within the industry because she trusts very few people that operate within it. Annalise informed me that she would sometimes catch herself disclosing her profession to someone if she had just met them at the bar. But this kind of disclosure would only occur when she felt as if the person she was telling it to would have no personal connection to her or her life. When I asked if disclosing this information made her feel somewhat relieved, or more honest, she told me that was the case only in certain circumstances. More often than not, the people she would tell at bars were those she thought to be potential clients. Depending on their reaction, and if she felt safe around them, she would leave them with her contact numbers. Others who were not potential clients, would ask routine questions about sex work, or would then ignore her all together. Annalise humorously told me that she would rather be ignored than asked routine questions. However, it was not their reactions she was primarily concerned about, but rather
their ability to recognize her or share her information with someone else. And even amidst all the precautions taken, Annalise assured me that there is still a great level of stress associated with the fear of her son finding out (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).

Similar to Annalise, both Sylvia and Wendy do not disclose their professions and are concerned that if their children know about their profession, it could result in their children telling others and, in turn, could cause their children to face ridicule. According to these women, the stigmatization, the constant stereotyping and the discrimination of sex workers on a larger scale is what prevents the women from sharing their profession with their children and their families.

Wendy: I don’t tell them, but because I am in the media a lot, there is that risk he will find out. Which also played a key role in me not getting him back. Because they thought “she’s not likely to leave the profession behind… because she’s speaking out about it… I am speaking out against violence… but for some reason that is endorsing the profession. What kind of environment am I bringing the child into if I think sex work is morally acceptable? Does it really differ [than other non-sex worker parent’s environments]?

Sylvia: I find it different… I don’t think that when my children are older… I don’t think that it’s something I would tell them right now because they’ll bring it into the day care. I don’t really say anything right now, but when they’re older, I don’t think I will be that secretive about it, because I am a really open person. But at the same time, I find I am a very different parent. Some people have issues with some of the things I do, whereas…. But I think I learned that from my own mother who wasn’t a sex worker… I mean I will have a bath with my children, or I walk around naked in front of them, and I don’t think that has anything to do with the fact that I am a sex worker, but I am just really free with my body. Some people just don’t approve of it, I mean I have a boyfriend right now, and he doesn’t think I should just always walk around naked in front of my kids. But your naked body is a natural thing, as long as you are not doing anything wrong to the child, or doing anything out of the norm.

Wendy: Perhaps it could foster respect for a woman’s body? Firstly, it’s important for them to respect women, before you know; you tell them about selling your body.

Sylvia: My kids see me naked all the time, and my partner says “What are you doing?” I said when you make the female body and sex taboo that’s when problems occur [referring to a previous conversation on sexual violence]…

Sylvia: It’s because of the way society views sex work… society views it horribly. Right now he may not understand it [the industry and the stigmatization], but in the future he will. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)
To this end, Sylvia agreed with Wendy that when her son is older and more capable of understanding the position of sex work within society and the embedded nature of the profession, she may admit her involvement to him. Niki also contemplated the repercussions of her child finding out about her profession. But unlike Sylvia, Wendy and Annalise, Niki appeared to be more concerned what her child would think of her, then how others would treat her child.

Niki: She doesn’t really know, at least I don’t think. But if she does I am afraid what she’ll think of her mother. She’ll probably think that I wasn’t good enough to go out and get a real job. So I don’t want her to find out. (Interview 10: 09/18/2006).

Moreover, Niki was as equally concerned with her mother discovering her profession as she was her child finding out. Niki, like Annalise goes to great lengths to hide her profession. She does so by pretending that she has money problems and woes at work to reflect what she believes other people with ‘real jobs’ often complain about. She tells her friends and family that she is a massage therapist and insists that, at times, she is broke. This is simply not the case, she assured me, as she often comes home with $600 a night when working at the escort agency and usually between $600 and $1200 when working independently. While Niki does not necessarily consider this “white lie,” as she described it, a point of stress, she does wish she could be more open and honest with her family and friends. However, she remains secretive for fear of their judgement. She does so because her parents are “sexually conservative” and “quite religious” and would be “appalled” with her choice of profession. (Interview 10: 09/18/2006).

As Niki explained it, if you are uncomfortable talking to your parents about your sex life then why, she argues, would “you want to tell them about your work life which also serves as a part of your sex life?” (Interview 10: 09/18/2006). From the women interviewed who maintain relationships with their parents (or are still in contact with them), none of them have shared their profession with their parents. For all participants with the exception of Sylvia, their parents lived...
outside of the city in which they practice. And as all the women seemed to agree, being separated by distance from their parents certainly makes for an easier working life. However, as Christy shared with me, simply living in a different city does not eliminate the threat and stress of your parents or family discovering your occupation. Rather, the double life and the need to keep her professional life secret from her family affects the location of her work and sometimes makes getting to work or gaining new clients difficult (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).

Christy: I will not take calls in the apartment building that my sister works in, and I get calls from there often because it is a middle to upper class building. (Interview 7: 07/08/2006).

As Christy’s case shows, the fear of being discovered by one’s family or loved ones constricts potential business and clients. The women must be cautious of the times and ways in which they communicate with potential clients, where and how they choose to advertise and where they practice.

Niki also fears that she will be discovered by her family, and in particular, she fears that one day she will get a call from one of her father’s friends. As such, Niki’s client screening process includes a list of several questions that she asks over the phone. This is possible because the majority of Niki’s business comes from her advertisement in the yellow pages. These questions are aimed at weeding out anyone that would associate with her father or be friends with her family. Niki asks questions such as: what church do you attend (if applicable)? Where are you from? What is your age? While she has not yet had a close encounter, she argues that if her parents find out, it will most certainly estrange their relationship with her and/or it will embarrass them in front of their friends. The fear of her parents finding out, forces Niki to lie to her dearest friends, even those whom she thinks would be supportive of her decision to work within the sex industry. (Interview 10: 09/18/2006).
Other women who use the internet to gain clients protect themselves from discovery with a screening process that is done via e-mail. The lists of questions appear to be uniquely their own and can be found on their websites. If you would like to be called back by the women (as their phone numbers are rarely listed on the website) then you follow the procedures, fill out the form and e-mail it in. These questions, as some of the women explained to me, are a safety measure meant to weed out undesirable clients, but are also intended to exclude anyone from using their services that could somehow disclose their profession to those they do not want knowing about it.

Unlike the majority of the women interviewed, Mistress Patricia’s commitment not to share her profession with others was less based on the consequences for others (such as children or parents), and was more about the reactions she personally received when she shared this information:

Mistress Patricia: The thing is, if you let people know what you do then you open yourself up to discrimination. You make yourself vulnerable. Who knows, someone who doesn’t like what you do may try to make you move out of your home, or may throw advances at you making you feel so uncomfortable that you move out on your own. So it really doesn’t pay to tell people what you do.” (Interview 9: 05/06/2006).

Intimate Relationships:

Interestingly, the shame and secrecy that shadows family relationships and relationships with strangers does not seem to carry over into the participant’s intimate partnerships or relationships in all cases. Some of the women interviewed who felt that it was necessary to hide their profession from their children and their parents did not think the same way about disclosing their profession to their partners. For example, Wendy told me that her boyfriend loves what she does. She has complete control over it, but he admires and is turned on by her choice of work. Because of this she was able to involve him in her sex work and has sex with him in front of a regular client for five hundred dollars an interaction. The regular client does not touch her or him but instead masturbates
while watching Wendy and her boyfriend have sexual intercourse. Wendy argues that disclosing her profession to her boyfriend gives her a greater amount of freedom as she does not have to constantly take precautionary steps to prevent her partner from finding out (Interview 1: 03/05/2006).

Fascinatingly, three of the fifteen women interviewed have current partners who were former clients. In fact, Christy’s current live-in partner of ten years was a former client. At first, Christy’s partner was nervous of her continuation with sex work because he feared that she would meet someone else and fall in love with them, as she had him. To make him feel more comfortable, Christy invited her partner to observe an engagement with a client, and at this point she told me that: “[He was] never worried again because he saw how much I take it as a job and how professional I am” (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).

While Christy was considerate of her partner’s emotions about her involvement with the industry, she assured me that her personal relationship never really had much effect on her decision to continue working as a sex worker. In fact, Christy was proud to say that staying in the industry, or leaving the industry, was entirely her choice and the decision to stay within the industry after she started her relationship was made without the influence of her partner (Interview 2: 03/27/2006). In general, the women tended to be very proud that their partners had little say in their continuing involvement or retirement from the sex industry. This is perhaps because the women I interviewed were independents, and thus, unlike other sex workers, refused to work for a pimp, or agency. To this end, they were proud to make decisions without the influence or overarching demands of others. Their independent decision making, with regards to their professional lives, tended to be a source of pride amongst the women. In fact, Christy informed me that the money that she generates as a sex worker is a primary source of income for her household. Because of this, she told me with a laugh, her live-in partner has no right to say much about it at all (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).
Niki is also intimately involved with a former client. When asked how this relationship developed and how she found the transition, she humorously told me that the only part that was difficult was deciding when he had to no longer pay for sex. Niki did, however, speak to me of some of the difficulties that exist in crossing over from client to partner relationships. For instance, Niki’s relationship is a fairly new one and her partner insists that she does not disclose her profession to any of his friends or family. When I asked Niki if his request made her feel ashamed, she quickly answered no. In fact, she informed me that she understands his concern and knows that he personally does not have a negative judgment of what she does. She tells me that she knows this because he pursued her after the first date/encounter. If he thought less of sex workers, or did not respect them, then he would have only continued seeing her as a sex worker and would have left their exchanges at that. In this sense, then, Niki is extremely empathetic of her boyfriend’s concerns especially since she is highly aware of the societal stigma associated with sex work. (Interview 10: 09/18/2006).

Others believe that there is a level of unspoken rules for professional engagement. As Sylvia explains, “everything I do is work, work, work, work …work that produces money.” Sylvia does not want her partners involved in her sex work or to even know of what she does. She argues that this would only confuse things and would risk the children or her family finding out with a slip of the tongue or an innocent remark and would cause considerable strain on their relationship. Sylvia does not believe that sharing these personal details and her secret professional life with her husband will bring her closer to him, rather she believes that the more people that know about her profession, the more likely something will slip and someone she does not want to know will find out (Interview 1: 03/05/2006).

In sum, because of these women’s independent status and the societal stigma of sex work, the aspects of the industry which the women highly value are those of privacy and autonomy. Out of
concern for their children and out of a need to protect themselves and their families from harassment, the women take great measures to ensure that their professions remain discrete.

_Fear of Losing One’s Children:_

Efforts to conceal one’s sex worker identity are also based on the fear that discovery of the profession will lead to a separation of mother and child, or a removal of the child from the home. Many of the women interviewed fear being judged negatively by the courts or government agency in child custody and/or protection cases because of the assumption that they are incapable of providing a safe home for their children. Similarly, sex workers interviewed by Weiner reported that their “greatest fear is that of being investigated by a social service agency and having their children taken away” (1996: 97).

There is nothing in either the Ontario Child Welfare Act or the Alberta Child Welfare Act which specifically states that children whose mothers are sex workers should be removed from their homes. And unless a parent’s involvement in the sex industry substantially affects the best interests of his or her child, courts are not to take that person’s profession into account when determining custody or access. However, as Weinberg makes clear, one feature of the Best Interests Standard, employed in most custody and access disputes, is the imposition of the standard of “fitness to the mother in a demonstration of appropriate feelings and behaviour” (2004: 86). These expectations of the mother, hinging on the broadly interpreted term “appropriate,” cause this standard to be contradictory in its application and nearly impossible to implement without bias. As Weinberg shows, Social Services and Children’s Aid all have divergent requirements on how a mother should behave (2004: 86). And more often than not, it appears that an individual’s participation in the sex industry is interpreted as inappropriate behaviour for a guardian. As Pivot Legal Society makes clear, “in cases where a parent or relative is engaged in sex work, the courts
have taken this into account as a potentially ‘undesirable’ factor affecting that person’s right to custody or access” (PLS, 2007: 42). This bias is made evident by the following access case:

In N.F. v. H.L.S., the B.C. Supreme Court overturned the lower court’s decision to allow a grandmother who worked as an escort to have access to her seven-year-old grandchild. The Supreme Court found that the mother of the child had the right as the child’s custodian to make moral decisions regarding the child’s upbringing, including denying access to the grandmother for as long as she remained active as a sex worker. The case went to the Court of Appeal which upheld this decision on the ground that the grandmother bore the onus of proving that her access was in the best interests of the child, rather than the mother having the onus of establishing that access was contrary to the child’s best interest (PLS, 2007: 206).

In this particular access case, the grandmother’s profession was taken as just cause for preventing her access to her grand child. In protection cases, on the other hand, parent-child separation hinges even more so on questions of appropriate behaviour of the parent. Since parent-child separation in these cases is up to the discretion of the case worker, personal interpretations of sex work as appropriate or inappropriate behaviour can play a large role, therefore leaving a lot of room for personal prejudice, opinion or discrimination (Weinberg, 2004: 85).

Two of the women interviewed had their children removed from their care and believe that they faced discrimination from social services and/or law enforcement on the basis of their professions. Wendy, for example, had her son taken away by child protection services at five years old. According to Wendy, this was due to the fact that it was discovered that she was a sex worker and was at the time, between homes.

Wendy: So they [Children’s Aid Services] came over the next day, and of course I didn’t come home, and they started asking questions, about my lifestyle, if I have a disruptive lifestyle, you know constantly working at night or something. And that I was a sex worker, so they started giving me a hard time about being a sex worker and they took my son away from me and put him in foster care. So I quit sex work to get a straight job, and I lost my apartment, because I couldn’t afford my apartment anymore because I was working for minimum wage. And I ended up becoming homeless, working for different shelters and what not. They kept using that against me. So when I did finally get housing, that’s after I started working at Street Help, where I work now 40 hours a week, they
kept using that against me. This was probably a year and a half later, two years later, we were in the court case and they kept saying what if she goes back to working as a sex worker. I had an employer saying that “she’s been working at street help for a year now” and blah blah blah. A year and they’re asking you, what if, who is to say that a sex worker is not a good mother?

Sylvia: I work with abused women right, and a lot of people face abuse, and they have a protocol, that they will take children away from women that have a cycle of abuse, because the next relationship they get in will be abusive. So they take a lot of children away based on the next relationships. So they take children away on what the mother may do because of past experiences and pas personality traits. They leave no room for change.

Wendy: That’s exactly one of those questions they asked me, if you had a bad call one night that would look after your child? The babysitter!

Sylvia: Well what would happen if I was robbed at a convenience store?!

Wendy: Well that’s exactly what I say, that’s been my thing too, I always say, the part of my body that I use to work is just like any other part of my body... you know, my hand, my mind, my mouth. I would never work at (illegible) mine because I don’t want to get emphysema. I would never work at a nuclear power plant because I don’t want to get cancer. To me the risks of doing sex work and getting HIV or Hepatitis C are the same as working as a cop and getting shot every night

Sylvia: It’s the moral standard in society. That’s what makes it risky.

Wendy: It’s up to me which parts of my body do I value. I would never sell my mind or my soul, but I would never sell my body

Sylvia: Then they brought it up to me “what if your child found out about your work as a sex worker?”

Wendy: CAS would call me up, saying “we saw you in the newspaper…” and then they would take another hair sample off me, every time they saw me, even though it was only about sex work law in the paper. They were testing for drug use, but they would try to connect me to it. The assumptions were obvious. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

While Wendy’s son was in foster care she could see him regularly, but since he has been placed with adoptive parents, the parents have decided to have these rights relinquished. She believes that this is due, in large part, because they know she is a sex worker and a sex workers’ rights activist. As Wendy explains:

Wendy: When I put my son up for adoption, legally there is no such thing as open adoption in Canada. When I asked the parents if I could see my son, they said ok, once a week you can see your
child. That’s when they didn’t know I was a sex worker, so like one week later, they were watching
CTV, and they saw a show I was on. “Wendy [last name], Wendy [last name], current sex worker”
all my visits were cancelled. Last week CAS called me up to tell me how my son was doing. They
said they have never had a child take this long to adjust to their new family. He won’t adjust. He’s 7
when they adopted him; he wasn’t a two year old. He’s hurting himself; he bangs his head off the
wall, he throws stuff in the fire place. He hurts himself. When I raised him I had to put a helmet on
him the whole time, and now he’s acting out again. He threw his sweater in the fire recently. He
wanted to know why his Mom abandoned him, why his mom doesn’t love him anymore. And I kept
telling him, when he was taken away, that I loved him that this wasn’t his fault. But he didn’t
understand, all he saw was his mom saying good bye to him, mommy doesn’t want him anymore.
And now he says “daddy doesn’t want him anymore, that’s why daddy left me.” His first foster
mother let him go, because she couldn’t handle a disabled child… left him, so there goes another
person. The next foster family that he found that loved him let him go up for adoption, so now he is
upset… He’s only 7 and he had to put up with 5 people abandoning him in his life. Well not really
abandoning him. The mom is the only one that really didn’t, I’ll see him but they won’t allow me to
see him. I keep telling them, won’t it be beneficial if I can see him? Wouldn’t it be if I just told them
that I didn’t abandon him, but they will not they will not. Wouldn’t that help the little boy, but they
don’t want him anywhere near me. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

The removal and separation from her son has caused her emotional pain, sadness and anger.
Fiona, while not speaking in great length about the apprehension of her child, spoke of how she felt
she lost “her identity” in the struggle (Interview 13: 02/08/2007). In need of emotional support
Wendy has talked to other women who have had their children taken away and she believes that this
a common phenomena.17 Because of the numbers of women that have this problem, Wendy wants to
start a group called “Mother’s Without Children.” This group would essentially provoke debates on
the question of the ‘unfit’ mother and the moral regulation of sex work. It is Wendy’s hope that such
a group could show that sex workers are like many other mothers, who struggle with common
parenting issues, but are not afforded the same assistance as other mothers and therefore also have a
political struggle (Interview 1: 03/05/2006).

Parents, like Wendy, who feel they have unjustly faced the removal of a child or children,
through the application of various provincial child welfare acts, do have certain rights under the
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As Pivot Legal Society makes clear, a
Parent whose child has been apprehended has the right to legal information, to be represented by a lawyer, and to know about the court process and the options available, as well as the consequences of any court decisions or actions. Also, parents have the right to due process and to make a complaint about unfair procedures (2007: 209).

Wendy is now seeking legal advice and assessing her alternatives to getting her son back. However, because parent child separation cases are on a case by case basis and leave the decision of apprehension to the case worker, and because the legal system does not recognize sex work as a legitimate profession, there is little assurance that the common misconceptions and stereotypes about sex work that Wendy feels caused the removal of her son from her home, will not manifest themselves in Wendy’s ensuing legal battles.

