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MA RESEARCH REPORT

Sex in the City: An Ethnography of the Lives of Sex Workers in Two Clubs in Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

This is an ethnography of the lives of sex workers in two clubs in Johannesburg. It aimed to explore the intimate lives of sex workers, focusing on how sex workers maintain boundaries between their work and their private lives. Difficulties and issues of time and access meant the research increasingly became one of illuminating the rich texture and social worlds of the two clubs. As it turns out, these women's private lives are intricately linked to their work. The ethnographic research method uncovered the complex and otherwise hidden processes in the clubs, from the regimes of work, to the surveillance, drugs and money. The research revealed the exploitative nature of sex work at the clubs, but also the agency and choice that these women exercised in their work and private lives, challenging the notion of sex workers as mere victims.

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I declare that this research report is my own original work, and that none of its sections have been previously submitted for publication or examination.

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Signed on this _____ day of _____ 2014

INTRODUCTION

As the old adage has it, prostitution is one of the oldest forms of work. Karl Marx viewed prostitution as a working class condition of capitalism, even though the lines and boundaries of the sex industry have become blurred under neoliberal capitalism (Brent and Hausbeck, 2010). The cultural and economic changes driven by global, late capitalism have created a consumption-driven, market-service-based economy that increasingly sells human interactions and emotional exchanges. The sale of personal service, leisure and tourism commercialises ever more components of human relationships (Zelizer, 2007).

This has contributed to two important trends. First, there has been a marked sexualisation of culture where sexualised images proliferate, and diverse sexualised practices, identities, and values are part of popular culture. The second trend is the mainstreaming of the sex industry. As the adult commercial sex industry expands, the more formal and upscale parts of the industry are increasingly organised and operate more like the mainstream (Brent and Hausbeck, 2010) One of the most important developments in this process has been the marketization of the sex industry. Behemoth corporations have entered the industry and given it far more influence politically and socially. Agustin (2007) refers to this as the "Macdonaldisation" of the sex industry.

Despite sex work being recognised as intimate labour (Boris and Parrenas, 2010), the research on the intimate lives of sex workers remains relatively under-researched. While Hochschild's (2003) concept of "emotional labour" would seem apt for a study of the kind of work sex workers engage in, this research seeks to expand this idea to include an exploration of the relationships between the intimate labour of sex workers, on the one hand, and their emotional lives outside of their labour, on the other. This research therefore aimed to explore how sex workers in South Africa maintain boundaries between their personal lives and their work. How do they manage the impact of work on their personal lives as well as their emotional wellbeing? Do sex workers perform "emotional labour" to only maintain clientele, or

do they also engage in a form of emotion work to separate their work from their family lives?

These questions are inter-dependent with debates of 'consent' and 'force', 'victimisation' and 'wellbeing', and 'sex worker' and prostitute' that are central to research on sex work. The differences in the use of term 'sex worker' and 'prostitute' are fundamental. The term 'sex worker' falls into the domain of labour studies whereas prostitute is often used by 'anti-prostitution' scholars, who use the terms 'prostitution', 'survivors of prostitution' or 'prostituted women'. The small addition of the 'd' following 'prostitute' serves to imply coercion by a third party (or patriarchal system); adding 'women' specifies that the scholars are concerned specifically with females, excluding male/transgender/queer prostitutes from consideration (Koken, 2010). This research is positioned to utilise the term 'sex worker' as opposed to 'prostitute'. While sex worker is an accepted term many women in the industry do not identify with it. Many view themselves as "working girls" and "career girls." The term 'girls' is therefore commonly used in the industry by not only management and customers, but indeed by sex workers themselves.

Research on sex work and sex workers thus far has focused on healthcare (HIV/AIDS), the state, and police harassment or the legal system (decriminalisation/criminalisation). This research aimed to move beyond these questions into a terrain that remains relatively under-explored: how sex workers maintain or draw boundaries, if they do, between personal life and work, as well as exploring how they manage the impact of their work, given its distinctively intimate nature, on their private lives. There has been little focus on sex workers' personal lives in the South African academe.

The research question intended to explore boundary maintenance however difficulties and issues of time and access meant the research increasingly became one of illuminating the rich texture and social universe of the two clubs I focussed on. The difficulties of access meant opting for an ethnographic research method which uncovered the secretive and hidden nature and processes in the clubs from the labour process and despotic work regimes to the control, surveillance, drugs and money. The

use of ethnography as a method revealed an entire social world in all its complexity and richness. The choice in the report is to describe these worlds without overlapping it with analytical claims. The ethnographic research method did afford the possibilities of addressing the original research question I was interested however the report provides an entire range of experiences and setting of clubs in order to contextualise these women's lives.

To address this, the research adopts an approach that sees sex work as a choice (necessarily uneven under patriarchal capitalism), but which does not deny that some sex work is involuntary and coercive. However, in order to address the central questions, this research is guided by a perspective that sex workers should not be viewed as victims, nor as liberated women who have escaped patriarchy but rather as fully realised and agentic human beings performing work inside a complex web of personal and social relations (Koken, 2010). In this report, I will first set out the debates in the literature in sex work, and provide an account of the methodology used for the study. The report is then organised to provide an ethnographic account of the two clubs, and then, through an account of the first coercive and agentic aspects of the women's work., as well as their familial lives, hopes and aspirations, I engage the debates in the literature to suggest that the lives are far more complicated than the binary analyses in the literature suggests.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast amount of literature on sex work and the sex industry. The main debates centre on "choice" versus "force", "sex worker" versus "prostitute" and "victimisation" versus "wellbeing," and emerge from arguments over decriminalisation/criminalisation and healthcare in the industry. There are important arguments for sex workers' coercion/structure, on the one hand, and their subjectivity/agency, on the other. The social and self identities of sex workers are essential in addressing the different coping styles/emotional management of sex workers which the research questions seek to address. There have been no studies on boundary maintenance in relation to sex work in the South African context, and this research seeks to address this gap. The literature reviewed below indicates that there is a need for research on sex workers' negotiation of the boundaries between their private and work lives.

This research explores the boundaries between commerce and intimacy. In the sex work industry, as in our everyday lives, economic activity and intimacy mix. Vivianna Zelizer's (2007) *The Purchase of Intimacy* examines how economic activities affect the meaning of our intimate relations. Her title has a double meaning. Not only is it about the literal purchase of intimacy, but also about how intimacy affects the way we organise our economic life. Sex work epitomises the mixing of economic activity and intimacy, especially with the rise and demand of the 'girlfriend experience'(Bernstein, 2010).. These types of social relations raise questions of why people maintain a conceptual distinction between economic activity and other kinds of social activities like friendships, child-parents, family and marriage. Money and economic activity is seen to degrade intimacy, and vice-versa. (Zelizer, 2007). Sex workers constantly have to negotiate this perception of their economic activity being degraded by the fact that it involves the 'purchase of intimacy'.

There are two main trends in the literature regarding prostitution. On the one hand is the notion that the sex industry is underpinned and reinforced by patriarchy, and therefore affects women and all gender relations (O'Neill, 2001), while on the other hand is the notion that prostitution is a freely chosen form of work and should be

afforded the same basic human and workers rights. This position is often referred to as the subjectivist standpoint. This research will be situated within this latter framework in the field of labour studies and sociology of work. The first position, also regarded as 'stop-feminism' or 'anti-prostitution,' treats sex workers as victims within the system of patriarchal capitalism. It is better to view these positions on polar opposites of the debate because many scholars have positioned their arguments on neither side but strategically in-between. The 'anti-prostitution' position is on the abolitionist side with regards to the law while the subjectivists are situated within the legal frameworks of reform and regulation.

'Sex Work' versus 'Prostitution'

Wendy Chapkis broke ground in the sex work literature with the publication of her book *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labour* (1997). She clearly aligns herself with the 'sex work as labour', or the 'subjectivist,' position. The notion of sex work being labour is central to free choice. However, within the subjectivist feminist perspective, work can be freely chosen or coerced. According to Chapkis (1997), what is critical is that free choice does not mean equal choice. She argues that women are in especially disadvantaged positions because of the hierarchical structures of sex, race and class, therefore women working in the sex industry operate within the constraints of social prejudice as well as unequal privilege and these differences produce different experiences of sex work. For Chapkis (1997) sex work, or "erotic labour" as she terms it, can actually be a "liberatory terrain for women". In her book she outlines three feminist positions: pro-'positive' sex feminism, anti-sex feminism and sex radical feminism and seeks to develop a hybrid perspective.