Common stereotypes of sex workers which may come to influence the decision makers in these cases include the myth that all sex workers are sexually abused, drug addicted, diseased and infected, verbally abusive and immoral. And because of the highly regarded theory of the “cycle of abuse” which circulates freely in policy discourse, many scholars and others often assume that the children of sex workers will be more prone to sexual exploitation, confused sexuality, low self-esteem and limited opportunities (Sloss et. al., 2004: 105). However there is limited research to indicate the truth of the cycle of abuse as it relates to sex workers and their children. Many of the common perceptions of sex workers are simply stereotypes, and even if they ring true for certain individuals, there is little evidence to predict if their children would necessarily show the same patterns. Indeed, the life of a child is determined by many interwoven cultural factors, such as social environment, physical facilities, opportunities for socialization etc. And as Jayasaree makes clear:

sometimes children facing many difficulties in their situation develop better survival skills and they may have more reflexive capability. On the contrary, many overprotected schooled children may have less coping skills. But the specific problems of children of sex workers like the shame they feel when others despise them, ostracisation from the other community, etc., should not be overlooked (Jayasaree, 2000: 1).
As such, considering each case individually, and with sensitivity towards the stigmatized nature of sex work potentially avoids the tendency to make sweeping generalizations about the parenting capabilities of sex workers. I avoid making the argument that sex workers are either good or bad parents for two reasons. Firstly, the ages of the children in my sample make it difficult to predict the opportunities that will be harnessed in the future or their future mental well-being. Secondly, such a judgment would be wrought with its own assumptions (what exactly is a good mother anyway?) Chapter 5 makes recommendations with regards to these common assumptions and misconceptions during child custody and access cases.

Despite the tendency of scholars to delve into the moral and philosophical discussions about sex workers and the moral personal aptitude of the sex worker, I argue that it is important to resist this and focus on what the occupation of sex worker can do for a mother and how being a sex work either assists or impedes her own perception of her ability to effectively parent. The question becomes, do the women find their job a satisfying source of income for their families? How so? And how does their occupation affect their parenting capabilities?

**Sex Work as a Potentially Good Job:**

All of the participants expressed grievances with sex work, but reported that they generally enjoy their jobs and find it rewarding. Indeed, the sex industry offers women all the rewards and insults, profits and loss like any other industry. As Ruth Frost, a striptease artist in London makes clear:

Many workers in different industries may love their work but battle day-to-day with the conditions under which they do that work. For example, when a schoolteacher says ‘I have too many pupils per class, I have too much paperwork to do, our school doesn’t have enough money, but I ultimately love my work and find it rewarding,’ they are celebrated and respected for their passion in their work despite the difficult conditions. Because many people do not believe sex workers can genuinely enjoy their work, the positive experiences workers may have are often ignored (2005: 8).
Many of the women interviewed felt that there certainly could be changes made to improve their working conditions, yet also explained to me exactly why they consider it a good job. While not all of these benefits are generalizable to all forms of escort work, one of the most cited benefits is the good pay.

It has been argued that because of sex work’s illegal nature it is considered a higher risk profession and arguably elicits a greater pay off (Moffatt and Peters, 2004: 11). As is shown in an economic analysis of sex work in the UK, “prostitutes typically earn more than twice the typical earnings of non-manual workers, and more than three times that of manual workers” (Moffat and Peters, 2004: 11). And as several of the participants I interviewed informed me, sex work is the highest paying work experience they have ever had. Other benefits that were listed included the flexible hours, the ability to profit from one’s exhibitionism or unique sexuality and feelings of contribution to community.

For Wendy, the loss of her son has not coincided with a desire to stop sex work and nor does she believe that it should. Rather, like others in the sample, Wendy believes that sex work provides well for a family and the flexibility of the job allows for a greater amount of time spent with her child. In fact, all of the participants agreed that their lifestyles were adequate for providing the best emotional and physical care possible for their children.

Amee: Other people have mentioned to me that sex work is actually beneficial to being a parent… you are making more money and you are flexible.

Wendy: When I had my child I felt so good, because I was able to give him everything I could never get. He couldn’t ride horses, but I would pay for him to go on pony rides, he wasn’t old enough to go for lessons, he was only like 2 and 3. But I would take him horseback riding, I went to Humber college for that, for equestrian studies. So every weekend we had a special trip, like the Ronde, the Science Center, like whatever… when I was on welfare or that minimum wage job I wasn’t able to do anything like that… I couldn’t do that, I used to say… well let’s go the park… Yeah, like I am working 7 am-5pm \(^{18}\), and then I am going to come back and make dinner and rest my poor feet. You know, no! And no, here it was my schedule was around him. Saying “Mom I don’t want you to work
tomorrow… because it’s going to be play day…or whatever.” As a sex worker, I would say I am not going to work tomorrow then, fine, let’s not do it, let’s do what you want to do.

Sylvia: I’ve always been a sex workers rights advocate, even when I wasn’t an advocate, even when I didn’t know how to advocate, I always thought of sex work as a positive. Looking at my first child that I had, I provided for him way more than I did my second child, because at that point, when I had my second child, I wasn’t in sex work anymore. And I was, like I said, I was working in a part time job in social services, I was on every subsidy possible because I was low income and I had two kids with no fathers. You know what I mean, so it was very difficult. I know there were sometimes, when I was crying, because I was working as a social worker, giving people free diapers and free formula and not having diapers and formula for myself and my children. It was just really difficult, because as a social worker, you have to understand, you have to understand you can’t go to the same food bank that you’re clients go to, because there is a stigma, there is a conflict of interest. When I did sex work, there was nothing I was ever needy for, except for emotional support, from any man.

As soon as I became pregnant I became dependent on my husband, for support because I was pregnant, like I said before, that’s when he became abusive and controlling. I was very depressed. That’s when I lost my self esteem. It’s not when I was doing sex work that I lost my self esteem it was after when I was not controlling my own income. You know?

Wendy: Most people that I know, I grew up with sex workers my whole life, they were all child prostitutes, we would always try straight jobs. But we would end up going back to sex work, because the straight jobs were always minimum wage… and sex work definitely isn’t. So a lot of us just went right back into it. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

For Annalise, working as a sex worker has also enabled her to provide her son with the things she was never able to when she was working a secretarial job. However, the greatest thing that her job has provided her, Annalise assures me, is her confidence. And this is the greatest gift she can give her son because he “doesn’t have to worry about me anymore” (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).

According to Barnett, the job satisfaction expressed by these women carries over into their relationships with their children. Barnett examined the interaction between job satisfaction and parenting and argued that women with jobs that they found rewarding were protected from the negative mental-health effects of troubled relationships with their children (1992: 2). Her findings suggest mechanisms by which employed mothers reap a mental-health advantage from juggling two or more roles, even when some of those roles are stressful (Barnett, 1992: 18). Therefore, the
women’s overall satisfaction with their jobs presumably has a positive effect on their relationship with their children and allows for more effective parenting.

Sarah, on the other hand, believes that while sex work is a good job, it has nothing to do with your ability to parent. According to Sarah, it doesn’t make parenting easier or harder, rather it’s all about the individual; I have seen girls that are great parents and some that just aren’t. I told someone else this. I saw all this even when I worked at a day care. It doesn’t matter what you do for a living. (Interview 14: 07/27/2007).

At the same time, she argues that mothers who are sex workers should not be assumed to be bad parents.

Each of the women voiced that they are extremely protective of their children, reluctant to speak highly of the sex industry and are doing their best to provide their children with as many opportunities as possible. What really harms the relationship between the children and their mothers is the shame surrounding the profession, the lack of respect for sex workers and the ostracism of the mothers by social workers and the community. Thus the real battle lies in eradicating the discrimination and stigmatization of mothers that are engaged in sex work.

By virtue of their socio-economic position, many sex workers face a degree of discrimination and stigmatization that can negatively affect their parenting capabilities and pose obstacles to their parenting potential. It is important to understand these obstacles, because as The National Council for Family Relations’ (NCFR) Effective Mothering Family Policy Recommendations asserts, it is only when we know the barriers that mothers face at the individual, community and societal levels that they may be overcome and mothers become enabled to more effectively support and affirm their children (NCFR Policy Brief, 2003: 4).

Barrier: Stigmatization and Discrimination:
There can be severe emotional consequences of stigmatization, and as many of the women interviewed demonstrate they are to some degree negatively affected by their social status. Indeed, many of the women I interviewed had internalized the discrimination of sex workers. Sylvia, who defends the career choices she has made, also explains how the ostracism has made her second guess her own self worth:

But with my kids, I think it’s more an internal, what’s the word for it, I felt guilty, like an internal guilt… the fact that I leave them with ahhh… I think it’s society’s view on sex work, because like when I leave with my parents and I got into a 12 hour shift at a shelter I don’t feel guilty, right. Like I feel a little tinge of guilt, because of whatever. But if I go into a sex worker shift I feel extra guilty right? Like I feel like “Oh my god I am leaving my kids because I am doing this and not this.” But realistically I’ve realized that, I focus on the fact that I am really put bread on their table. And I don’t have an issue with it. I think it’s really about society, and how they view sex work and demonize women. And the fact that, women are seen as (illegible) because they sell sex, but it’s really men that want to buy sex. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

Where other women within the industry may justify their work and can even appear to be proud of there job choice, Sylvia seemingly questions the morality of her choices and relates this to her role as a mother (Interview 1: 03/05/2006). As Weiner argues, this internationalization of stigma is not only emotionally damaging but can prevent the women from returning to more ‘legitimate’ occupations in the future, or prevent them from associating with non sex-workers (1996: 101).

The Consequences of the Double Life:

While some of the women argued that they were not bothered by discrimination and expressed several personal justifications for their job choices, the need to remain secretive of their occupation because of social stigma, causes undue stress for these mothers. There are several
consequences of the secrecy that the stigmatization forces upon these women. As Sanders makes clear:

Psychological strain and stress of sex work in relation to emotional work and labour has begun to be documented in prostitution studies. Responding to the needs of others, in both a physically and emotionally demanding job, can produce specific occupational health issues that have not been considered because of the illegitimacy afforded sex work in prohibition schemes (2007: 87).

Similar to Sloss et. al., the participants in my sample shared feelings of anxiety when working because they feared that their children, parents, or others close to them would find out about them working through other sources, such as police officers or service providers (2002: 335). Moreover, because of the fear of being discovered, women were less likely to access services for sex work, get prenatal care, seek child support or make reports to police. This, in turn, causes the women to be more vulnerable both physically and in their alienation from services.

Firstly, it was discovered that in order to avoid potential run-ins with family members, many of the women will take work in remote neighborhoods far away from where they or family members live. As Sylvia explained to me, she only takes calls in downtown Toronto which is far from the suburb where both her parents and her children live. She does not tell her parents or children the truth about where she is going, telling them instead that she is “at her boyfriend’s” or working late. She admits to abusing substances when working and mentions that the distance between home and workplace is dangerous because she often “must drive home intoxicated afterwards or pay for a hotel”. In cases like Sylvia’s, where no one is aware of her whereabouts and where she must make her way across long distances when sometimes intoxicated, efforts to hide one’s profession can potentially increase a sex worker’s vulnerability to physical harm. 22 This risky behavior is what causes Sylvia to limit her sex work and partially exit the industry (she still maintains her regular customers, but no longer advertises).
Sylvia: Like I said, the only way that sex work has affected my parenting, or my sex work, is that I’ve become more careful. I stopped sex work [as her full time job because she still takes regular clients]. And realistically, I’ll be very honest, I stopped sex work because I used to drive to work. And I am a user, I am an alcohol user, and I felt bad because I said I have two kids that are at home and I don’t want to drink and drive on the way home and that was realistically the thing that ended it. I am in a rural area and I had to drive very far. I used to get a driver, which used to cost me 100 dollars each way, so 200 bucks a night, which means I would have to do one or two tricks before I even got any money to bring home. I so I used to drive, and I said, once I had my kids I couldn’t justify the fact of me getting into a drunk driving accident. And I think I’ve always tried to live on the right side of the law. Because I didn’t want my kids to get taken away so I always had a real job to back me up somehow. Even if it was only 10-15 hours a week, and like the sex work and drinking, waking up with a hangover used to interfere with my real job. I think that’s where it got curbed. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

At the same time, where the secrecy may force one into compromising situations, as it did for Sylvia, being a mother has also caused some women to make safer or more cautious choices. Some participants reported that being mothers caused them to be more cautious while on the job and more discriminatory in their selection of dates. If they thought that a customer could be dangerous or a police officer, they were more likely to reject his offer because of their responsibility as mothers.

The following excerpt, taken from Sarah’s interview, also illustrates this point:

Anything doesn’t really go anymore. I try to keep myself safe today. Because I do have some other… something else to live for. You know. I try to make decisions that won’t affect them or will affect them on a positive level….A decision of just whether or not to go with that client or not. You know. When a, when you’re a loner, you go. You know. When you have other people to think about, and when you’re thinking about your safety also, you turn, you tend to second guess. (Interview 14: 07/27/2007).

Mistress Patricia echoed Sarah’s sentiments:

First, you got to be very, very, very selective and very careful in what you do, and very discrete. I’m not gonna go with just any old body [now that I have children]. It’s not just about you and a buck anymore. (Interview 9: 05/06/2006).

Stigmatization Makes Sex Workers Less Likely To Access Services That Do Exist:
In spite of the safer choices that sex workers may make due to mothering responsibilities, there are still several obstacles that are unique to sex workers in their parenting. Several researchers have observed that sex workers’ fears of being discovered, and the constant discrimination and prejudice they face when they access services, prevents them from accessing needed services or legal protection (Perkins and Bennett, 1985; Shedlin and Oliver, 1993; Sloss, 2002; Weiner, 1996, Sloss et. al., 2003). As Weiner makes clear, sex workers are unlikely or at least less likely to approach agencies for help in raising their children or are reluctant to seek prenatal care or medical attention because they fear that they will be arrested, and/or that their children will be removed from their care upon disclosure of their profession (1996: 102). This reluctance can have dangerous outcomes, as poor prenatal care increases the risk of birth defects, infant mortality, premature birth and/or nutritional deficiencies for the child (Weiner, 1996: 102). Similarly, Dalla’s research (2002) argues that even if sex workers were granted access to certain provisions that other workers have and that they currently do not, they may potentially feel uncomfortable using them because of stigmatization and/or discrimination, may lack information on the benefits or access to such services, or would be unable to use them because of their non traditional work schedules.

None of the participants I interviewed refused to seek prenatal care on the basis of discrimination or stigmatization, although several of the women informed me that they simply did not disclose of their occupations to health care professionals in order to avoid discrimination. Fiona, for example, refuses to admit to health care professionals that she is a sex worker so she can “save herself a lecture.” She does not tell the Doctor she is seeing that she is a sex worker, because she believes she has heard safe sex lectures too many times from either a “judgmental Doctor or a pervert” (Interview 13: 02/08/2007).
Similarly, Aelishcia found it difficult to obtain understanding, professional medical help because of her occupation. As she explains in a written letter I received:

I feel this is an area where there needs to be assistance in a safe and non-judgmental way. When I first became pregnant I knew that even though I was careful I was at risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). I felt like I did not have anywhere to turn for advice or to counsel me through this process. At the beginning of both my pregnancies I asked for a thorough check up from my doctor. Both times my doctor dismissed my concerns and said that many of the tests I asked for where not necessary because she assumed that I was in a monogamous relationship and I had just gotten tested 6 months ago. I felt very uncomfortable trying to push for some of the tests. I did not feel that I could be honest because of fear of CAS involvement. Women need prenatal groups and access to an open and safe environment to discuss the very real probabilities such as STIs; possible effects of using before you know you are pregnant. I know that many women stay silent because they are afraid. Not only does this put the woman and fetus at risk it takes the joy out of the pregnancy. (Interview 12: 01/26/006).

In a decriminalized environment, it is hoped that health care professionals would be given the appropriate training so as to prevent these women from feeling alienated by the very services whose purpose it is to assist them. Furthermore, upon decriminalization, it is hoped that the discrimination and stigmatization which currently exists and which obviously serves to further alienate these women, would diminish over time, and that the women would engage in less risky behaviour in order to avoid detection and would feel more comfortable accessing services.

As is evident, stigmatization and discrimination, cause a great degree of stress for these women and prevents many of them from using necessary supports and services. It is necessary that we understand or at least pay attention to these barriers and make efforts to eradicate them if we are to help these women in their efforts to be positive parents.

**Barriers: Lack of Societal Support:**

There are other barriers that the women site, which may also hinder their ability to effectively parent. In an interesting comparison of sex work to other forms of work, Satz argues that “the net social costs of sex work are greater than the net social costs incurred by the sale of other human
capacities.” (1995: 68) There are heavy individual social costs (societal stigmatization) associated with working as a sex worker, such as the potential loss of social services, removal of children and termination of parental rights, expulsion from social support systems such as family or church, rape or other violence and arrest. Contrary to one of my own preconceptions, in face of these difficulties, sex workers in the escort sector do not form a community of support for each other. From the interviews it became clear that the relationships between sex workers are characterized more so by competition for business than by mutual support or assistance. When I asked Annalise if she found support in other sex workers, or if she had friends within the community that helped her when she was having difficult parenting, I was abruptly told “no.” When I asked why that is the case, I was told that other women within the industry are more competition to each other than anything else. None of her friends outside of the sex industry knew of her profession and although she told me that they often gave her advice on certain parenting issues, it was difficult to only give them part of the story when asking them for assistance (Interview 2: 03/27/2006).

This could help explain why most of the women interviewed reported to be “doing it [parenthood] alone,” signifying a severe lack of trust between women in the industry and between others with similar employment. All of the women interviewed felt solely responsible for the care of their children. And with the exception of one woman (Sylvia), the women received little to no help from family or friends in the care of their children.

When looking for support the women were not any more likely to turn to the biological father’s of the children. None of the women interviewed currently receive any kind of financial, emotional or parental support from the father’s of their children. When I asked Sylvia and Sarah whether or not the fathers of their children give financial or parental support, Sylvia told me “I don’t talk to him anymore” and Sarah, laughing, said “no” (Interview 14: 07/27/2007). When I asked
Sylvia and Wendy why they do not pursue child support arrangements, they argued that doing so risks bringing the legal system into their lives more than it is already. And the more people that are in their lives, they argue, the more judgments they risk and the more potential there is to be seen as an unfit parent (Interview 1: 03/05/2006). None of the women had or currently sought child support payments or went through custody battles with the biological father of their children. As mentioned in the NCFR policy recommendations for effective mothering, a lack of support from the father of the children, in care taking and financial matters compounds the difficulties of lone parenting. The NCFR Brief argues that “a mutually respectful and supportive relationship with their children’s father” is of primary importance in effective mothering.

Dalla also questioned the relationship that the women maintained or had with the biological father of the children. According to Dalla, many of the street level sex workers described scenarios in which they were impregnated by their tricks, referring to the children as “trick babies” (Dalla, 2002: 68). It was shown that children born from this relationship are stigmatized not only by society, but by the sex worker community alike (2002: 64). There was evidence of this discrimination within my interviews, as the women were adamant in telling me that their children came from outside work relationships and explicitly reported that there children were not “trick babies.” While not certain, it appears that all of the children of the women interviewed came from relationships outside of work, but not one woman reported receiving either financial or emotional support from the father of their children. However, since all of the women interviewed know the paternal identities of their children, we can assume that if the women were more comfortable using the court system and if it was shown to be less discriminatory towards sex work, they would be more likely to pursue some kind of child support arrangement. And as NCFR makes clear, child support and community and family
involvement is integral to achieving economic and emotional stability, and is key to empowering these women as effective mothers.