The pro-'positive' feminism views prostitution and pornography as corrupting practices that undermine 'positive' sex based on love, sex is given expression in love and is violently articulated in 'pornographic objectification' (Chapkis, 1997). For anti-sex feminism there is no possibility of reclaiming the sexual terrain for women because the very meaning of sex is male domination, i.e. sex is essentially constituted as male domination (Chapkis, 1997). Sex radical feminism is made up of those who identify with libertarian ethics and politics and others who situate sex within structures of power and privilege. The sex worker thus cannot be reduced to an object but may be a symbol of women's authority and a threat to patriarchy (Chapkis, 1997).

Chapkis seeks to develop a hybrid perspective using: the radical feminist insistence that injustice should be challenged and not accommodated, the sex radicals' insistence that subversion is a creative means of opposition, the abolitionist insight that just because something has always been it is neither inevitable nor unchangeable, and finally, the prostitute's rights perspective that transforming their lives does not mean a politics of prohibition (Chapkis, 1997). This research will be situated within this framework. According to O'Neill (2001) the goal of this 'hybrid' perspective is the redistribution of wealth and power between men and women, an organised and empowered workforce, and the decriminalisation of sexual activity.

Jill Nagle (1997) is positioned in the sociology of work framework and offers an illuminating perspective. Nagle distinguishes between freely chosen voluntary sex work, on the one hand, and coercive, involuntary sex work, on the other. She is critical of feminist perspectives that do not include perspectives of sex workers in feminist debates. Her thesis is highly relevant to my research question because it asks interesting questions such as: How does working in the sex industry affect the feminism of individual workers? How does stigma affect women not working in the industry or on the borders of prostitution? These are central questions that relate directly to my study. These are thus the frameworks within which the research is situated.

Sheila Jeffreys (2005) views prostitution as being a harmful cultural practice. For her there is little difference between female genital mutilations, make-up and prostitution all of which are viewed as harmful cultural practices. The vagina becomes the centre of a business organised on an industrial scale though the vagina itself is still subject to the problems inevitably associated with the use of the interior of a woman's body in this way, in the form of pain, bleeding and abrasion, pregnancy and STD's, and the associated psychological harms that result from the bodies of live women being used as instruments of male pleasure (Jeffreys, 2005). She is aligned to the pro-'positive' feminism in Chapkis' (1997) framework. Pro-'positive' feminism advocates the abolition of the erotic by the pornographic and to free women from the sexual objectification of men but still recognising that sexuality may be reclaimed from patriarchy, but not in forms easily recognisable as sex (O'Neill, 2001). Within

Jeffreys' framework the choice of women, be it unequal, is not afforded a viable platform.

There are scholars who hold the view that sex is constituted by male domination. For scholars such as Catherine Mackinnon the prostitute can never be seen as a 'sex worker' because she is a 'sex object', constituted as and through sex (O'Neill, 2001). This perspective is aligned with the anti-sex feminism in the framework above, with Catherine Mackinnon insisting "…men say all women are whores" (Chapkis, 1997:20). The underlying perspective of the study undertaken her is, however, a subjectivist approach. Reiterating that women are whores and reducing them to no more than objects is ignoring the fact that they are sex workers who have the agency to engage in acts of resistance, subversion and negotiation (Chapkis, 1997).

Chapkis' seminal work explored ways in which sex workers managed their emotions *on* the job. This is related to Arlie Russell Hochschild's (2003) theory of "emotional labour", in which gendered service jobs are viewed as necessitating the production or appearance of 'appropriate' emotions. She uses the term emotional labour to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display, emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has an exchange value. Hochschild contrasts this with "emotion work", which refers to the acts done in a private context where they have a use value (Hochschild, 2003).

Emotional Work and Boundary Maintenance

This study is located in a similar conceptual terrain, looking at how sex workers maintain emotional wellbeing within their work, especially how they draw boundaries between work and private life. Workers who perform emotional labour are just as susceptible to alienation as those who perform physical and mental labour. In her research, workers (flight attendants) spoke of their smiles as being 'on' them but not 'of' them (Hochschild, 2003). The alienation of sex workers is fundamental to this research, as is the 'work/personal' divide to maintain psychological and emotional boundaries while performing activities with clients that involve a combination of physical intimacy and emotional distancing.

The exploration of boundary maintenance among sex workers has been explored by Teela Sanders (2005). She noted that unlike typical patterns of sex workers' histories participants were not scarred by abuse, violence by clients, financial exploitation from male partners but defined themselves as 'career girls' or 'working girls' expressing an entrepreneurial attitude. Sanders (2005) argues that emotional labour constitutes both an effective business strategy for gaining and maintaining clientele, as well as a strategy for self-preservation while performing the intimate interactions required for sex work. They use condoms as symbolic barriers, providing emotional distance in the moments when maintaining personal boundaries becomes most challenging. Condoms therefore do not only prevent STI's and unwanted pregnancy, they prevent clients from entering their minds and affecting their personal relationships (Sanders, 2005).

Central to the maintenance of boundaries in the work and private relationships of sex workers is the notion selling of sex, desires and intimacy as a 'performance'. This is reiterated by the title of Sanders (2005) work *Its Just Acting*. In order to maintain boundaries emotional labour is central to the 'performance' but also requires what Sanders terms a "manufactured identity" (Sanders, 326:2005). These identities are assumed and acted out by sex workers in order to capitalise on heterosexual notions of sexuality. Taking on pseudonyms, dressing up, assuming character are not just used as valuable business strategies but serve to maintain boundaries in the intimate acts of selling sex. The research of Chapkis (1997) and Sanders (2005) form a qualitative body of literature that has explored sex work as a form of gendered affective service work. Their work further suggests the emotional, physical and mental distancing from work relationships required by the intimate nature of selling sex.

The maintenance of boundaries between the public and private, commerce and intimacy are more nuanced especially when the demand for 'authentic' relationships in the sex work industry is growing (Bernstein, 2010). While boundaries between home and work are not easily discernable the rise of the 'girlfriend experience' in the sex industry may make it more difficult to maintain. A typical non-'girlfriend experience' session with a sex worker includes one or more of the basic acts required for the customer to reach climax whereas a typical 'girlfriend experience' might proceed like a non-paid encounter between two lovers including lengthy foreplay and even kissing passionately (Bernstein, 2010). According to Bernstein (2010) a

'girlfriend experience' session is where the customer works to stimulate the sex worker and she works to stimulate him, including periods of cuddling and closeness at the end of sessions. This is emblematic of notion of "bounded authenticity" (Bernstein, 138:2010).This increases the burden of emotional labour in a job involving quasi-dating. Acting and performing are central to these encounters of selling 'counterfeit intimacy' and more importantly in maintaining boundaries between work and private personal intimate relationships. This study deepens and extends these lines of scholarly inquiry into the relations between love/work and intimacy through an exploration of the intimate lives of those engaged in intimate labour.

Love, Intimacy and the Sociology of Affect

When exploring boundary maintenance between the work relationships and private personal lives of sex workers, the sociologies of intimacy and affect are crucial. There has been an increased focus in the scholarship on the subjective dimensions of sex and its affective entailments, especially in Africa and South Africa The seminal work by Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas (2009) *Love in Africa* explores love as a vital element of the social, economic, political and cultural lives of Africans. Exploring the meanings and ways love is understood in different African societies and countries. the book argues that different cultural and historical strands in Africa produce different meanings of intimacy and love (Cole and Thomas, 2009). This research is an exploration of the intimate boundaries of sex workers' lives in South Africa.

While there has been an intense focus on HIV/AIDS and sexuality in Africa, Mark Hunters (2010) book *Love in the Time of AIDS* explores the transformations in notions of gender, love and intimacy in South Africa. Hunter (2010) illustrates how first apartheid then post apartheid issues of unemployment, poverty and inequality have become entangled with notions about love, sex, femininity and masculinity and have created an economy of exchange that perpetuates the transmissions of HIV/AIDS. The work and intimate private lives of sex workers are intertwined with the structural forces in society like unemployment, poverty and inequality. In trying to understand the roots of the epidemic this seminal work challenges conventional understandings and notions of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, calling for further studies of the intersections of sex, intimacy, and money in South Africa.