_Working Life:_

As I have shown, because of the social positioning of sex work, working as an escort may hinder one’s ability to parent. In this way, working within the sex industry has a strong affect on one’s familial and personal life. But what does this relationship look like in reverse? How does being a parent affect one’s ability to work effectively? When I asked the women to what extent their personal or familial life affected their work life, I was often answered in terms of profitability or desirability of the women themselves.

When I asked whether or not potential clients cared if the women had children or were in a relationship, I was told that the clients don’t seem to want to know about their outside lives, unless it fulfills their fantasies. Several of the women had clients who had asked them to “act married,” but gave little care to their personal lives. In addition, similar to Dalla’s research which reported that pregnancy itself constituted minimal disruption to the working lives of street sex workers, all of the women I interviewed also worked at some point during their pregnancy (2002: 192). They did so to maintain a steady level of income. It became obvious through the discussions with these women that their personal lives (especially when pregnant) directly affected their work lives, via their desirability and profitability. Both of which are directly related. As Sylvia explains:

When I got pregnant the first time was very difficult because all I had known for that whole time was sex work, working in bars like waitressing or whatever…and I was a sex worker at the time. I had no EI insurance or whatever, so what was I going to do? So I actually worked for about 3 months into my pregnancy. Like I was pulling tricks while I was pregnant. It was kind of awkward you know; anyone who has ever been pregnant knows that your body is different when you’re pregnant, it’s tender… you don’t feel right; you know…it’s the emotional aspect of it…

Amee: I heard something about, a woman I spoke to, said she was fearful…
Wendy: Yeah you don’t want to lose your baby...

Sylvia: During rough sex or whatever. I made way more money when I was pregnant, than ever…

Wendy: Oh yeah trust me. The Brass Rail and Zanzibar were fighting over me to see who could get me to dance, but I wouldn’t. I felt like it was exploiting my child if I did. It was my own personal belief. I didn’t dance, but I would go the bar, with my friends there, but they would beg me to work for them. ‘We need you to work for us we need you to work for us, you’re pregnant…’ These were guys that I worked for before that didn’t give a shit about my dancing before then, but all of a sudden I am pregnant.

Sylvia: Because you’re more feminine, you’re more voluptuous

Wendy: Yeah I am the prize pig. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

Unlike the majority of the sex workers in Dalla’s sample, who openly admitted to being heavy drug users and using drugs while pregnant and working, none of the women I interviewed considered themselves to be drug addicts or admitted to heavy drug usage. However, as Sylvia’s comment above illustrates, she did have a few glasses of wine during the early stages of her pregnancy while working. She argued that this is because she often feels the need to use while working. Had she not been working, in other words, she believes she would not have consumed alcohol while pregnant. Both Sylvia and Wendy considered whether their children’s learning disabilities and tempers may have resulted from their use of alcohol during pregnancy. Because of the tendency to use drugs or alcohol while working, refraining from working as a sex worker during pregnancy would have reduced the vulnerability of children whose parents are also sex workers (Interview 1: 03/05/2006).

Amongst the women interviewed there was a consensus that a woman should not have to work in sex work during pregnancy. But due to the lack of viable alternatives for sex workers, who essentially work illegitimately or as independent contractors, they have no access to maternity leave and other services provided to other long term or more legitimate workers such as employment insurance or other securities. As a result of financial necessity, these sex workers were forced to work throughout their pregnancies. Thus, a large area of concern for expectant sex workers is the status of their work, working conditions and the illegal nature of their work. There are significant negative aspects to working as a sex worker and a discussion of these problematic working conditions is not in conflict with support for recognizing sex work as a legitimate profession. Where
sex work may reap greater levels of pay than other forms of women’s work it is often the most marginalized of the marginalized female labour force for these reasons.

**Conclusion:**

As this chapter demonstrates, sex workers face unique stressors that pose barriers to their ability to effectively parent. Because of the fear of harassment, discrimination and/or parent child separation, many of these women take great lengths to be discreet about their professions and lead what they call the “double life”. As a result, the women report feeling alienated and isolated from social support networks and services that other mothers who are not sex workers may feel more comfortable using. Moreover, despite the fact that sex work can be considered a job that provides well for a family, sex work is discriminated against within both the legal and social services sector. As such, it is more difficult for these mothers to access fair, understanding and non judgmental services and this, in turn, impedes their ability to effectively parent.

This chapter also demonstrated the ways in which the lack of maternity leave and other employee protections forces many sex workers to have to work throughout their pregnancies. This causes undue stress to the women and poses not only a health risk to themselves, but also their unborn children. A more detailed discussion of the legal and social status of sex work will develop in the next chapter.
Chapter 3
Legal and Social Positioning of Escort Work

Not many people would disagree with the argument that lone parenting is difficult in most to all circumstances. However, there are contextual and environmental factors which make effective lone parenting more attainable for some parents, and not for others. For instance, the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) argues that effective mothering is only possible when mothers experience emotional, psychological and physical well being. Integral to a mother’s well being is “a just society that provides equal rights and access to quality institutions, goods and services. In the absence of equality… [all] mothers are expected to provide for their children even though they do not have the resources available to other mothers” (NCFR Policy Brief, 2002). Each of the women in this study felt that they did not have rights equal to other working parents. Moreover, the interviewees reported having less access to quality institutions, goods and services, or stated that they felt uncomfortable using them. To this end, all of the women interviewed agreed that they face more difficulty in achieving the levels of well being that are integral to effective parenting. Why is this? Why is it that the women interviewed feel they have less rights then other working parents? Why is it reportedly more difficult for sex workers to provide economic stability and security to their families? And in what ways can their situations be improved?

To answer these questions, this chapter will consider the current social and legal positioning of sex workers who are single mothers. It will do so with reference to the NCFR Policy Brief and Recommendations on Effective Mothering. It will demonstrate that because of the criminal nature of sex work, sex workers are not afforded the same protections and benefits as other workers and “are unable to access many protections offered under employment and labour laws” (PLS, 2007: 13).
After identifying the marginal legal and employee status of individual sex workers, I will link the demand for sex workers’ rights to the demand for contingent workers’ rights, arguing that sex work is one of the most marginalized forms of contingent or marginalized labour. In this sense, I will demonstrate that sex workers have a more difficult time, relative to other lone working mothers, in achieving both formal and informal supports which are integral to effective mothering.

This is an extension of Dalla’s argument (2004) that sex workers have more difficulty in parenting because they have more difficulty in achieving economic stability and supportive relationships. Unlike Dalla, however, I show that sex workers face more difficulty in parenting not because they are drug addicted and therefore have no financial stability, but because their legal and social positioning prevents them and their families from living securely and with rights, protections and benefits. These rights, protections and benefits are what best allow for the women to achieve economic stability. The absence of these rights, protections and benefits negatively affects their levels of well being, and ultimately their ability to effectively parent. As such, it will show that the current legal status of sex work which prohibits sex workers from being granted equal rights and protections relative to other workers, poses a considerable barrier to these women in their desire to be effective and supportive parents. And while decriminalization is one of the first steps in assisting these women in their roles as mothers, this chapter will also make the point that until this happens, organization amongst sex workers is paramount to their achieving rights as workers.

*Sex Work in Canada:*

Under Canadian law, the act of sex work is not illegal, but communicating in public for the purpose of buying or selling sexual services, as well as buying or attempting to buy sexual services of someone younger than 18, is (Bruckert et. al., 2003: 19). Furthermore, being found in a place maintained for sex work, and procuring or living off the avails of sex work are all criminal acts (Bruckert et. al., 2003: 19). As the Law Commission of Canada demonstrates: “Women working
the sex trades generally are vulnerable to charges of communicating for the purposes of sex work (code 213), procuring/living off the avails of sex work (code 212) or under the common bawdy house provisions (code 210)” (Bruckert et. al. 2003: 19). Such laws obviously create restrictions on employment in the sex industry and make it difficult for a sex worker to be recognized as a legitimate worker by the law. Moreover, under the current criminal laws, a number of federal and provincial laws and human rights protections are either inapplicable or irrelevant to the sex industry because of sex work’s partly criminalized status (Pivot Legal Society [PLS.], 2007: 01). However, before issues of municipal law, employment and labour law, income assistance and employment insurance, or income tax law can be addressed, the national Criminal Code must be repealed. Repealing the criminals laws related to prostitutes (ss. 210, 211, 212 (1), 212 (3) and 213) would, as Pivot Legal Society suggests, be the first critical step towards providing sex workers with access to the employment and labour protections that are generally afforded to workers under the laws of the Provinces and Canada (PLS, 2007: ii). I will now examine the differences between different types of escorts, and the ways in which these differences affect the women’s relationship with labour law and/or policies and their demands pre and post decriminalization.

_The Specificity of Escort Workers: Employment and Labour Standards_

The number of sex workers in Canada is unknown and there is a lack of definitive information about demographics within the industry. According to Pivot Legal Society “the existing evidence suggests that the majority of sex workers operate as independent escorts or in massage parlors; only a small percentage work at the street level” (2007: 16). As such, this project, which only addresses the experiences of escorts/out-call sex workers, can shed light on the current working and living conditions of many sex workers within Canada but may not speak to the needs of street
level workers. A definition of escort work is now required. I have borrowed Pivot Legal Society’s Description of escort/out-call workers which is as follows:

Some out-call sex workers are employed by agencies. Some out-call escort workers operate independently. In both cases, sex workers do out-calls, which means that they meet clients outside their workplace or home. Escort agencies are, for the most part, licensed businesses, whereas only some independent escorts are licensed. The common practice at agencies is to receive requests from clients and then send an escort to meet that client at an agreed upon location. Escort agencies are able to take some precautions to make working conditions safer, such as ensuring that each client gives their name to the agency along with the location where they will be meeting. Sometimes agencies provide the drivers or people who wait outside while an escort is with a client (PLS, 2007: 04).

There are many differences between working as an escort within an agency and working as an independent escort. These differences influence the women’s decision to work, or not work within an agency. In Edmonton, for instance, owners are required by the municipality to have a special business license to operate an escort agency. Independent escort workers, on the other hand, who operate outside of an agency, are required to have an independent license. The escort license for independents in Edmonton costs 1700 dollars\(^{26}\). These licenses are subject to a renewal fee every year and if a woman has a criminal record, she is prohibited from gaining a license to practice independently. For this reason, John Lowman considers the licensing scheme to be elitist (2000). Since escort work is proven to be safer than street level work (perhaps one reason accounting for the higher level of known escorts vs. street workers), then why is it only possible for those who can afford it and do not have a criminal record to work within a safer work environment? Secondly, such practices can limit sex workers’ ability to exit street level work and move to indoor work which is known to be safer. And thirdly, many women dislike the licensing scheme because it is a record of your participation in the sex industry. And while purported to be confidential, there is always the fear of its potential for disclosure. Those who refuse to get a license must operate without one and risk a fine of $2 500.
In Toronto, on the other hand, escort agencies are not municipally licensed but "body rub parlours" are.\textsuperscript{27} To become licensed as a body rub parlour costs the owner 820 dollars and each of the women working within it must be individually licensed. Fiona, a current sex worker, told me that the owners of these establishments often ask the women working within the agency to pay for their own license to operate within the agency (Interview 13: 02/08/2007). Independent escort licenses are not available in Toronto, yet this does not prevent Toronto from being widely known as a ‘hub’ for independent escort workers.\textsuperscript{28}

Independent escort workers and agency escorts also differ with regards to earnings. Independents are known to get a greater ‘cut’ than agency workers because they do not have to pay the agency. Several of the women I interviewed, for instance, worked for an agency when they first entered the sex industry. After a few bad experiences with agencies, or after recognizing the earning potential of independent work, some of the women switched to independent work. Only three of the fifteen women I interviewed still work for agencies and do so only on a part time basis. These women combine their agency earning with independent work gained from their personal websites or newspaper ads. Other women combined independent work with part-time jobs not related to the sex industry, or worked strictly as independents.

While independent escorts may make more money per job than agency workers, they differ on the way their position relates to the employment and labour laws. In this way, their demands, post decriminalization, would also be different from agency workers. In an interesting and provocative study titled “Beyond Criminalization” Pivot Legal Society (PLS) contemplated the various changes that should be made post decriminalization which relate to the current employment and labour laws. As PLS makes clear:

[When] discussing the employment and labour protections for sex workers, it is important to understand the distinction between workers who are ‘employees’ and workers who are
‘independent contractors’ or ‘self employed.’ The standards set by the Employee Standards Act (ESA) and the right to unionize under the Labour Relations Code (LRC) are only available to workers who are ‘employees’ and not to independent contractors. This means that only the sex workers who fit the definition of ‘employee’ can access these rights and protections [2007: 13].

Escorts who work within a licensed agency or body rub parlour are legally defined as employees (2007:17). However, Pivot Legal Society discovered that a majority of the sex workers they interviewed, who work within an agency or parlour, had been told by their employers that they are ‘independent contractors’ and not ‘employees’ (2007: 17). The refusal to recognize these women as employees may be because the agency does not have an appropriate business license or because the employer wants to relieve themselves of the responsibilities set out in the Employment Standards Acts.29

Niki works for a massage parlour, rather than a licensed agency. She mentioned that many escort agencies in Edmonton pose as massage parlours because the business license for massage parlours is much cheaper than a business license for an escort agency, and yet customers know “what it really stands for.” Not only this, but massage parlours often face less ridicule and harassment from police and gain more clients from their more discreet nature. However, Niki is not licensed as an escort worker nor is she recognized as an employee by her boss. She admits to having no idea whether or not there is record of her employment, and since she only works part time there, she tells me that she does not pay taxes. Like the other women interviewed, her employer does not pay into any formal employee insurance scheme, and forces her to absorb the risk of being fined or charged for operating without a license. Niki’s employee status makes it more difficult or nearly impossible for her to receive leave benefits, including pregnancy leave, parental leave, family responsibility leave, bereavement leave, and/or sick leave from the agency, etc. Pivot Legal Society argues that based on the definition of employee, and the working descriptions spoken of by these
women, it would “seem that many of them meet the legal definition of ‘employee’ and, therefore, should have access to employment and labour protections” (2007: 32). However, as Niki informed me, many of the women are told by their agency heads that they are “independent contractors” rather than employees. (Interview 10: 09/18/2006).

When working for an agency, gaining the recognition as an official employee is critical to empowering and supporting workers in the sex industry. Agencies can be potentially fulfilling work environments, but from the opinions expressed in these interviews, it appears that many of the agency owners/managers are not fulfilling their responsibilities as employers or abiding by the ESA. Each of the women interviewed would like to be recognized as an employee by their employers, and feel that this would give credit and legitimacy to their hard work. Secondly, all expressed the desire to have some sort of scheme set up in which they would feel more enabled to negotiate employment contracts (such as hours worked and wages) and turn to EI or the Employment Standards Branch. As it currently stands, many of the women that work within agencies live much the same lives as do independents as they face little in the form of employment protection or standards. In the absence of these protections, these women are not as able to securely provide for their children as they would like to.

Contingent Work and Sex Work: The Most Marginalized of Marginalized Labour

The lives of independent sex workers are better understood if we consider them within the wider context of marginal labour. The Law Commission of Canada, for example, has sought to approach the issue of sex work from the perspective of marginal labour and has sponsored research on this basis. According to this perspective, all women form a marginalized labour force and it is this idea that best “allows [them] to appreciate points of juncture with other consumer service sector employment without obscuring the uniqueness of working in illegal and stigmatized sectors of the
labour market” (Bruckert et. al., 2003: 1). As a report it retains the uniqueness of sex workers’ experiences by drawing considerable attention to the ways laws and regulatory practices are “mediated by and interface with, stigma, labour processes and labour structures to condition the experience of labour” (Bruckert et. al., 2003: 2). To this extent, the perspective of marginal labour, advanced by many Marxist and socialist feminists, is useful to an analysis of sex work, because it is this approach which acknowledges the growth of the non-standard labour sector and shows that contingent workers are in a contradictory space, in that they are subjected to labour expectations, but denied the security, stability and protection generally associated with paid employment. The primary grievance amongst independent escort workers, for instance, is that they are categorised as self employed or as independent contractors. Consequently they have no job security, no guarantee of earnings, no health care provision, no employment insurance and so on (Gall, 2004). As such, independent sex workers do not have automatic entitlements to benefits such as CPP, EI and WCB.

There are several arguments within the non-standard work/contingent work debate that self employed persons, such as independent sex workers/ contractors should have access to the benefits and protections that non contingent workers have. Employment insurance holds a primary position in this debate. However, self employed workers can not pay into the EI program. Independent sex workers, therefore, are not eligible for programs such as the maternity and parental benefits provisions of the Employment Insurance (EI) program. Moreover, because the general requirement for Employment Insurance is that you must have worked between 640-800 hours (depending on which province you are in) prior to making an application, and since sex work is not considered as contributing to the 840 hours, many agency workers are also not eligible (PLS, 2007: 34). This unduly penalizes independent sex workers, or sex workers with an uncooperative agency boss, because they are unable to provide legitimate hours by an employer.
Secondly, self-employed workers within Ontario and Alberta are not expressly covered by the Worker’s Compensation Act. And while they are able to purchase alternative personal protection for themselves and their children these come in the form of personal insurance schemes, and are not contributed to by an employer or by the government (PLS, 2007: 32). These schemes require a degree of resourcefulness on behalf of the women and a steady savings account. None of the women I interviewed had yet contributed to any personal insurance schemes, were aware of any, or had significant or reliable investments or savings accounts for them and their children. Considering the potential for high earnings within the industry, this can come as a surprise.

This finding is similar to Dalla’s (2002) argument that sex workers have a more difficult time, relative to other lone working mothers, in achieving economic self sufficiency and societal support. According to Dalla, these best allow for effective mothering. Unlike Dalla’s sample, however, this project’s research participants did not have drug addictions or criminal records which prevented them from maintaining full time jobs, having savings or achieving economic stability. Rather, many of the participants argued that they had no safety net to fall back on and that their lack of savings or investments was due to their confusion with and distaste for the income tax system.

Several of the women indicated that they were afraid to declare income to Revenue Canada for fear that they would be subjected to an investigation for violating criminal laws relating to prostitution. Others cited that they were reluctant to admit their source of income when seeking loans, credit or insurance because of past discrimination on the basis of their source of income. And still, others argued that if they had to pay income tax, then the federal government was “living off the avails” (Interview 11: 11/08/2006). However, without claiming an income, it is difficult to own your own home, get a loan, have investments or savings accounts and/or have Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) and/or RESP’s (RESPs). In order to pay into RRSPs, for
example, a person requires what is termed “contribution room.” Contribution room is “calculated at 18 per cent of earned income reported to Revenue Canada for the prior year” (PLS, 2007: 32-35). Because of this, many of the women interviewed had little in terms of long term financial security or economic stability. This is extremely problematic, considering most sex workers consider themselves to have “an expiry date,” or believe that they are forced to retire early. As Wendy illustrates, “In this industry, you’re old when you’re twenty seven. They move on, they go to the younger blonde. You really have to save, because you don’t know how long you’ll last” (Interview 1: 03/05/2006).