Victimisation of Sex Workers

While this study focuses on the intimate lives of sex workers, the literature on sex workers' experiences focuses on their victimisation. In South Africa, there is a dense body of research on police harassment of sex workers. Police abuse of sex workers in South Africa is systemic and widespread (Fick, 2006 and Manhoek, 2012). Of the sex workers interviewed for the study conducted by Fick (2006), 70 percent experienced some form of abuse at the hands of police. The most common human rights violation by police against sex workers that were reported were: assault and sexual harassment, arbitrary arrest, violations of procedures and standing orders, inhumane conditions of detention, unlawful profiling, exploitation and bribery, and denial of access to justice. According to Fick (2006), a majority of sex workers are targeted and arrested through the use of municipal by-laws, such as loitering or being a public nuisance. Using the South African Police Service - a profession dominated by alpha male types - to regulate the activities of a group of marginalised females leads to abusive public management (Leggett, 2001). The legal and policing systems reinforce the stigma and exclusion of sex workers. This type of research has led to calls for decriminalisation and legislative reform.

The relationships between sex workers, brothel owners/handlers and clients are not equal. It has been shown that exploitation and abuse are common in the sex work industry (Leggett, 2001). These relationships are based upon unequal power relations. The law against adult prostitution acts as a further constraint on the ability of sex workers to determine and control the nature of their relationships with clients and brothel owners. Gould and Fick (2007) argue that their status as criminals makes them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because they do not have recourse to the law. Even though legal change is not expected to change the social power relations, nor necessarily mean that sex workers are not exploited or abused, such a change may serve to allow sex workers a little more power to negotiate their contracts with third parties (whether that is clients or brothel owners/handlers). Leggett (2001) proposes less formal means and measures to ensure sex workers are not abused and harassed, the national government could authorise interventions through existing programmes or funding NGO's working in the area. A good deal of research has concluded that

decriminalisation of sex work would benefit those who are most vulnerable in society, including informal female workers.

In South Africa much academic research and funding on HIV/AIDS is focused on sex workers as an epidemiological problem, with an emphasis on trying to control their behaviour and limit the spread of the disease. There has been some illuminating research by Ted Leggett (2001) looking at the relationship between drug use, sex work and HIV. The main findings were that sex workers who used drugs had more partners, but they actually had lower levels of HIV than those that did not. That is because the sex workers who did use drugs were much more likely to be white, while those who didn't use drugs were much more likely to be black. The assumption that sex workers are a major factor in the HIV/AIDs epidemic needs serious reviewing because sex workers are far more likely to be using condoms than your average sexually active woman (Leggett, 2001). Yet stigma and criminalisation has reduced sex workers' access to resources such as healthcare and the legal system.

As opposed to these studies on sex workers and their relationship to police abuse healthcare, disease and the legal system, the study undertaken here deepens the existing work on sex work and emotional labour in the South African context. In particular, the study here explores the boundary maintenance between the work and private lives of sex workers, as well as emotional labour, if any, in managing the intimacy of their labour, and the intimacy of their personal lives.

METHODOLOGY

The data required for the research was qualitative. The research question aimed to explore people's experiences and practices. The participants were sex workers over the age of 18 who engaged in the exchange of money for sexual intercourse, intimacy and desire. It not only focussed on 'traditional' sex workers but all those selling sexual desire and intimacy, including transgender, gay, man to man, erotic dancers and 'call girls', recognising that there are different kinds of sex workers (outdoor, indoor, erotic dancers etc) and that each have different axes of vulnerability.

This research was a highly intimate exploration of boundaries and the management of the work and private lives of sex workers. There are multiple boundaries between home/work, self/other and dominant/submissive and this research aimed to remain sensitive to these multiple boundaries but the primary focus remained on sex workers' work and private lives. The research explored not just their work but their private intimate lives and relationships with family, partners and friends. This type of research question was thus best suited to qualitative data gathering methods. To answer the research question what was required was in-depth descriptions of how sex workers (if they did) maintained boundaries between work and home.

Qualitative research allows for openness and flexibility (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This was central to the data that was needed to address the research question. By allowing openness and flexibility it created a space to explore in-depth detailed subjectivities of sex workers. The research was conducted in Johannesburg, although due to the nature of sex work it was difficult to specify a specific location within Johannesburg. Two types of research methods were used in order to collect data, the main method being unstructured interviews and the other a 'limited' ethnography.