Similarly, Sylvia argues that she is glad to be mostly out of the business, because she is no longer 100% reliant on her perceived level of attractiveness or sex appeal. Both of which, she argues, fade with age. According to both Sylvia and Wendy, when you are no longer attractive, then, you also no longer have a source of income (Interview 1: 03/05/2006). As such, early financial planning as a way to safeguard future income is extremely important for sex workers. However, very few of the women have any form of savings.

Savings:

Sylvia, for instance, distrusts these financial institutions to the point that she keeps most of her cash in her home (Interview 1: 03/05/2006). Christy, on the other hand, doesn’t have a distrust of financial institutions, but has very little in terms of savings. She told me to advise other women to “save, save, save” and wishes someone told her the same. She admits to spending lavishly, and wishes she knew about the short working life of escorts when she first started (Interview 2: 03/27/2006). Had she known that she would spend this long in the industry, she would have put money away for herself and her children. Aleischia, on the other hand, luckily did have savings.
With no outside resources to rely on when she was pregnant, it was her savings and her part time jobs that kept her alive.

I found it was tough to make the transition when I became pregnant. Neither of my pregnancies were planned therefore I did not have a back up financial plan. I continued to work to the end of my first trimester. I lived on my savings as morning sickness and moodiness prevented me from working many times. I also found a job both times without letting the employer know that I was pregnant. My average salary during pregnancy was 12 hundred take home. This was the worse part. I made it but I had to be resourceful.

The women’s lack of savings/investments to rely on during pregnancy, or early parenting, combined with a lack of benefits/services, are what necessitated the women to work during their pregnancies and early years of their children’s lives, and what keeps some of them working in the industry, despite their intentions to leave.

_The Social Nature of Employment and Labour Law and Policies:_

The Social Council on Social Development argues that it is unjust that “many contingent and self-employed workers in Canada are deprived of this valuable support during the first year of a child's life” (2005). The Council believes that maternity and parental benefits for workers are not only economic, but also social. As explained by this excerpt:

Obviously the policy rationale for these benefits is both social and economic. It's part of the government's commitment to support parents during the first year of a child's life and recognition that the support is very crucial in terms of the child's future development. It also increases choices, reduces work-life stress, and helps persons maintain a labour force attachment, making for an easier integration back into jobs after having children.

Under direction from Human Resources and Social Development Canada, the Council recommended that the government develop a framework for extending maternity and parental benefits to self-employed workers under the EI program and examine other program models which could provide maternity and parental benefits to self-employed workers. The Council wishes to not only make EI more available to contingent workers but also Employment Insurance special benefits, including maternity and parental benefits by adjusting the requirements for eligibility and
other means. The Council also argued that sex workers who are independent contractors, but whose employment circumstances (such as providing a service for someone) fit the legal definition of employee should also be given full access to EI, the ESA branch, the Labour Relations Board or a court of law in order to seek recognition as employees and have their rights protected as such. Moreover, should they not fit the definition of employee, all sex workers should be provided with the appropriate information to assist them in understanding the different rights and privileges that are offered to workers who are being classified as employees as opposed to independent contractors.

In sum, because of the nature of sex work, sex workers are on their own account operating within a “fee-for-service structure without [the] benefit of a guaranteed income or any form of longer term financial security” (Law Commission of Canada, 2003: 8). Financial or economic protection is limited, which causes sex workers and their families to be more vulnerable to the ups and downs of the market. This is extremely problematic considering that economic stability is a basic foundation for caring for children. Thus it is imperative that necessary attention be given to sex workers lack of access to employee resources and financial benefits and protections. This would enable the women to plan for long term financial stability for their children and themselves and would increase levels of security, both of which are integral to effective mothering.

*Occupational Health and Safety:*

The NCFR policy brief also makes clear that effective mothering requires a commitment of resources to build local institutions capable of promoting public health and safety. They argue that low income mothers, or otherwise marginalized mothers, face critical challenges in this area. As mentioned previously, many sex workers feel uncomfortable accessing public health services for the fear that disclosure of their profession will result in parent child separation, or because the health services do not understand the peculiarities of the industry. In addition, the participants expressed
concern about their working conditions, the nature of their engagement with customers and professional health and safety. Again, the criminal nature of escort work exacerbates these grievances and puts at risk the health and well being of sex workers. As Lewis and Tyndale argue, escort agencies and body rub parlours must walk fine lines to avoid coming into direct conflict with federal laws which “impedes the provision of and information about, or services to facilitate, [the conduct] of escort work in a safe manner” (2000: 440).

Lewis and Tyndale examine areas in which sex work has been licensed by the municipalities and argue that there has been little done in the way of support offered to other licensed workers by the establishment of a licensing program. They hold in high regard the workshops for preventative health and health promotion required of other municipally licensed operations, such as taxi drivers. However, Lewis and Tyndale (2000) show that in Windsor when escort agencies attempted such programs, the plans did not receive city council approval. According to Lewis and Tyndale, councillors were not prepared to allocate funds to educating sex workers on health and safety issues even though the funds came from workers themselves (from licensing fees) (2000: 446). Furthermore, because of the criminal nature of the industry, owners of escort agencies cannot provide such items as condoms, safe sex workshops or free HIV tests and are made to avoid recognizing the sale of sex on their premises (Lewis and Tyndale, 2000: 445). Municipal employees, those responsible for licensing and monitoring the escort industry, are even more blatantly prevented from discussing with escorts “anything that relates to engaging in sex with clients, including how to minimize the health and safety risks associated with escort work” (Lewis and Tyndale, 2000: 441). Because independent escorts are not covered by employee protections or benefits (such as sick leave), and employers are not responsible for occupational health and safety,
escorts are left on their own to figure out how to conduct their work in a way that minimizes risk to the health and well being of themselves and their families.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, independent sex workers are some of the most marginalized workers of the contingent labour sector. Because they are independent workers they are not granted access to employee benefits and protection, and by virtue of the stigmatization and discrimination and illegal nature of their work, they find it difficult to access public services that do exist. Moreover, the illegal nature of sex work prevents agencies and municipal officials from assisting sex workers in their attempts to live their daily lives healthily and safely. Empowering these women to achieve their full potential and raise their children in a healthy and nurturing environment requires that the criminal laws related to sex work be removed, and that the contingent worker debate results in an improved situation for this group of workers in the form of improved access to employee status, benefits and protections.
Chapter 4
Sex Work as Work

This chapter will address the feminist concerns around prostitution and will provide an argument for the recognition of sex work as work. While it will delve briefly into the philosophical and moral debates surrounding sex work, it will argue that if we are to be truly concerned with the human rights of sex workers and their abilities to effectively parent, we must remove ourselves from these kinds of debates and consider what can better assist these women and their families to live with security and dignity. This moves us from the moral and philosophical “question of prostitution” and “prostitutes” to the lived realities of sex workers. Employing a labour rights analysis, this chapter will end with a consideration of unionization for sex workers.

Whether or not employment benefits/protections, or contributory insurance schemes should be offered to parents who are sex workers is an issue of considerable debate amongst feminists, social workers, lawyers, etc. Arguing for benefits to be extended to these women can be interpreted as recognizing the legitimacy of sex work as an occupation, and is premised first on the partial or whole decriminalization of the profession. As mentioned previously, repealing the criminal laws related to prostitution is the first critical step in affording these mothers the protections and benefits available to other workers. Therefore, at one end of the spectrum are those who seek the decriminalization of sex work as means to legitimize, regulate and protect sex workers and their families. These people believe that sex work could be practiced “as it is occasionally even now, in circumstances of relative safety, security, freedom, hygiene and personal control” (Weitzer, 2000: 937).

At the other end of the spectrum are those who seek the complete abolishment of the sale and commodification of sex (Jeffreys, 1997: 161). For those who are opposed to the sale of sex, the criminal/illegal nature of sex work, and the lack of benefits or support to those who are sex workers
are viewed as means by which to abolish sex work, prevent the growth of the industry or deter those thinking of engaging in sex work from doing so. Some of the most popular arguments for and against the decriminalization of sex work and the recognition of it as work have their roots in feminist debate. As Guidroz and Berger point out, “feminisms has historically had a troubled relationship with the sex industry; therefore, the nature and focus of research on the sex industry has been used for different outcomes” (2005: 6). During the 1980s the sex wars highlighted many of the tensions between these splits. The argument of sex positive feminists and sexual libertarian feminists coalesced into the pro sex feminist position, while the anti-sex feminists took the position that sex was degrading and needed to be eradicated. Feminist opposition to the sale of sex is based on one or more of the following arguments.

1) Only the vulnerable enter sex work as a last resort.
2) Women are physically coerced into sex work
3) Patriarchal capitalism economically coerces women into sex work
4) Women involved in sex work have been so psychologically damaged by patriarchy that they are incapable of giving informed or real consent:
5) Sex work is violence against women, is degrading and objectifying and reinforces their own oppression
6) Sex work is morally wrong and re-affirms the ‘natural right’ of men over women’s bodies

I will address each of these points individually, from the position that sex work is work and can be both a financially and mentally rewarding job for parents.

1. Only the Vulnerable Enter Sex Work as a Last Resort
2. Women are Physically Coerced into Sex Work:

With regards to the first and second points: Women enter into sex work for a variety of reasons. Currently there is no reliable research done in Canada on the reasons for entry into escort work, rather much of the research on motives for entry into sex work focuses on those who become street
level sex workers. Nonetheless, the research which focuses on street level sex work can still provide
us with insight into the possible reasons why some women enter escort work.

Much of the research on street level sex work indicates that a vast majority of street sex workers
became involved in sex work, not because they were running to the street but because they were
running away from a dysfunctional home. In fact, homelessness, abuse, neglect, family dysfunction
and mental illnesses as children are all factors that are argued to be precursors to the entry into sex
work (Estes, 2000: 15). The idea of sex work, in most cases, became a factor for consideration only
after the young women arrived on the streets. Therefore their position on the streets is often a result
of the circumstances “that induced them to see the street as the [only] feasible choice” (Hodgson,
1997: 24). This sad fact is especially prevalent amongst youth who enter into sex work. (Hodgson,
1997: 27). The youth who become sex workers have often left destructive, painful and oppressive
family relationships and remain scarred by the memories of sexual, physical and psychological abuse
well into adulthood. Sadly, this story is quite common amongst street sex workers, in which the
average entry age in Canada is 13 to 14 years, with pimps and clients placing a premium on younger
children (DePasquale, 2000: 3). Youth sex work and the known precursors to it (child abuse, neglect,
rape, drug addiction, homelessness) are all serious issues and need to be seriously addressed. In no
way do I seek to support the entry of vulnerable youth into sex work. Rather I believe that sexual
rights advocates and sex workers’ rights advocates should work together on educating young
children about sex work and those who are responsible for the coercion of children should be
punished.

Other women/girls have been forced into sex work by an emotionally and physically abusive
and/or manipulative pimp or parent and/or have even be physically kidnapped and held hostage
while being forced to perform sexual acts. These horrific instances are most common amongst
young migrant women (DePasquale, 2000). In cases where physical or emotional coercion does exist, it must be taken very seriously and those responsible must be punished. However, we must understand that there are a variety of reasons that women enter into sex work and while coercion is very serious, it is only one reason. It is undeniable that some of the women within the escort industry were particularly vulnerable before their entry into sex work; however, I must once again reinstate the uniqueness of the women I am interviewing. By virtue of the sample I am working with (independent out-call escort workers) they do not work for anyone but themselves and in this case, and are much less likely to be forced to perform anything by someone outside their intimate encounters (I say this because there always exists the potential that a client could physically assault one of the women). These women are entering into their own interactions by their own will for a variety of reasons, setting their own price and making their own profit.

Moreover, as McElroy argues, if we believe that all cases of sex work are men verbally or emotionally coercing women, we run the risk of “re-enforcing the concept of men as intellectually and psychologically stronger than women. It is the old ‘man of steel/ woman of Kleenex myth…” which may backfire on women who may be required to prove they are able to manage their own finances or handle custody of their own children (1995: 121).

3. Patriarchal Capitalism Economically Coerces Women into Sex Work

Another argument is that women are forced into entering sex work because of a lack of options, because of poverty or finances. As Catherine Mackinnon observed in Only Words “The sex is not chosen for the sex. Money is the medium of force and provides the cover of consent” (McElroy, 1995: 92). According to this view, women’s oppression is not only linked to patriarchy but argued to stem from the twin evils of patriarchy and capitalism (McElroy, 1995: 91). It is true that sex work is an exchange, it is work for wage and it is for the money. However, the free market is
based on economic coercion, it forces everyone to take jobs for money and survival and to this end, we are all economically coerced. In this case, sex work is no different from other forms of work. And if by economic coercion, they mean that many women in sex work only are there to make the money they need to give themselves and their children a decent standard of living then yes, it is similar to any other highly paid industry which attracts people who want the money. Out of the women that I interviewed, with the exception of two of the women, all had entered sex work well into their adulthood and informed me that they were not physically forced into doing so; rather, the motives were both the potential for good money and the flexible hours.

In an interesting and much needed study, Vanwesenbeeck (1994) discusses some other potential motives for entry into sex work that are not often cited in the literature on sex work. In her discussion she explains the merits of drift theory, which attributes careers in sex work to women being stigmatized as deviant before their entry into sex work. Vanwesenbeeck shows that many women were described as having "bad reputations" or being labeled as "whores" even before their entry into sex work. For many, sex work was the next logical step since the fear of stigmatization was lost, it appeared that there was more to be gained than lost from sex work. Similar to my sample, she also found that few women were physically forced into sex work, and for the most part, the overwhelming motive for entering sex work was the “good money.” In my sample of women, three of the women entered sex work after having their first child. Thus they explained their entry into the industry as a reasonable way to provide for their families. Others continued with the sex work well into motherhood because it was seen as a profitable profession which provided a comfortable standard of living. In addition, some of the women that I interviewed hinted at other motives, such as the chance to enjoy one’s exhibitionism and sexuality as well as a chance to change one’s lifestyle.
For Mistress Patricia, becoming a professional dominatrix was a chance to turn her life around and become a person who is “more in charge.”

Certainly Mistress Patricia feels not loss of power when she engages in sex work; rather she felt a sense of empowerment that extended to her daily life outside of work. As Mistress Patricia explained to me:

From being dominant I have learned a lot about life, I am not as shy anymore when I want something and I have gotten comfortable with power…this has helped me in my relationship with my family, as I am confident and feel more comfortable with authority. (Interview 9: 05/06/2006).

Like Mistress Patricia, some women may wield power in sex work and a sense of individual or sexual empowerment. However, for women that are exhibitionist, enjoy performing sex acts on strangers or on clients for money, or are unique sexually, the following argument ostracizes them.

4. Women involved in sex work have been so psychologically damaged by patriarchy that they are incapable of giving informed or real consent.

The above argument refuses to see sex work as a potentially empowering and profitable profession and instead views the sex worker as a victim. This view argues that the sex worker is so psychologically damaged or socialized by patriarchy to the point that she is no longer responsible for her actions and is rendered incapable of providing any type of real consent (McElroy, 1995: 104). This view purports that “Women in sex work who have not been physically coerced have been so traumatized by patriarchy that they cannot give real consent. . . And the absence of real consent is the equivalent of coercion” (McElroy, 1995: 105).

To feminists who advocate for a woman’s body, a woman’s right, the argument that sex workers have been brainwashed by patriarchy to the point of not providing any real consent is not only unfounded but dangerous. McElroy appeals for us to consider that whether a woman’s sexuality is formed by culture, genetics, or by some combination of the two, it is still her body and the
significance of this remains unchanged; she must remain free to do with it whatever she chooses (1994: 101). Indeed, all choices are culturally influenced by patriarchy or by other overarching power structures. And since every decision is made in the presence of cultural pressures, we cannot invalidate only certain choices because we aim to “protect” and rescue those who are apparently unaware of their own state of mind. My own interpretation was that all of the women I interviewed were culturally intelligent, communicative and socially aware individuals. And certainly, while victimized by the stigmatization and cultural degradation of sex work, I saw these women as no less victimized or brainwashed by patriarchy than I am myself.

But Canadian law and society continues to reject the choice of an adult woman to engage in consensual sexual relations for profit, partly basing their arguments on the false consciousness or victim narrative. Opponents to sex work argue for the continuation of its illegal nature because the point at which sex work becomes a

"Free choice" is not easily identified. Whether we are talking about sex work or any other form of labour, the line between coercion and consent is not and never has been clear-cut. In the absence of alternative opportunities, or where the inducements are great enough, people can and do volunteer to enter contracts that may harm them or that they would not otherwise choose to enter.35

Based on this argument, the Canadian legal framework makes voluntary sexual engagements illegal because of the potential for coercion or harm. To this end, Canadian law does not respect a woman’s right to assess the costs and benefits or the risks of her own choices/decision. Rather her choices are constrained and dictated to her by a legal framework that favours abolition and limits sexual expression. Essentially, the woman considering the possibility of sex work as a legitimate way to provide for a family becomes a political ward for feminists and others to make the choices for her. This rips her away from ownership over her own body and her right to choose anything “outside the narrow corridor of choices offered by political/sexual correctness” (McElroy, 1995: 106).
McElroy (1995) insists that the law is meant to protect self ownership and rights, as well as virtue. But when the state enforces what it deems to be virtue, it denies a woman the right to make an acceptable choice with her own body (McElroy, 1995: 100, 126). And the right to choose what to do with one’s own body is equal to the right to potentially make a “wrong” choice. In the absence of force, women should be free to make any and every sexual choice that they wish. From this position, sex work should be defended out of respect for women’s choices and for human sexual diversity.

In the absence of physical coercion and abuse, a woman who has advertised her sexual services for sale and later engages in such activities has voiced her consent. She is essentially entering a labour contract, which many other labourers do. If women are forbidden from voluntary interactions based on full knowledge (a labour contract) the state should not take this as triviality. Doubting a woman’s consent is often more harmful to women than respecting her right to choose and consent to sexual relations even when there exists the potential for harm. Significant legal implications could occur if we ignore a woman’s right to profit from sexual relations and support a family. McElroy makes this point clear and argues that

For centuries, women have struggled against tremendous odds to have their contracts taken seriously. At great personal expense, they stood up and demanded the right to own land, to control their own wages, to retain custody of their children—in other words to become legally responsible for themselves and for their property. A woman’s consent must never again become legally irrelevant (1995: 100-101).

Evidently, the state has put more effort into controlling and policing women’s sexuality rather than protecting women’s choices, removing the potential for harm, or providing services for them and their families to assist them in their parenting roles. This is most evident within the sex industry, where the thrust is not to help the women live securely and prosecute the individuals such as pimps, who truly coerce and abuse the women, but to regulate and limit “public nuisances.” Such an approach, as we have seen, makes it very difficult for sex workers who are mothers. Within the
abolishment and regulation framework that currently exists, sex workers are stigmatized, often
deemed as immoral criminals (and horrible mothers) and find it difficult to gain access to formal
services, or feel uncomfortable using the ones that do exist. Thus the efforts of the abolitionists tend
to backfire, doing little to actually help the women they seek to protect and help. The battle, then, is
not to dismantle the entire industry altogether but to create a specific charge for coercion into sex
work, especially amongst youth, and to simultaneously protect the human rights, dignity and
choices of women who consent to sex work as a way to provide for their families. In no way does
recognizing sex work as work and fighting for sex workers’ rights on that basis, ignore the potential
for abuse and exploitation within the industry. Rather, it is this position which respects and values
the women’s choices but also acknowledges the potential for harm and exploitation by implementing
greater measures for the prevention and penalization of abuse against these women. It is also this
view which argues for supporting these women in their everyday lives, to live with rights and dignity
whether they remain as sex workers or not. It is in this way that we can best support these women in
their efforts to be effective parents.

5. Sex work is violence against women, it is degrading and objectifying and reinforces their own
oppression.

Then there are those scholars that, rather than see the sex worker as a victim who must be
“saved” believe the very act of sex work is morally wrong this view is exemplified by point five.
According to those who take this position, it is the way in which men subjugate women and maintain
their own positions of power by degrading and objectifying women. This view purports that men
reduce women to sexual objects, which means that women are used only for their body parts and are
reduced to their physical appearance. For these reasons, it is argued that sex work cannot be
recognized as work like any other and that rights cannot be granted to these women on that basis.
However, it is important that we pinpoint what exactly we fear about being looked at, in addition to our minds, as a sum of body parts. While people may attribute different moral importance to these areas, women are as much their bodies as they are their mind and spirits. As McElroy eloquently argues: “to get upset by an image that focuses on the human body is merely to demonstrate a bad attitude towards that which is physical” (1995: 98).

This area of contestation is from those who argue that sex work is not only a reduction of women to their body parts, but rather that the very act is dehumanizing. They remain firmly against sex work and argue that even in cases where a woman is paid to have sex and considers it empowering, they consider sex too sacred, too intimate and non saleable. They argue that sexuality is closely linked with the conception of one’s self, and that “there is something about the sale of sexual or reproductive services that is different from the sale of other things; that is they are asymmetric to other types of labor in the market” (Kesler, 2002: 225). However, the notion of selling one’s self, when using one’s sexuality for monetary gain is a social construct in itself. Since when has a person’s sexuality become a person’s humanity? And if we believe this, then how is the sale of one’s ideas or skills not also akin to the selling of a person’s humanity?

6. Sex Work is Morally Wrong and Re-Affirms that “Natural Right” of Men Over Women’s Bodies

Following this argument, is point six which maintains the primacy of sexuality and all the confusion around it. Point six argues that supporting sex work is akin to supporting the satisfaction of the male sexual need as a "natural" phenomenon by providing the sale of sexual services in the market place (Ericson, 1980: 12). Many feminists not only disagree with the “natural” aspect of this urgent male sexual need, but believe that the decriminalization of sex work or support for it leads to other negative phenomena. As Brownmiller explains, she is uncomfortable with the support for sex work because it is linked to male violence in the “perpetuation of the concept that the ‘powerful
male impulse’ must be satisfied with immediacy by a co-operative class of women, set aside for the purpose, is part and parcel of the mass psychology of rape” (1976: 392).

According to this view, those who seek reformed legal measures are not doing so for the well-being of the sex workers or their dependents, but rather are doing so to render her a safer product for male consumption and satisfaction. Kesler supports this view and argues that decriminalization and demands for legal reform would only publicly affirm the male sex right (2002: 228). However, this view has male sexuality at the center of it, and ignores the right of a female to enjoy or gain benefits such as financial security or emotional empowerment from her sexuality. Those feminists in support of the idea of sex work have shifted the topic of sexuality in sex work from male to female sexuality, with the argument that a woman in sex-work is potentially in greater control of her sexuality than a woman in a (non-commercial) heterosexual relationship. Rather than concentrating on the male sexual right, this view argues that we must concentrate on ownership of one’s own sexuality, which includes the right to choose what one wants to do with it.

*But Sex Work Can Be Empowering: the Recognition of Subjectivity*

And while some may scoff at the idea, I would like to ask a critical question: Why do we consider a woman’s job, even if in a factory, empowering, but not sex work, which is a skilled profession and one in which the worker is getting paid considerably more than average?36 As Margo St. James, the founder of Cut Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) explains, the disempowerment and the dehumanization of the sex worker occurs more in public life than in her personal and sexual relationships with her clients. In public life “she [the sex worker] has absolutely no rights - no civil rights, no human rights,” but in private sexual transactions “she is in charge, setting the terms for the sexual exchange and the financial exchange” (Bell, 1987: 2). Since sex work can be an indifferent sexual service that is usually provided on terms set by the sex worker (usually monetary) and since
therefore there is an intention of mutual gain, supporters argue that a sex worker may, in fact, have greater control over her body and her sexuality than most non-sex worker women.

Of course, accounts from sex workers vary and are contradictory. Where some feel in charge, independent and in control of their sexuality, others may feel degraded, cheap, abused, used or manipulated. The question of sexuality in sex work is therefore very complex, thus making sweeping generalizations about the nature of sex work and categorizing or naming sex work as either empowering or degrading in the service of different feminist positions is impossible. Nonetheless, to those that disagree with the profession of sex work and to those that view its criminalization and illegitimization as the best way to protect and benefit sex workers, we need to ask them if this is really the way to afford the best protection and benefits to sex workers and their families? Is the illegal nature of sex work and the lack of benefits really the way to recognize the needs of sex workers who are mothers? Do philosophical and moral discussions like the ones above actually help these women to live with dignity and rights?

Claiming that sex workers are unable to consent and that they are unable to determine their own sexuality, as do many abolitionist arguments, forces sex workers into further stigmatization and victimization. Criminalizing their professions, not only removes the potential for empowerment but criminalizes their consent. And for the sake of what? The women involved? Certainly there are cases where harm needs to be reduced, but first and foremost the victim narrative must be removed and these women must be viewed as capable adults who are able to provide for their children. The legal frameworks and regimes that criminalize female sex workers reinforce negative cultural messages about sex work and negative attitudes, myths and stereotypes of women that work within the industry. The perpetuation of these negative cultural messages act as a form of moral regulation.

*Moral Regulation of Motherhood: But a Sex Worker Can Not Possibly be a Good Mother!*
According to Hunt, moral regulation is defined as “a series of normative judgments that some conduct is intrinsically bad, or immoral; this judgement provides the object of regulation and the grounds to justify regulatory intervention” (1999: 410). For example, the suppression of prostitution (the process of moral regulation), by criminalizing and not supporting its workers, is legitimated by the “immorality” of prostitution. Following this, it becomes obvious that the abolishment narrative which has influenced the laws surrounding sex work within Canada is an act of moral regulation. The moral objection to sex work that underlies these laws, combine to create what Lowman (2000) has called a “discourse of disposability”. This discourse has located the “wrong” in prostitution to the female prostitute herself, and thus perpetuates violence against sex workers and reinforces their status as a marginalized sexual minority. As Bernstein shows, the sex worker became the “symbolically-laden precipitate of large social currents” (2001: 395). Those arguments which condemn sex work, also work to condemn those individuals who work within the industry and posit that they would be unable to fulfill the more respected and idolized role of mother. Moreover, by disregarding sex work as a legitimate occupation and emphasizing the plights of the most marginalized and abused sex workers, this paternalistic and prohibitionist scheme represents these women as victims who need to be protected, rather than as individuals capable of taking care of themselves and their families. Therefore, not only is the morality and femininity of these women questioned, but also their capacity to become good mothers.

As Sanders explains, the positive role of “being a good mother was something that sex workers strived towards as a replacement for the deviant status they had internalized” (Sanders, 2007: 92). However, because of the intense moral regulation that exists, these women are dually stereotyped as morally inept individuals and, following from that, they are also depicted as “bad mothers” and face greater scrutiny. As Sylvia demonstrates:
Being a sex worker is seen as the primary basis for a woman to have her parenting skills and custody of her children scrutinized. Many women with regular jobs go out and drink or use on a regular basis and call it their time out. They get babysitters and they are not seen as endangering their children…men are notoriously known for going out with the boys and not having their parenting skills dissected. Sex workers many times combine drinking or using while they work. As long as their addiction is not out of control and they are leaving them in proper child care endangering the children should not be an issue. I know that I am drinker. I would drink every night that I worked but I would never go out to bars or parties on my days off. My days off were my rest periods. Basically I did not have a social life outside of work. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

As Sylvia demonstrates, some women are deemed more capable of parenting by the community, and therefore face less scrutiny of their everyday parenting activities decisions. Such differences are what cause Ricki Sollinger, in her book *Pregnancy and Power*, to argue that “Choice” pretends that all women are considered “legitimate” mothers and that the power structure values all women’s “choice to become mothers” (2005: 119). She contemplates what the consequences for citizenship are when women with racial, social or class privilege face less public scrutiny with regards to their parenting skills and have far greater access to the resources and services required to parent their children, than others do. Solinger argues that the “choice” rhetoric which weaves its way through discussions on motherhood ignores the fact that some women face higher costs of having children and therefore some are left with very little choice of whether or not to have children. As such, Ricki Solinger asks whether women can be full citizens if mostly marginalized women are prohibited or prevented by law, public policy, or community and family attitudes, from controlling their own bodies, including their fertility. In an extension of this argument, we can see how the social costs of having children appear to be much higher for sex workers as these women face greater public scrutiny of their lifestyles and parenting skills than do other more socially privileged women. Upon acknowledging this, some sex workers may “choose” not to have children.

As became evident from the interviews, the position of these women as agents holding multiple social positions serve to challenge many of the mainstream myths and stereotypes of sex
workers (Gregory, 2004: 4210). Their determination in surviving and supporting their families directly contradicts the pathologized/victimized sex work narratives that uphold many abolitionist and protectionist arguments. From my own perspective, these women are knowledgeable, street smart, hard working and extremely protective of their children.

Nonetheless, the lack of support and services offered to these women to assist them in their daily lives as mothers, in addition to the lack of attention paid to their needs, suggests that the state does not value the role that these women play as care givers. And in its condemnation of sex work, the state simultaneously condemns the women who work as sex workers thereby making it more difficult for them to parent. Their roles as mothers are ignored in legal and social services, and in many non governmental programs aimed at “helping” sex workers.

*Support for Sex Work:*

On the other end of the spectrum, are those who hope to empower not eradicate the sex worker. This position recognizes that the best way that we can help these women as parents is by protecting their safety and human rights in the best way possible. Rather than punish the women who participate in the industry, then, the aim should be to empower. As Margo St. James asserts:

> The government thinks that women have to be protected because they can’t take care of themselves. I think that attitude perpetuated slavery in the United States too, but we didn’t think about reforming the slave did we? We thought of empowering him or her and that is what has to happen here (Kesler, 2003: 200).

It is only when we make efforts to empower the women that we actually begin to assist them in their efforts to be, or become, positive and nurturing parents.

Usually feminists who support sex workers are those who understand sex work to be a reasonable socioeconomic response to a competitive gendered labour market. While female
participation in the labour force is changing, both in quantity and type of participation; women as a whole are paid less and occupy less prestigious positions than their male counterparts (Kesler, 2002: 221). To many socialist-feminists, sex work is clear evidence of the gendered capitalist system. As quoted by Kesler: “sex work is, aside from modeling… the only job (emphasis added) for which women as a group are paid more than men. What is happening within this structure called capitalism is that it forces women to sell their sexual services for a lack of a better paying alternative” (2002: 221). While certainly not a view that is advanced by all socialist-feminists, the above statement implies that when faced with a patriarchal capitalist system, sex work is a rational economic choice for some women. Those who take this view argue for the recognition of sex work as a legitimate profession and the decriminalization of activities related to sex work. Sunder Rajan further divides these scholars into radical and liberal feminists (1999:2). She argues that radical feminist activists have tended to concentrate their energies on promoting welfare measures for women in sex work…

in the form of rehabilitation, legal assistance, job training and placement, and to refrain from pushing for stricter law-enforcement or more stringent laws against sex work… Liberal feminists on the other hand, have put an emphasis on opposing police excesses, social pressures, discriminatory legal decisions, and on agitation for improved work conditions, benefits and protection for those in the sex-trade (Sunder Rajan, 1999: 2).

It is doubtful that even the feminists who are in favour of abolishing sex work would disagree with changes made to improve the health and well being of sex workers. This is assuming that the majority of people who identify as feminists would be against police excesses, social pressures, lack of access to community services and discrimination. Perhaps, then, that is where we can find common ground in the feminist debate on sex work. Central to this common ground is the appreciation that there is a difference between condemning individual sex workers and condemning sex work itself.

*Common Ground between Abolishment Activists and Sex Workers Rights Activists:*
As Kesler shows, it is possible to withhold judgment about sex work and empathize with the women that work within the sex industry while simultaneously abhorring the idea of sex work and the abuse of sex workers (2002: 219). From this we can assume that it is also possible to simultaneously see these women as victims, particularly those that are victims of rape, physical, emotional, sexual abuse, incest and childhood sex work while we acknowledge their agency and “determination in surviving” (Kesler, 2002: 22). By making a clear and crucial moral distinction between women as sex workers and sex work as a practice and institution, it is possible for those who do not respect the idea or profession of sex work as it currently stands and acknowledge its link to patriarchy to work with others who seek to fight for the improvement of the lives of women who work as sex workers.

To do so requires switching focus of the debate away from the theoretical and moral ideas about sex work towards the living realities of those that work within the sex industry. It opens the way for supporting the worker, rather than abolishing the industry. As Kesler makes clear, the term sex work (which I use to replace “prostitution”) is of the most assistance to those who hope to improve the lives of sex workers, because sex work is not about the idea of “sex work,” rather it is about the work and nature of work (2002: 223).

**Sex work is Work:**

Re-defining prostitution as sex work highlights a concern about labour issues such as wages, working conditions and child care. Within this approach, therefore, it is possible to apply a labour rights analysis and lobby for the rights of sex workers, the improvement of their working conditions and their ability to have a family in combination with the long-term goal of empowering the female sex workers to have ownership over their own sexuality and to have choice in their decisions. Bindman and Doezema (1997), in their seminal article “Redefining Sex work as Sex Work on the
International Agenda,” compare sex work with other forms of labour and argue that sex work has much in common with other forms of work and that the problems faced by sex workers resemble those faced by other workers. By examining international human rights and labour standards, they show that most issues faced by sex workers could be addressed by international instruments used to protect the rights of other workers. Recognizing sex work as work and taking a labour rights approach to sex work can help to mitigate anti-sex work theories because if sex workers address their concerns by utilizing instruments available to other workers to take control of their working hours, rates of pay and working conditions, then the abolishment of sex work as a way to protect the “victims of sex work” would become meaningless (Overall, 1992: 713).

**Recognizing Sex Work as Work Allows for a Labour-Rights Analysis:**

While it is important to look at what decriminalization can do for the legitimization of sex work as work and the advancement of sex workers’ rights, the decriminalization of sex work does not solve all of the problems associated with sex work. Inequalities and stigmatization may still exist under decriminalization, and certainly the debate about contingent work remains. So in addition to decriminalization what else can help to advance sex workers’ rights?

Indeed, the advancement of sex workers’ rights can be forwarded by a strong union and social efforts. A union is defined as an organization or association of employees that act collectively to address common labour issues on behalf of workers. One central purpose of a union is the regulation of relations between employers and employees through collective bargaining, which means bargaining as a group, rather than as individuals (PLS, 2007: 131).

And, according to Pivot Legal Society, the right to establish or join a trade union is protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant for Economic, Social and Civil Rights… The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says quite simply that, ‘Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his [or her] interests.’
Benefits to Unionization:

Unionization offers several benefits to sex workers. Firstly, some authors see unions as an alternative to the structure of NGOs which, among other criticisms, are seen as being too dependent on the politics of fundraisers. Arguably, the autonomous structure of the union could be used as a strategy to circumvent funding policies of bodies like the United States Agency for International Development which, “under the current US administration, requires each recipient to declare that it does not promote, support or advocate the legalisation or practice of sex work” (Lopez, 2005: 2). Secondly, collective benefits include being able to use the union’s political clout for lobbying. For instance, when the UK’s Home Office started a review of sex work laws in 2004, the International Union of Sex Workers were consulted because they were organized and had a collective voice (Lopez, 2005: 11). Thirdly, and most importantly, unionization can lead to government recognition of sex workers as workers and opens the door for workers rights legislation. Unionization forces a public acceptance of sex work as legitimate work and shifts the debate from philosophical and moral discussion to a labour rights framework (Lopez, 2005: 9). Irina Alkhovka of Argentina, for example, argues that the lived realities of sex workers have improved since 1994, in large part due to increasing organization and participation on behalf of sex workers. As Alkhovka explains:

Things have improved considerably since 1994…due to unionisation. Being part of the CTA has been crucial. The Justice, Health, and Education Ministers know us, and meet personally with us rather than sending their underlings. We have also had meetings with President Néstor Kirchner, a progressive, left-of centre politician who used to be a labour lawyer…After 11 years of struggle, we have finally received official recognition from the government as valid participants in the discussion to address the problems in our sector. In early October, President Kirchner signed a decree that opens up an official line of communication and recognises that the fact that sex workers are not entitled to social security or retirement benefits is an act of discrimination that must be addressed by the government” (Lopez, 2005: 4).
Women interviewed by Pivot Legal Society also expressed support for unions, for a variety of reasons. The following quotes are excerpts from these interviews:

A. And solidarity. Y’know, having somewhere to go, with issues and things? And have some – y’know, if enough issues come up? Then there is somewhere, a recognized organization, by the public, to give voice. Y’know, a dozen women have come forward with this problem – could speak in solidarity for everybody?

A. [Y]ou would be able to avail yourself of legal services if you needed them, you would have a voice if you need a voice, the media would be well informed about needs, maybe de-stigmatization could occur, that to health benefits and things like that, coverage, so maybe, you know, maybe, maybe they’ve got a point.
- Female off-street out-call sex workers

A. . . . we could complain to somebody. You know, have [complaints] looked into. For example, the work where I work now, she turns off the heaters on the floors in the winter for us. So we have this one minute heater that’s turning around in the room. So we have 14 girls that are freezing without robes on. That’s cruel, and who are we going to complain to? The girls have other issues too, labour complaints or whatever but no one takes it seriously, no one comes in and inspects it.
- female off-street in-call sex worker

There are also individual benefits to unionization, which include both advice and training. The Red Thread Union, for instance, subsidizes different types of courses such as self defence, pole dancing courses or those that will help sex workers to leave the industry if they wish to do so, such as literacy skills, C.V writing, IT skills, etc. The acquisition of these skill sets could provide the women interviewed with a source of income and financial security as they “retire” from the sex industry. This would essentially allow for the women to have a source of income for their families, past what Sylvia identified as “her expiry date.”

In addition, the Red Thread Union of the Netherlands, has on hand occupational health and safety representatives and has free legal representation. An example of a successful legal representation of a sex worker by a union occurred in Australia. The Scarlet Alliance, the main sex workers’ rights advocacy group in Australia had worked for some years with the Liquor, Hospitality
and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMWU). In one particular case, a sex worker was supported through an unfair dismissal case and the judgment was in her favour. As Gall illustrates:

The importance of this case, Phillipa v. Carmel, was that even though the sex industry location was illegal in Western Australia, the worker was still identified as an employee, and it was confirmed that there was an employer/employee relationship. This was a critical precedent that has increased the negotiating power of sex workers because it was in the face of a high level of lobbying by owners to have sex workers identified as sub-contractors, with the result that the employer’s responsibility is much lower and there is no obligation to provide superannuation, industrial rights etc. Sex workers are often told that they are merely ‘hiring’ the room, even though in reality the owner has a high level of control over when they work, what services they provide, to whom, how much they receive, and how they conduct themselves (Lopez: 23).

Gall shows that in the Netherlands, due to unionization, the state has accepted sex workers as workers and shows a legitimate interest in the sex industry. Gall argues that unionization is a critical step in opening the door to talking about further crucial worker rights that will help to protect and provide for these women and their families, such as access to social security, retirement benefits and protections against unlawful termination (2004).

In “Sex Workers of the World Uniting for their Common Good: Sex Worker Union Organizing,” Gall finds that the most significant unionization projects concerning sex workers have taken place in Australia, Germany and the Netherlands while the most significant unionization projects concerning exotic dancers (e.g., lap-dancers) have taken place in Australia, Britain and the United States. In the Netherlands, there is collective bargaining for prostitutes through the Red Thread union while in Australia, the Striptease Artists of Australia has recently won an industry-wide award for wages and conditions from the Australia Industrial Relations Commission for lap dancers. In Britain, the GMB union has between 2,000-3,000 sex worker members and several lap dancing clubs have been granted union recognition. As Gall states, though most of these unionization projects are in their infancy and although they still remain fragile, we may yet come to
“look back on them as an important turning point in trade unionism developing a purchase for workers in the burgeoning private service sector in particular” (2004: 12).

As there are no existing sex worker unions in Canada, if the laws pertaining to adult prostitution were to be repealed, sex workers could start a union for the sex industry. Sex workers could also join existing Canadian unions, as they have done in other countries, or join an international sex work. There are, however, various legal and social barriers to the unionization of sex workers in Canada.

What’s Stopping Canadian Sex Workers from Unionizing?

Firstly, the public organizing of sex workers is no small feat given the stigmatization and marginalization attached to sex work and sex workers. Since you have to use your real name to join a union, and therefore have yourself publicly recorded as being a sex worker; it can be assumed that many women would avoid joining unions in order to protect their privacy and their families from potential discrimination. Secondly, only those persons who meet the definition of an “employee,” and who have employers willing to verify that they are in fact employed, are entitled to be part of a union and exercise collective bargaining rights. Therefore, “independent contractors” cannot unionize, and nor can personnel who perform a managerial role in the employment context, or if a person is employed in a confidential capacity (Lopez, 2005:11-12).

Unionization:

Nonetheless, Pivot Legal Society makes the persuasive argument that sex workers within Canada should be able to unionize through the normal certification process under the Labour Relations Acts in Alberta and Ontario. According to Pivot Legal Society, the Alberta and Ontario Labour Relations Boards have the exclusive authority to determine whether workers can form a new union, join an existing union as a new bargaining unit, or join an existing bargaining unit. As Pivot
Legal Society suggests, the key issue with respect to unionization under the existing legal framework is whether sex workers can join an existing union or whether they can form their own union (PLS, 2007: 136).

In determining whether a group of employees is appropriate for collective bargaining the Boards consider a number of factors, including: similarity in skills, interests, duties and working conditions, etc. (PLS, 2007: 137). All of these factors relate to what the Boards consider to be a “community of interest.” Surely there is a sufficient community of interest amongst sex workers, and escort workers in particular, for them to certify as a bargaining unit.

Despite these barriers, the unionization case within Canada looks promising. In recent statements from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Canadian Labour Congress, both of these organizations have committed themselves to working toward legislative reforms to help end the discrimination experienced by sex workers. At the 2001 CUPE National Convention, members passed a resolution for CUPE to take the lead in the Canadian Labour Congress for the repeal of the criminal laws pertaining to prostitution in Canada. Also, in 2002, the Canadian Labour Congress, an organization that represents 2.5 million workers in many different unions, called on the entire labour movement to support sex workers. In the process, as Pivot Legal Society argues, these established unions have recognized the de facto employment relationship that characterizes much sex work, and have become much more open to supporting the sex workers’ rights discourse.

Conclusion:

As it currently exists in Canada, sex workers are deprived of basic labour rights. Recognizing sex work as work and organizing on that basis will support the struggles of sex workers and potentially alleviate their unique grievances, especially those faced by single mothers. Sex workers’
organizations now exist in most countries in the world, increasingly in the form of unions. Ana Lopez, president of the International Union of Sex Workers, states “the right [for sex workers] to be represented by a union is fundamental” to the sex workers rights discourse (2000: 10). And while the illegal nature of sex work does pose considerable barriers to collective action, collectivization is also the very act by which sex workers can hope to gain decriminalization and the same level of protection, services and respect as other working women (Bruckert et. al., 2003). Unions could be one of the main driving forces behind getting sex workers the rights and services they need in order to be able to better provide for their families.
Chapter 5

Recommendations

This chapter discusses my recommendations that were developed based on the needs expressed by the mothers. As previously mentioned, the implementation of these recommendations could be hastened by a strong sex workers union and/or decriminalization. They include: altered service delivery, flexible child care, a non-judgmental legal system and sensitivity training for health and social service professionals.

As mentioned in the third chapter, repealing the criminals laws related to sex work (ss. 210, 211, 212 (1), 212 (3) and 213) is the first critical step towards providing sex workers with access to the employment and labour protections that are generally afforded to workers under the laws of the Provinces and Canada (PLS, 2007: ii). A repealing of these criminal laws would also give sex workers the recognition of their profession as a legitimate profession, which could eventually lead to lowered levels of discrimination and stigmatization. However, in the absence of decriminalization, the following recommendations address the current reality and immediate future of these women and are based on the argument that improvements to these women’s lives must occur immediately.

Recognize the Dual Roles of Most Sex Workers Who Are Mothers:

Because of the discrimination and stigmatization of sex work, to which its illegal nature is a large contributor, sex workers are not easily served through normal agency service delivery. In light of the women’s choices to be discrete about their profession, programs dedicated to sex workers must be sensitive to the fact that many sex workers do not want to “out themselves” by attending services or receiving benefits until sex work is accepted as legitimate. Services that are sensitive to the dualities of sex work would considerably reduce the stress and vulnerability of this population and could ultimately be more effective. Such programs need to offer treatment to women that are
otherwise intimidated to go to “normal” health clinics and social workers and agencies need to
develop outreach programs that can gain trust. As the participants informed me, in addition to the
usual harm reduction services and services aimed at helping women leave the industry, sex workers
could also benefit from services that take into account that they are also mothers. Thus, the most
effective approach to addressing the needs of mothers who work as sex workers would be to help
them manage their dual roles and identities and meet the needs of each.

Child Care:

One common need brought up by the participants was the need for child care. Just as with
other working mothers, sex workers who have children may also need help in securing child care
that is good, affordable, and accommodating of their working hours. As Farley and Barkan show in a
study of 130 sex workers in San Francisco, the need for child care was the primary concern amongst
these women (1998: 38). It was found that if female street sex workers were to have good child care
options, they might experience less stress in their dual role, and be more able to provide adequately
for their children’s needs. The same needs were expressed by the escort workers I interviewed. The
women informed me that a simple expansion of child care hours or a universal child benefit is not
sufficient to accommodate their sometimes inconsistent or odd working hours. Rather, they
expressed a need for flexible child care that accommodates atypical working hours. However,
flexible child care is difficult to find, both in Alberta and Ontario.

There are few Canadian studies which directly address the need for child care during atypical
hours. In an overview of a 1995 survey conducted as the background to the Task Force on Child care
and a Toronto survey conducted in the mid 1980s, Friendly et. al. show that only 16 per cent of child
care arrangements occurred between 6:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. despite the increasing number of
parents who report a need for child care on evenings, overnight and on weekends (1994: 11).
In the sample of women I interviewed, all women with children under the age of 14 reported a demand for extended day-care hours and/or overnight care. While other research on street-level sex work indicates that the busiest hours are in the early morning (on the drive to work), the escort workers in this sample cited weekends and nights as the busiest (Farley and Barkan, 1998: 40). This is not necessarily because this is where the demand is, but because three out of fifteen of the women also have day-time jobs and therefore make themselves unavailable during the day. Both Sylvia and Fiona explained their specific needs to me.

Sylvia: I need the option to have my child taken care of over night. I use [drugs and/or alcohol] sometimes when working and I don’t really wanna go pick up my kid at 3 AM drunk or high. You know, I want to…I’d rather just get myself a hotel room or stay at a friends. (Interview 1: 03/05/2006)

Fiona: It would be great if there was somewhere open twenty four hours or someone I could call to come to my home and watch the kids, if I get a call from a regular or something. That’s a lot of money to give up because I don’t have care. That’s, like, rent. (Interview 13: 02/08/2007).

As is evident from these excerpts, a minor extension of ordinary child care program hours would not accommodate these women. Since escort workers often receive calls late at night, and would like to take business with little notice, they expressed a demand for increased availability of affordable, night-care or overnight or drop in care. And since work does not qualify as an emergency, these women are unable to honestly use these services.

At the time of their study, Friendly et. al. reported that in Toronto, Metro Children's Services, (operated by the government), Family Day Services, Victoria Day Care Services and Scadding Court Community Centre in Toronto provide a group program to deal with short-term emergencies in child care (1994:16). However, when contacted, I discovered that the majority of these agencies no longer offer overnight care in their centers, but rather refer you to regulated home-care providers that ‘may’ offer the services. Similarly Edmonton Hospital Workers' Child Care Services refers mothers to a
small number of recommended and affiliated family day-care homes which provide extended hours and limited overnight care.

Two helpful women at the Edmonton Child care Services and Toronto Child care Services directed me to certain home-care providers that they believed provide overnight care, however I quickly discovered that these home-care providers require advance notice and the number of them is extremely limited. Because escort workers essentially work on-call and are often unable to provide advance notice the utility of these kinds of home care providers is limited. As reported by Friendly et. al., a number of day care providers have reduced their hours and now only provide evening care, reporting either that demand was too low or costs were too high to continue to provide care overnight (1994: 11-12). 43

Considering the specificity of these women’s needs, in-home care is perhaps the best option for sex workers. In-home care is in the child's own home, either at night or overnight and is not only on an emergency basis. Regulated in-home care is where the child is taken care of by a trained and qualified child care worker approved by the government (Friendly et. al., 1994). Regulated in home care was part of the Government of Canada and Government of Manitoba funding agreement on early learning and child care in 2005 which was worth $176M over five years. As per the agreement, the Government of Manitoba developed a five year Action Plan to stabilize and expand the child care system. Regulation and flexible child care were large components of this Action Plan. In her assessment of Manitoba’s childcare regime, Prentice argues that childcare in Manitoba is distinctly progressive since the establishment of provincially regulated childcare (2004: 193). In addition, Friendly et. al. specifically mention a program in Winnipeg called Child Minders that is operated by the Manitoba government and which provides in-home care at night for two or more children in a family (Friendly et. al. 1994). This program has been touted as extremely supportive and
accommodating of working lone parents and their schedules. Many nurses, for example, have taken advantage of this system (Friendly et. al., 1994). Regulated in home service is beneficial to many working women, not only sex workers, as it is flexible and more accountable since there is a degree of standardization and an ensured reputability of the individual taking care of your children. Moreover, this allows the child some consistency in care and maintains the children’s familiarity with their surroundings.

In Ontario and Alberta, where no such regulated service exists, unregulated commercial babysitting services report that they are often used to provide in-home care for children at night (Friendly et. al., 1994: 16). While regulated in home care is beneficial to all working women, it can be more so for sex workers. I argue that this is because sensitivity training and non-judgmental service provision can potentially become more easily a part of the training for government regulated child care workers, than it could for non-regulated private services. This could potentially allow the women to receive child care when they need it, and without stigmatization and discrimination. As such, a regulated 24 hour in-home care provider or an overnight drop in center that is not only emergency based would prove extremely useful for sex workers and their families.

*Parental Support Services:*

Other services that should be offered are non-stigmatizing services that provide parenting services, including pre- and postnatal care, parent training and support and family or parent counselling (Sloss and Harper, 2002: 340). Such support could potentially be the protective measure to prevent women from losing custody of their children, proving them to be proactive and knowledgeable parents. Furthermore, it was suggested by some of the women, that programs could be designed to increase rapport and promote mutual assistance amongst sex workers who are also
parents. Programs that could develop as a result of this increased cooperation amongst the women could include car-pooling, child minding or non-judgmental parental support groups.

For these services to actually be non-stigmatizing and non-judgmental, service providers, employees, and/or volunteers may require training in challenging their own assumptions regarding the parenting abilities of these women and the realities of sex work. This training is essential to create non-judgmental community outreach programs for sex workers that are not likely to seek services on their own. While examples of successful outreach programs by and for sex workers certainly do exist, according to Sex Professional of Canada, the number of them remains limited. 45

Similarly, the women I interviewed knew of no outreach programs dedicated towards mothers who were also sex workers and when asked if they knew where to turn in case of a custody battle or in need of support of any sort I was told by Wendy “most of the support groups out there just try to get you out of sex work….so I just don’t go to them.” Thus, public efforts need to be put into place to access this population and support them through their pregnancies, and after their pregnancies, through public health or outreach clinics that recognize sex work as work and aims to support them in their efforts to support their own families.

*Alter Existing Programs to be more Receptive of Women:*

The creation of these new programs may take many years; therefore there also exists a dire need for social workers, sex workers rights advocates and other leaders within the sex industry to invest time in altering existing programs aimed at sex workers to recognize that most sex workers do have children. In any program designed to aid sex workers, it must be taken into consideration that sex workers are, for the most part, also mothers. Therefore, having children greatly influences the way in which sex workers receive certain outreach programs. For example, many women will have paramount concerns for their children (either for their care or for preventing their children from
knowing of their profession) before entering a program designed to support sex workers (Weiner, 1996: 102). As is shown by Weiner, women who were going to enter into residential drug treatment expressed hesitation because of concerns for their children. In this study about twenty percent of the children lived with their mothers and:

these women were not likely to enter treatment unless they could arrange alternate care for their children… About 70 percent of the children were already in informal or familial arrangements, and these caretakers might make claims to terminate parental rights or refuse care if the mother is not providing income. The nearly 10 percent of the children who were already in the foster care system could have been permanently removed if their mother admitted to drug or alcohol use and requested treatment or disclosed that she was HIV positive (Weiner, 1996: 101).

The women in this study were also concerned with sex worker programs that ignored the family lives of sex workers. Fiona believes that this is because most publicly funded programs are aimed to support street level workers (not escorts) and are intended to help sex workers leaves the industry. She argues that, because of her family life, she was not able to even volunteer for certain sex worker programs. According to Fiona, the majority of these programs organize on the assumption that sex workers have no dependents or no family life:

Most of them [other sex workers], you know, have their children taken away, or don’t have kids, so it’s not a deal. But I’ve even wanted to volunteer for some programs or go to look for support, or meet some other women, and these gigs are at the weirdest hours. When I’ve got my kids, mostly nights. What am I supposed to do? (Interview 13: 02/08/2007)

As can be seen, to be truly effective, funded programs or volunteer support groups must take into consideration the personal and familial lives of the sex workers.

Sensitivity Training:

The women also felt that the legal system was a point of stress in their lives and that this tense relationship was the result of the stigmatization of sex work. As such, in cases of potential parent child separation, in order to avoid common assumptions and misconceptions during child
custody and access cases, lawyers, judges, and family law mediators should be educated to recognize and avoid the biases and misconceptions that often cloud perceptions of sex work and sex workers who are mothers (PLS, 2007: 116). And while being non judgmental may run counter to the safety of the child in some cases, it is necessary that social workers do not act as judges on the morality of the profession or the individual engaging in the profession but rather act on the best interests of the child. All levels of government, law enforcement and emergency services personnel who make decisions that impact sex workers and their families should have sensitivity training available which, at least, shows that their judgments are rarely neutral. In all cases, individual circumstances should be considered and the courts and governments should take all precautions to avoid stereotypes and assumptions in their decision making.

Lastly, attention should be paid to individual cases in which parent-child separation has occurred. Jayasaree argues that mothers who have been separated from their children may be at the most risk for emotional or drug problems (2000: 5). As such, these women could benefit from counseling to deal with the loss of their child, as well as legal or social assistance in attaining reunification if possible.

**Conclusion:**

This chapter discussed my recommendations that were developed based on the needs expressed by the mothers. As previously mentioned, the implementation of these recommendations could be hastened by a strong sex workers union and/or decriminalization. As argued in Chapter Two, many women feel uncomfortable using public services that are not recognizant of the peculiarities of the sex industry or they find it difficult to use services in which they feel they face discrimination, judgment or the threat of parent child separation. Moreover, because many women feel that there is a blatant negative perception of sex work within the legal system that comes to
affect legal decisions which have serious impacts on their lives. As such, I suggest that all public employees, especially those who work within the health and legal sector undergo a form of sensitivity training. This could potentially allow for a more equitable treatment of sex workers in custody battles, parent child separation cases and more non judgemental and accessible health and social services.

Secondly, the women spoke of the need for flexible child care to accommodate their difficult working hours. Because of the lack of overnight or flexible care, I suggest the establishment of an overnight regulated, in home service, similar to one that exists in Manitoba. I argue that a regulated service, compared to a non regulated private service affords these women the same type of standardized care as other working mothers who work during the days. And lastly, considering the lack of research on this very important and complicated matter, it is necessary that more research continue in this area and that we encourage more of these women to speak out and tell us their needs in non discriminatory and respectful environments. And while it may seem that much dialogue exists on the topic of sex work, for these discussions to actually help the women, it necessary that all efforts concerning the sex industry aspire to promote the health, safety, civil and human rights of sex workers, including their rights to have families, to engage in their work as safely as possible, and to receive high quality health and other services in conditions of trust and confidentiality, without discrimination.

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Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the complex relationship that exists between lone-motherhood and sex work. Given how little is known about the impact of sex work on lone motherhood, my aim was to address the lack of research done in Canada. Secondly, in order to address and correct for the often hasty over generalizations made by some academics on the sex industry, I narrowed my focus to only one segment of the industry, being that of independent escort workers. Utilizing the idea of particularism, I argued that it is important to understand the environmental context of mothers and the variety and uniqueness of women’s experiences in order to effectively respond with directed policies and supports for lone mothers. With this comes the recognition that not all parents can equally take advantage of the limited amount of supports that are provided for lone parents in order to become effective parents. As such, I sought to discover whether or not sex workers who are single mothers have unique needs and experiences.

From the 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with independent escort workers I was able to identify the unique stressors that these women face relative to other single mothers. It became evident as the interviews continued that the stigmatization and illegal nature of sex work often force these women to lead double lives characterized by shame and fear. Faced with the threats of stigmatization and/or parent-child separation upon discovery of their occupation, many of the women interviewed refuse to seek professional, legal and/or social help. As such, the double life which many of the women reportedly live is not only stressful, but is also a serious impediment to their ability to effectively parent.

I argue that the current legal status of sex work and its stigmatization are what cause many of these women to live the “double life” and are what pose barriers to these women in achieving
financial stability, equal rights, social comfort, access to quality services, and child support; all of which are integral to effective parenting. One of the primary grievances, for instance, is that these women are categorised as self employed or independent contractors. Consequently they have no job security, no guarantee of earnings, no benefits and no employment insurance. To this end, these women are in a contradictory space, in that they perform work and are subjected to labour expectations, but denied the stability, security and protection generally associated with paid employment. However, arguing for benefits to be extended to these women can be interpreted as recognizing the legitimacy of sex work as an occupation, and is premised first on the partial or whole decriminalization of the profession.

However, while I discuss the philosophical and political arguments against the recognition of sex work as work, I assert that they distract much needed attention away from the everyday lives and needs of these women. I argue that, as a result, scholars and policy makers need to focus not on the idea of sex work but rather the improvement of the everyday lives of individual sex workers and their families. It is only when we remove ourselves from the debate about how best to protect sex workers that we can actually move towards empowering them and better assisting them in their efforts to be effective parents and provide for their families. Ultimately, I contend that when sex workers are granted equal rights and access to supportive institutions they are capable of effective parenting. To this end, I argue that decriminalization and the recognition of sex work as work, provides for the most supportive framework in which mothers who are sex workers can raise their children. This not only grants them access to the support that other working mothers may have, but also can potentially alleviate the societal stigma and discrimination that moralizes and punishes sex workers.
I end my discussion with a brief list of my recommendations which were developed based on the needs expressed throughout the interviews. The implementation of these recommendations could be hastened by decriminalization and a strong sex workers union. Both unionization and decriminalization are seen as critical steps in opening the door to talking about further crucial worker rights that will help to protect and provide for these women and their families, such as access to social security, retirement benefits and various other protections. My recommendations include: flexible child care, altered service delivery, non judgmental legal system, sensitivity training and future research.

In addition to the recommendations already discussed, future feminist research is needed on the areas of sex work and lone parenthood. Given how little is known about the impact of pregnancies and mothering on women in the sex industry, much remains to be learned. Researchers must examine the effects of mothering on female sex workers’ mental and physical well-being, parenting, service seeking, stigmatization, work etc. These studies should include large-scale investigations of women involved in the various areas of the sex industry and expand their focus to the children and families of these women as well.

The life of sex workers and their children are mystified in a society where they are stigmatized and socially isolated from mainstream society. Many people misinterpret the life of these people according to their own preconceived notions. It is my hope that my research has served to demystify the sex worker to an extent, to show that these women are in many ways very similar to all other lone working mothers. Like other lone mothers, these women face the difficult tasks of
raising their children alone, yet they do so in a social environment that is hostile to both their status as lone mothers and as sex workers. Yet they struggle on, with courage, determination and the hope that one day people will realize that they are “just like everyone else” (Interview 1: 03/05/2006).
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Appendix A

CITY OF EDMONTON BYLAW 12452  ESCORT LICENSING BYLAW  (CONSOLIDATED ON DECEMBER 6, 2006)
CITY OF EDMONTON BYLAW 12452  ESCORT LICENSING BYLAW

Pleas see: http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws/C12452.doc.

Whereas, pursuant to section 7 of the Municipal Government Act, a Council may pass bylaws for municipal purposes respecting, inter alia, the following matters:

a) the safety, health and welfare of people and the protection of people and property;

b) businesses, business activities and persons engaged in business; and

Whereas, pursuant to Section 8 of the Municipal Government Act, a council may, in a bylaw, inter alia:

a) regulate or prohibit; and

b) provide for a system of licenses, permits or approvals including:

   (i) establishing fees for licences, permits and approvals including fees for licences, permits and approvals that may be in the nature of a reasonable tax for the activity authorized or for the purpose of raising revenue;

   (ii) prohibiting any development, activity, industry, business or thing until a licence, permit or approval has been granted;

   (iii) providing that terms and conditions may be imposed on any licence, permit or approval, the nature of the terms and conditions and who may impose them;

   (iv) setting out the conditions that must be met before a licence, permit or approval is granted or renewed, the nature of the conditions and who may impose them; and

   (v) providing for the duration of licences, permits and approvals and their suspension or cancellation for failure to comply with a term or condition or the bylaw or for any other reason specified in the bylaw.
Edmonton City Council enacts:

**PART I - PURPOSE, DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION**

**PURPOSE**

1. The purpose of this bylaw is to establish a system of licensing Escort and Agency businesses in order to:

   (a) prohibit the conduct of these businesses until a license has been granted;

   (b) help protect the safety, health and welfare of people engaged in, or receiving the services provided by, these businesses; and

   (c) establish license fees that reflect, at a minimum, the costs associated with administering and regulating these businesses.

**DEFINITIONS**

2. In this bylaw, unless the context otherwise requires:

   (a) “Agency” means a person who charges or receives a Fee for arranging an introduction between an Escort and another person;

   (b) “Agency License” means a License issued to an Agency providing introduction services to one or more Escorts;

   (c) “Chief of Police” means the Chief of the Edmonton Police Service or his designate;

   (d) “City” means the City of Edmonton;

   (e) “City Manager” means the chief administrative officer of the City;

   (f) “Escort” means a person who charges or receives a Fee for acting as a date or providing personal companionship for a limited period of time;

   (g) “Escort License” means a License issued to an Escort;

   (h) “Fee” includes any monetary amount or any other consideration of value;

   (i) “Fine Option Program” means a program established by the Province of Alberta for the purpose of allowing an individual to discharge a fine in whole or in part by earning credits for performing work;

   (j) “Independent Agency License” means a License issued to an Agency providing introduction services to only one Escort;

   (k) “Land Use Bylaw” means a land use bylaw passed by the City pursuant to the Alberta *Municipal Government Act*;

   (l) “License” means a license issued pursuant to this bylaw;

   (m) “Licensee” means a person holding a valid and subsisting License;
(n) “Peace Officer” means a person employed for the purposes of preserving and maintaining the public peace;

(o) “Registrar of Corporations” means the person appointed pursuant to the Alberta Business Corporations Act;

(p) “Violation Ticket” means any ticket issued by the City pursuant to a bylaw or a violation ticket as defined in the Alberta Provincial Offences Procedure Act.

RULES FOR INTERPRETATION

3 The marginal notes and headings in this bylaw are for reference purposes only.

PART II - ESCORT LICENSING

4 Before any person may provide the services of an Escort, a written application must be made to the City Manager for an Escort License.

5 An Escort License may not be issued to:

(a) an individual under the age of 18 years; or

(b) a partnership or a corporation.

6 Every application for the issue or renewal of an Escort License must be in a form prescribed by the City Manager and must contain at least the following information regarding the applicant:

(a) family name and all given names;

(b) date of birth;

(c) residence address;

(d) residence telephone number;

(e) Agency through which introduction services are received;

(f) other names used by the Escort, to a maximum of three;

(g) a current colour photograph of the applicant.

7 Every application for the issue or renewal of an Escort License must be personally signed by the individual named in the application.

8 Every Escort License expires 12 months from the date it is issued unless it is revoked earlier pursuant to this bylaw.
PART III - AGENCY LICENSING

9  Before any person may provide the services of an Agency, a written application must be made to the City Manager for an Agency License or an Independent Agency License.

10 An Agency License may not be issued to:

(a) an individual under the age of 18 years;

(b) a partnership with any partner under the age of 18 years; or

(c) a corporation with any shareholder, director or officer under the age of 18 years.

11 Every application for the issue or renewal of an Agency License must be in a form prescribed by the City Manager and must contain at least the following information regarding the applicant:

(a) If the applicant is an individual:

(i) family name and all given names;

(ii) date of birth; and

(iii) a current colour photograph of the individual;

(b) If the applicant is a partnership:

(i) the family name and all given names for each partner;

(ii) the date of birth for each partner; and

(iii) a current colour photograph of each partner;

(c) If the applicant is a corporation:

(i) the legal name of the corporation;

(ii) the corporate access number;

(iii) the family name, all given names and the date of birth for each individual shareholder;

(iv) the legal name and corporate access number for each corporate shareholder;

(v) the family name, all given names and the date of birth for each director; and

(vi) the family name, all given names and the date of birth for each officer;
(d) For all applicants:

(i) the complete legal name of each person employed by the Agency whether by direct employment, independent contract, or otherwise;

(ii) the business address of the Agency;

(iii) all business telephone numbers used by the Agency including, but not limited to, cellular phone’s, digital phone’s, pagers and fax lines;

(iv) all names used by the Agency;

(v) all electronic mail addresses used by the Agency; and

(vi) all internet computer addresses used by the Agency.

12 Every application for the issue or renewal of an Agency License must be personally signed by:

(a) the individual named in the application;

(b) each partner named in the application; or

(c) each director of a corporation named in the application

as the case may be.

13 Every Agency License expires 12 months from the date it is issued unless it is revoked earlier pursuant to this bylaw.

14 An Independent Agency License may not be issued to:

(a) an individual under the age of 18 years;

(b) a partnership; or

(c) a corporation with any shareholder, director or officer under the age of 18 years.

15 An Independent Agency License may only be issued to an individual if that individual is the only Escort receiving introduction services from that Agency.

16 An Independent Agency License may only be issued to a corporation if the only Escort receiving introduction services from that Agency is the sole shareholder, director and officer of that corporation.

17 Every application for the issue or renewal of an Independent Agency License must be in a form prescribed by the City Manager and must contain at least the following information regarding the applicant:

(a) If the applicant is an individual:
(i) family name and all given names;

(ii) date of birth; and

(iii) a current colour photograph of the individual;

(b) If the applicant is a corporation:

(i) the legal name of the corporation;

(ii) the corporate access number;

(iii) the family name, all given names and the date of birth for the sole shareholder, director and officer;

(c) For all applicants:

(i) the complete legal name of each person employed by the Agency whether by direct employment, independent contract, or otherwise;

(ii) the business address of the Agency;

(iii) all business telephone numbers used by the Agency including, but not limited to, cellular phone’s, digital phone’s, pagers and fax lines;

(iv) all names used by the Agency;

(v) all electronic mail addresses used by the Agency; and

(vi) all internet computer addresses used by the Agency.

18 Every application for the issue or renewal of an Independent Agency License must be personally signed by:

(a) the individual named in the application; or

(b) the sole shareholder, director and officer of the corporation named in the application

as the case may be.

19 Every Independent Agency License expires 12 months from the date it is issued unless it is revoked earlier pursuant to this bylaw.

PART IV - REFERRALS

20 Every application for the issue or renewal of a License must forthwith be referred to the Chief of Police.

21 The Chief of Police may, upon receipt of an application for the issue or renewal of a License, make or cause to be made any investigations reasonably required to determine whether the issue or renewal of the License would endanger the
safety, health or welfare of people or the protection of people or property.

22 Such investigations must include, but are not limited to, a criminal record check of all individuals named anywhere in the application.

23 If the Chief of Police believes, on reasonable grounds, that the issue or renewal of a License would endanger the safety, health or welfare of people or the protection of people or property then the Chief of Police must notify the City Manager forthwith, in writing.

24 If the City Manager is notified, in writing, that the Chief of Police believes, on reasonable grounds, that the issue or renewal of a License would endanger the safety, health or welfare of people or the protection of people or property then the City Manager must not issue or renew the License.

25 If an application for the issue or renewal of a License has been referred to the Chief of Police and if no written response has been received from the Chief of Police within 15 days from the date of the referral, then the City Manager may proceed on the basis that the Chief of Police does not believe, on reasonable grounds, that the issue or renewal of the License would endanger the safety, health or welfare of people or the protection of people or property.

26 Every application for the issue or renewal of an Agency License or an Independent Agency License must be referred to the Planning and Development Department of the City for confirmation of compliance by the applicant with all relevant provisions of any Land Use Bylaw.

27 The City Manager must not issue or renew any Agency License or any Independent Agency License without confirmation from the Planning and Development Department of the City of compliance by the applicant with all relevant provisions of any Land Use Bylaw.

PART V - REPORTS

28 Every Agency must provide a written report to the City Manager within 10 days from the end of each calendar month containing the following information regarding that month:

(a) The family name and all given names of each Escort for which the Agency provided introduction services;

(b) The Escort License number for each such Escort;

(c) A complete list of every introduction arranged for each such Escort specifying the calendar date, time, and location.

(d) The complete name of each person employed by the Agency whether by direct employment, independent contract, or otherwise;

(e) Every name used by the Agency in advertising or providing the services of an Agency;

(f) Every telephone number used by the Agency, including any cellular,
digital, pager or fax numbers;

(g) Every electronic mail address and internet computer address used by the Agency.

29 The License of an Agency that fails to provide a report containing the information required by this Part within 10 days from the end of a calendar month is immediately suspended pending a hearing before the City Manager.

30 (1) If a Peace Officer believes, on reasonable grounds, an Agency has committed an offence pursuant to this bylaw, the Peace Officer may demand the delivery of a written report from the Agency to the City Manager containing the information required by this Part, current to the date of the demand.

(2) A demand made pursuant to this section must be in writing and must be served on the Agency by personal service:

(a) on an individual named on the License of the Agency; or

(b) on any director of a corporation named on the License of the Agency;

and a copy must be delivered forthwith to the City Manager with a description of the suspected offence and the reasonable grounds for belief.

(3) If a demand has been served on an Agency pursuant to this section, the report must be provided to the City Manager within three days of the date on which the demand was served on the Agency.

(4) The License of an Agency that fails to provide a report containing the information required by this Part within three days of a demand made pursuant to this section being served on the Agency is immediately suspended pending a hearing before the City Manager.

PART VI - OFFENCES

31 A person who contravenes or does not comply with a provision of this Part is guilty of an offence.

32 If a corporation commits an offence, any director, officer or agent of the corporation who directed, authorized, assented to, acquiesced in or participated in the commission of the offence is a party to and guilty of the offence and is liable on conviction to any fine or penalty provided for the offence, whether or not the corporation has been prosecuted.

33 No person shall engage in the business of or operate as an Escort without holding a valid and subsisting Escort License.

34 No person under the age of 18 years shall engage in the business of or operate as an Escort.

35 No person shall engage in the business of or operate as an Escort except through an introduction arranged by an Agency.

36 No Escort shall advertise or promote their services in any fashion using a name
other than the name on the License issued to the Escort unless the Escort has first provided the name in writing to the City Manager.

37 No Escort shall advertise or promote their services in any fashion without including the number of their License.

38 No person shall engage in the business of or operate as an Agency without holding a valid and subsisting Agency License or Independent Agency License.

39 No person holding a valid and subsisting Independent Agency License shall provide introduction services to more than one Escort pursuant to the Independent Agency License.

40 No person shall provide introduction services to an Escort unless the Escort has a valid and subsisting Escort License.

41 No person shall provide introduction services to an Escort under the age of 18 years.

42 No Agency shall advertise or promote their services in any fashion using a name other than the name on the License issued to the Agency unless the Agency has registered the name with the Registrar of Corporations.

43 No Agency shall advertise or promote their services in any fashion using:

(a) a telephone number;
(b) a name;
(c) an electronic mail address; or
(d) an internet address

unless the Agency has first provided the number, name or address in writing to the City Manager.

44 No Agency shall advertise or promote their services in any fashion without including the number of their License.

45 No person shall supply incorrect, incomplete or misleading information in an application for the issue or renewal of a License, or in a report provided pursuant to this bylaw.

46 A Licensee shall notify the City Manager forthwith, in writing, of any change to any of the information contained in the most recent application for the issue or renewal of a License.

47 A Licensee shall provide their License forthwith when requested to do so by a Peace Officer.

PART VII - PENALTIES

48 A person who contravenes or does not comply with a provision of Part VI of this bylaw may, if the Violation Ticket issued in respect of the offence contains a
specified penalty amount, pay this amount in which case the person will not be prosecuted in court for the contravention.

49 If a specified penalty amount is included in a Violation Ticket issued in respect of an offence under this bylaw, the amount must be that specified in Schedule B.

50 A person who is found guilty of an offence under this bylaw is liable to a fine in an amount not less than that specified in Schedule B, and not exceeding $10,000.00

51 If a person is found guilty of an offence under this bylaw, and the conduct that gives rise to the offence involves the non-payment of a fee which remains unpaid, the court shall, in addition to any fine, impose a penalty equivalent to the amount of the unpaid fee.

52 (1) In addition to any fine and penalty imposed, the court shall provide for imprisonment of not less than 12 days and not more than one year for non-payment of a fine or penalty.

(2) This section does not apply if a court is satisfied that the offender is unable to pay the fine, or discharge it pursuant to a Fine Option Program.

53 If a person is found guilty of an offence under this bylaw, the court may, in addition to any other penalty imposed, order the person to comply with this bylaw.

PART VIII - SUSPENSIONS AND REVOCATIONS

54 If a Licensee is convicted of an offence under this bylaw the City Manager must forthwith hold a hearing where the Licensee must show cause why any License held by that Licensee should not be suspended or revoked.

55 If a Licensee who has been convicted of an offence under this bylaw subsequently commits and is convicted of a further offence under this bylaw, any License held by that Licensee is immediately suspended for a minimum period of three months and the City Manager must forthwith hold a hearing where the Licensee must show cause why any License held by that Licensee should not be revoked.

56 (1) If a Licensee who has been convicted on two separate occasions of offences under this bylaw subsequently commits and is convicted of a further offence under this bylaw any License held by that Licensee is immediately revoked.

(2) The revocation of a License pursuant to this section may not be appealed.

57 If the City Manager believes, on reasonable grounds, a Licensee is operating in contravention of a Land Use Bylaw, whether or not the Licensee has been charged or convicted of an offence, the City Manager must forthwith hold a hearing where the Licensee must show cause why any License held by that Licensee should not be suspended or revoked.

58 (1) Any License issued in the name of a corporation is immediately suspended if there is a change in the shareholder(s), director(s) or officer(s) of the
corporation.

(2) Any License suspended pursuant to this section remains suspended pending a hearing before the City Manager.

(3) This section does not apply if the Licensee obtains the written consent of the City Manager prior to any change in the shareholder(s), director(s) or officer(s) being made.

Upon the conclusion of a hearing held by the City Manager, the City Manager may:

(a) except where a License has been suspended for a minimum period pursuant to this bylaw, cancel any suspension and re-instate a License;

(b) subject to any minimum period of suspension pursuant to this bylaw, suspend a License for a period of up to six months from the date of the hearing;

(c) revoke a License.

60 (1) An applicant for the issue or renewal of a License may appeal the refusal of the City Manager to issue or renew the License to the Quasi-Judicial Standing Committee of the City;

(2) A Licensee may appeal any suspension or revocation of a License imposed by the City Manager to the Quasi-Judicial Standing Committee of the City;

(3) Any appeal pursuant to this section must be made in a form prescribed by the City Manager and must be received by the Office of the City Clerk within 30 days of the date on which the decision to refuse, suspend or revoke the License was made by the City Manager.

61 (1) Upon the conclusion of an appeal heard by the Quasi-Judicial Standing Committee, the committee may confirm, vary, or overturn the decision of the City Manager.

(2) The decision of the Quasi-Judicial Standing Committee is final and binding and may not be appealed.

(S.6, 60-61, Bylaw 13219, November 26, 2002)

62 (1) A Licensee having had a License revoked may not apply or be named in an application for a License for a period of two years from the date of revocation.

(2) A shareholder, director or officer of a corporation having had a License revoked may not apply or be named in an application for a License for a period of two years from the date of revocation.

**PART IX - GENERAL**

63 The fees payable for a License required by this bylaw are set out in Schedule A and are non-refundable.
A License issued pursuant to this bylaw is the property of the City and may not be transferred.

No License may be issued or renewed if the applicant, or any individual or corporation named in the application, has an unpaid fine owing to the City for an offence under this bylaw.

The City Manager may carry out whatever inspections are reasonably required to determine compliance with this bylaw.

A copy of a record of the City, certified by the City Manager as a true copy of the original, shall be admitted in evidence as prima facie proof of the facts stated in the record without proof of the appointment or signature of the person signing it.

In any prosecution for an offence, where a question arises as to whether a person had a valid and subsisting License, the burden is on that person to establish that the License was valid and subsisting.

The City Manager may delegate any of his powers, duties or functions under this bylaw to an employee of the municipality.
Except where inconsistent with this bylaw, the general licensing provisions of Bylaw 6124, City of Edmonton License Bylaw, apply to this bylaw.

Bylaw 10397 is repealed.

This bylaw shall come into force on April 1, 2001.

(NOTE: Consolidation made under Section 69 of the Municipal Government Act, R.S.A. 2000, c. L-21 and Bylaw 12005, and printed under the City Manager’s authority.)

Bylaw 12452, passed by Council December 19, 2000:

Amendments:

November 26, 2002

December 7, 2004

December 14, 2005

December 6, 2006

Bylaw 13219,

Bylaw 13875,

Bylaw 14169,

Bylaw 14427,
CITY OF EDMONTON

BYLAW 12452

ESCORT LICENSING BYLAW

SCHEDULE A – LICENSE FEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>License</th>
<th>Annual Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Escort License</td>
<td>$ 107.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agency License</td>
<td>$4,282.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Independent Agency License</td>
<td>$1,606.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B:


**Labour Relations Code**, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 244 [LRC].


**Employment standards and protections**

- The *Employment Standards Act* (the “ESA”) sets out the minimum workplace standards for most employees. Varies from province to Province. Includes such things as minimum wage, protection of wage payment and prevention of exploitation by employers. The ESA applies to both unionized and non-unionized employees. The ESA sets out both general workplace standards and specialized standards for particular industries.

- The *Labour Relations Code* (the “LRC”) is also relevant to this discussion because it sets out the law in relation to unionization and the relationship between unions and employers. The ability to enjoy the protections that union membership offers is set out in the LRC. In order to be a part of a union, you have to be an “employee.”

- The *Workers Compensation Act* (the “WCA”) contains a provincial compensation scheme through which employers pay into a compensation fund. When a worker is injured on the job, he or she may make a claim for compensation under the Act that includes compensation for lost wages due to the injury and compensation for medical costs.

- The WCA has an associated set of regulations called the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* (the “OHSR”). The OHSR sets out the minimum requirements for health and safety standards in the workplace enforced by the Board in all industries covered by the WCA.
Appendix C:

Interview Schedule

Interview 1.
Participant(s): Sylvia and Wendy
Date: March 5th, 2006
Location: Toronto (personal interview)

Interview 2.
Participant: Annalise
Date: March 27th, 2006
Location: Toronto (personal interview)

Interview 3.
Participant: Veronica
Date: April 9th, 2006
Location: Toronto (telephone interview)

Interview 4.
Participant: Lorein
Date: April 13th, 2006
Location: (telephone interview)

Interview 5.
Participant: Audrey
Date: April 26th, 2006
Location: Toronto (personal interview)

Interview 6.
Participant: Sherri
Date: May 28\textsuperscript{th}, 2006
Location: Toronto (telephone interview)

Interview 7.
Participant: Christy
Date: July 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2006
Location: Edmonton (telephone interview)

Interview 8.
Participant: Anastasia
Date: July 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2006
Location: Edmonton (personal interview)

Interview 9.
Participant: Mistress Patricia
Date: September 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2006
Location: Edmonton (personal interview)

Interview 10.
Participant: Niki
Date: September 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2006
Location: Edmonton (personal interview)

Interview 11.
Participant: Petra
Date: November 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2006
Location: Edmonton (personal interview)

Interview 12.
Participant: Aelishcia
Date: January 26th, 2007
Location: Edmonton (personal interview)

Interview 13.
Participant: Fiona
Date: February 8th, 2007
Location: Edmonton (personal interview)

Interview 14.
Participant: Sarah
Date: July 27th, 2007
Location: Edmonton (personal interview)
1 Defined as a parent who serves as the sole caretaker for a dependent child/children at home under the age of 18 years. Lone parents include single, never-married, separated or divorced persons not currently living with a legal or common-law spouse. While this definition excludes persons who may otherwise be single parents but whose children are older or have moved away from the home, this thesis will still speak to the previous experiences of these women.

This thesis incorporates and supports alternative definitions of the family and will be based on the belief that either gender is capable of parenting and that lone-parent families provide equally as healthy family environments for children as other family models. However, it will only address the experiences of female lone parents, and in doing so will use the terms parenting and mothering interchangeably.

2 In an extension of this argument, Weitzer argues that street level sex workers are more prone to have children because of a lack of birth control and condom usage. Weitzer points out that the use of condoms and other forms of birth control in street level sex work is less than in escort level sex work due to higher and more frequent levels of drug abuse and intoxication amongst street level sex workers, which can result in forgetting to use protection, or compliance to the clients request to not wear a condom for a higher pay. Secondly, Weitzer shows that unplanned pregnancies amongst street level sex workers can be linked to the higher incidence of rape amongst street level sex workers, of which the offender may or may not wear a condom. These arguments, however, assume that the reportedly greater level of pregnancies amongst street level sex workers indicates a greater level of unplanned pregnancies, leaving no room for the consideration that some of these women may have intentionally decided to have children.

3 http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/597ENG%2Epdf

4 Preferred Styles of Parenting: An individual perception on what kind of parenting the women, themselves, deem to be ‘effective’. This differs from Dalla’s idea of effective parenting, which even though based on much institutional research, can tend to be bias because it assumes that dual parent families provide more healthy income, and that sex workers, as individuals are more likely to be drug addicted and previously abused. Since the length of this project prevents me from delving into the discourses surrounding the question of what the “good or effective parent is,” I have chosen to focus on what the women, themselves, see as the barriers to becoming the kind of parent they want to be.

5 Lone Parent:
All of the women interviewed are or were lone parents. It was discovered during an interview that one of the women is currently married. Her child is now an adult, however, and she met her husband after her son left the home.

Independent Escort:
This means that the individual operates without an agency or pimp and works outside of her home. The location of the transaction is usually a client’s home or a hotel room paid for by the client.

6 The definition of a "body-rub": “It "includes the manipulating, touching or stimulating by any means, of a person's body or part thereof, but does not include medical, therapeutic or cosmetic treatment given by a person duly licensed." (“How cities 'license' off-street hookers,” Dan Gardner, The Ottawa Citizen: Sunday, June 16, 2002).


8 http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/maggies

9 Snowball sampling is a technique for developing a research sample where existing participants recommend to the researcher future subjects from among their acquaintances. Multi-nuclei sampling refers to research in which the content is drawn from several focal points allowing the researcher to make estimates about the social network connecting the hidden population.


11 My findings indicate that in Toronto, only 16 out of 68 advertisements for escort workers in the Toronto NOW magazine referred to independent escort workers. In Edmonton, on the other hand, 11 out of 52 women advertised in the SEE magazine and the Sun Newspaper were independent. I was able to determine whether or not women worked independently or for an agency by who answered the calls. If they answered the call themselves or had an answering machine, this indicated that they worked for themselves. Those who worked for an agency, on the other hand, would not answer the calls themselves. Instead the calls were connected back to a main line at an agency. In Edmonton, for example, several of the numbers I dialled reached the same operators at both ‘Personal Touch’ and ‘Touch of Class.’ While the advertisements themselves sometimes declared ‘independent escort for hire’ and the number listed was not similar to any others, the call would still go back to one of the main escort agencies in the city. Upon explaining my frustration about trying to find independent escorts to interview to one of the first women I interviewed in Edmonton, I was told by her to look at the small print on the bottom of the advertisements. It was there that the companies (NOW and SEE) are required by law to list the license numbers of escorts, escort agencies or body rub parlous. The participant informed me that those advertisements with the same license
numbers at the bottom were most likely an agency and this number was their business license. Those advertisements with unique license numbers indicated an individual with an independent escort licence.

12 http://pub27.bravenet.com/forum/2274247688/show/564294

13 My intention was to engage in participatory research in which my writing was available to the participants at any point in the research process. For the participants with e-mails, I sent my completed research proposal and first chapter (if they requested this at the beginning of the interview). For those without e-mail, I offered to mail the chapters to them, but was not asked to do so. I made these efforts with the hope that I would receive input, comments, questions and suggestions. Had they felt uncomfortable with the way that I have contextualized their interviews, or felt that I was missing some key points, I would have or would continue to go to great lengths to change that. However, underlying this was the assumption that the participants would have the time, or the will to participate. The reality of the situation was that only two of the women requested I email them the updated versions and I received no feedback.

14 Only two of the women entered the sex industry after their children were born—Annalise and Mistress Patricia. Their children are now over the age of 18.

15“Provincial and territorial jurisdictions have the legislative responsibility for child and family services (child welfare). One exception is the federal responsibility for Aboriginal peoples with status under the Indian Act (Canada). Each province and territory has specific legislation providing protection for neglected and abused children. Child Welfare in Canada 2000 outlines the roles and responsibilities of provincial and territorial child welfare authorities in the provision of child protection and preventive/support services. The report also describes the organizational structures, as well as the tools, resources and policies that are used by child welfare authorities to carry out the responsibilities they assume under provincial and territorial legislation.” Please see: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/sdc/socpol/publications/reports/2000-000033/page03.shtml

The provincial ministries have a legal duty to investigate reports about children who are suspected of being abused or neglected, or who may be in danger. If it is reported that a child is not safe, a social worker is sent to the home to personally decide the situation. If the child is removed from the home, they live in state care until the judge determines what living arrangements are in the best interests of the child (PLS, 2007: 43). Please see: http://www.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/pad/reports/chart/chart1-1e.html
16 A public interest law firm based in Vancouver. Pivot Legal Society’s mandate is to improve the lives of marginalized people through law reform, strategic legal action and legal education.

17 www.whore.bravehost.com, Wendy’s website.

18 As a social services worker.

19 All of the women were of the view that they would not speak highly of the sex industry, now, or later if their children are too young to understand now. When I asked Sarah whether or not she would be supportive of her child entering the sex industry, if her child considered it, she said she would if her child knew all the costs and benefits of doing so. What she would not do is encourage her to enter the industry. From this, one could assume that having a knowledgeable mother in the area could serve as a source of information and may prevent one from making decisions based on a lack of information or false promises. There is not, however, any direct causal relationship that can be discovered such as “sex workers breed sex workers.” Indeed, in this sample, with the exception of one woman who was adopted, none had parents that were involved in the sex industry. (Interview 14: 07/27/2007).

20 All participants agree that their lifestyles are/were adequate for providing the best emotional and physical care possible for their children. Sylvia, for example, explained that the quick money and the flexible working hours brought extra cash when money was tight and in a way that did not disrupt her time with her family.


Policy Recommendations:
“Research has shown that low-income and working poor families benefit through the provision of education and skill-building opportunities. Empowering all parents, including low-income and working poor mothers, to achieve their full potential and raise their children in a healthy and nurturing environment enables parents to build strong families. NCFR believes that the following recommendations are needed to strengthen families and promote effective mothering in low-income and working poor families:

-Access to education and training provides parents with the skills needed to be competitive for employment and advancement. When parents are able to secure jobs that pay a livable wage and benefits, they are better prepared to provide stable housing and build strong families.
-Child care that is of high quality, accessible and affordable enables low income and working poor mothers to remain in the workplace. Employee absenteeism and job loss is frequently associated with lack of consistent, quality and affordable child care for low income mothers. Research has
shown that child care constitutes a large proportion of low-income and working poor families' income.
- Child support and father involvement is integral in empowering low-income mothers to achieve economic stability. In many states, when a family receives TANF benefits child support payments from non-resident fathers go to the state. Research has shown that when child support payments go directly to the family that the family benefits financially and that fathers are more likely to be involved with their children” (2003: 3).

22 Relationships with Clients: With reference to clientele, each of the participants reported having regulars (long term relationships with clients). Most non-regular clientele came from personal ads in the papers, rather than internet websites. However, each of the women reported that there was one particular ‘good payer’ in which the amount of money was high for the amount of work performed. It is these relationships that are particularly valued and provide a consistent source of income. But how do the women set the price and how do they distinguish between clients? Most new clients contact the women over the phone, or can be handed to an individual on recommendation by a certain escort, if they refuse a particular act. For example, Mistress Patricia refuses to have sex with her clients, preferring to only stimulate them orally or dominate them (urinating, slapping etc.). If her client wishes to have sex she has a list of women that she refers them to. These other women then receive new clients based on her recommendation. “Bad Date Lists,” put out by many organizations, which are available on some sex workers rights websites, provide some sort of protection and warn sex workers against certain individuals. However, these descriptions are based largely on physical characteristics or what kind of car the person drives and in that way, are not always recognizable or memorable.22 Because of the lack of regulation and support for sex workers, however, many sex workers are forced to rely on their own judgement when accepting new clients.

23 Both establishments are strip clubs in downtown Toronto.

24 Sylvia: It’s funny, I’ve always been kind of thin, but when I was pregnant, I had more womanly curves and stuff like that. But it was hard with the addictions issue, with it, because when you have addictions and you are pregnant and you don’t want to have addictions anymore. For me, I’ll be completely honest I used to have 2 or 3 glasses of wine completely spaced out, so I know what happens and I am in control. And that was only for the first two or three months and I only went into work about two or three times a week. So I don’t think it had a significant effect, but I do know it’s really difficult. And I found that it was funny, because when you’re drinking or using you are a different person, I actually got into a physical fight with a girl at a club, because she said I was being a bitch. But I wasn’t being a bitch I was just in the environment sober, so like everybody else was acting strange and I was getting irritable because it was loud and I was pregnant. So I got into a physical fight with someone when I was pregnant, and they
knew I was pregnant. It was very strange; they thought I was acting like I was better than them.

25 Please see: http://www.sexwork.com/montreal/law.html. The following is a quote from that website: “‘Procuring and living off the income (avails) of prostitution’ is illegal. Currently most of the enforcement of this law is against pimps living off the income of street prostitutes often also associated with drug crimes. The procuring restriction seeks to protect individuals from exploitation. It covers pimping, child prostitution and importing foreign sex workers illegally…But it can also be applied to legitimate escort agencies that screen and offer some protection for the provider. Again enforcement varies widely and many think agency services should be allowed to protect the provider. The Ontario Court of Appeals has ruled that living of the avails crime cannot be used against boyfriends or room mates of a prostitute as long as the relationship is not parasitical (forced). But this exemption does not extend to agencies….It’s not illegal for a sex worker to live off her own income from prostitution -- only for someone else to live off (receive any financial benefit) from her prostitution income. But with various city escort licensing bylaws the issue gets more complicated. Often it’s the city that could be argued is living of the avails with their high agency licensing fees.”

26 Please see Appendix A.

27 The definition of a "body-rub": "includes the manipulating, touching or stimulating by any means, of a person's body or part thereof, but does not include medical, therapeutic or cosmetic treatment given by a person duly licensed" (Gardner, 2002: 1)

28 The following website is a directory for clients of sex workers, it has discussion boards and escort listings. www.adultdirectory.com

27 The ESA, “protects an employee’s right to consistent and reasonable hours of work and leave benefits without risking job loss” (PLS, 2007: 16).

30 Nonetheless, the women interviewed by PLS expressed concerns that the standards set out by ESA were simply inapplicable to the sex industry. For instance, some of the women indicated that eight hours was too long to be working a shift as a sex worker, whereas others argued that since their working life is shorter, they would like to have the choice to work longer days if need be. In this sense, considerations would need to be made and the standards and qualifications would need to be adjusted appropriately in order to more clearly reflect the working conditions of the sex industry.

31 Firstly, there exists a three week wait period for income assistance. These women argued that this should be available immediately to prevent them from going back to sex
work while pregnant, or provide immediate support to those sex workers wishing to leave the industry (PLS, 2007: 30).

32 Pivot Legal Society shows how the “Human Rights Commission offers limited protection against discrimination on the basis of a lawful source of income. Protection from this kind of discrimination is only available with respect to obtaining housing in tenancy premises.” This ground has been applied to protect people receiving social assistance from discrimination in the context of obtaining rental housing (PLS, 2007: 37).

33 “In this industry, 27 is old. You have to move on and get a different skill set” (interview with Christy).

34 Such as the Maternity and Parental Benefits Model which Quebec initiated in January 2006.

35 http://www.metafilter.com/mefi/53541

36 A question first posed to me by Dr. Margaret Hillyard Little in a discussion on the empowering aspects of sex work.

37 This is in addition to the discrimination these women face as single mothers. As Hillyard Little demonstrates, the “moral condemnation of single mothers has escalated during the last decade as politicians have willingly blamed single mothers for school drop-outs, youth gangs, and teenage drug use and pregnancy. And to further fuel the moral panic surrounding single mothers, this neoliberal rhetoric claims that the number of single mothers is increasingly at an alarming rate and that, consequently, all of these moral problems are growing larger by the minute” (2005: 2).

38 An interesting parallel exists with the Canadian Forces, which helps to better explain this view. Although a vast number of citizens may not believe the existence of a military to be moral, or useful, the majority of people agree that these people deserve to be fairly paid and supported. Moreover, all Canadian citizens in some way indirectly contribute to Canadian Forces Personnel’s earnings and their ability to provide for their families.

39 Please see this article for more information: http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/redefining.html

40 Moreover, as Aleischia made clear, in the face of decriminalization we are left with no laws surrounding prostitution. She believes in decriminalization of the sex worker and greater criminalization of abusers of sex workers and violent offenders.
41 Guidelines for the determination of the appropriate bargaining unit are found in the Board decisions and on their websites (http://www.olrb.gov.on.ca/english/homepage.htm and http://www.alrb.gov.ab.ca)

42 Meaning they are subject to home inspections and must be qualified child care workers.

43 Indeed, the demand for evening, overnight and weekend child care programs in Canada is likely to be small at any one time and understandably, if a program is established based on unrealistic expectations of demand; its chances for success may be limited. On the other hand, a realistic appraisal of the minority of women that need overnight care, may lead potential providers to better assess their risks and therefore be more successful in sustaining their operations. For a list of some child care programs in Canada which offer evening, weekend and/or overnight child care, see the Resource List compiled by Friendly et. al. More extensive research into the areas of overnight care is needed.

44 For a more complete compilation of the existing child care services (or lack thereof) please consult the following document: http://www.childcarecanada.org/pubs/other/flex/flex.pdf