The main method of data collection, open unstructured interviews, offered a good method of collecting interior experiences, developing detailed descriptions and describing processes (Weiss, 1994). In order to develop a detailed account of how sex workers manage or draw boundaries between their work and private lives

unstructured interviews akin to life histories were utilised. It would have been challenging to understand someone's intimate and private space by asking them a set of rigid fixed set of interview questions.

The research required a good trusting research partnership in order to address the question, requiring multiple interviews with every participant, as one interview would not be sufficient to gain trust and understanding of how sex workers manage or draw boundaries between their private personal lives and work. With increasing contact, participants were more willing to confide in the researcher (Weiss, 1994). Therefore the quality of data was dependent on the rapport and research partnerships developed throughout the process. The research partnership was situated such that the researcher was a learner willing to listen. The interviews were all conducted in locations in which participants and researcher felt safe and comfortable. The research also utilised second data collection method, 'limited' ethnography.

A 'limited' ethnography was highly dependent on access, 'limited' due to time constraints, and ethical limitations. An ethnography as a research instrument allows for the observing of social activities as an outsider, observing while participating in activities and conducting interviews (Adler and Adler, 2003). The ethnography was highly dependent on access because it aimed to conduct the research at the home or private spaces of sex workers away from their work. This was dependent on trust, confidence and a strong research partnership, requiring highly developed social skills on the part of the researcher (Adler and Adler, 2003). The intension was to observe sex workers at their 'homes' to 'see' how they managed the impact of their work on their personal lives, especially the space(s) they occupy away from work and how they draw boundaries between work and their private lives. The trust and rapport necessary for this kind of access proved impossible to cultivate within the very limited time frames of the research. I thus utilised an alternate ethnographic strategy: entering a sex work establishment. The permission of the owner/s to 'hang out' was obtained as well as permission from the sex workers. My position as a male particularly allowed me access that would have been more constrained for a female, as I could 'hang out' unobtrusively as a potential client in the club and brothel. The 'limited' ethnography without engaging the sex workers in unstructured interview conversations would not have been sufficient, but the 'limited' ethnography did allow

the possibility of developing relationships with sex workers at the club and brothel, leading to interviews, the research however did require more than a single point of entry to participants.

The nature and illegality of sex work makes it a difficult-to-reach category of research subjects. This was the rationale as to why an initial multiple entry point strategy was employed. Snowball sampling was used because it proved the most useful way to for me as the researcher to access potential research participants (Straus and Corbin, 1990). One entry point which was utilised was Marlise Richter who is a visiting researcher at the African Center for Migration and Society (ACMS). A great deal of research as been done by ACMS with regards to sex work, migrants and HIV/AIDS. SISONKE, a sex worker movement which is based in Hillbrow was another entry point. These were two crucial points and both shared relations with the Sex Worker Advocacy and Taskforce (SWEAT) which was another entry point. There was the option to use the Women's Legal Centre (WLC) which is a non profit law centre but works closely with SWEAT and SISONKE. These were the initial points of entry that allowed for snowballing through known networks.

The research methodology during my fieldwork had to adapt to the time frame and my positionality as a male researcher in a field usually dominated by female researchers. This position within my research simultaneously closed and opened new avenues of possible data collection methods. Trying to access sex workers through organisations and other institutions proved fruitless, yet the access granted as a male researcher to the clubs/brothels was highly productive. The use of ethnography as a research method revealed an entire social world in all its richness and complexity. The research methodology is located in the tradition of work that tells stories and privileges the narratives of social actors without having to force them into strong analytical set of claims (Duneier, 1994). The choice in the report is to describe these worlds, experiences and narratives without overlaying it with strong analytical claims.

The initial research tool of in-depth formal interviews was difficult to utilise because sex worker groups and movements were highly suspicious of my intentions as a male researcher focused on sex work. SWEAT and Sisonke, the main sex worker organisations in South Africa working for sex workers rights and decriminalisation,

did not prove very productive as it required building a working research relationship with the organisation and its key members. For that, more time was indeed needed. The short duration of fieldwork was simply not sufficient without prior connections and links into the organisation. My main liaison at Sisonke and current sex worker in Johannesburg was Gloria. She was the leading figure in Sisonke and main link to SWEAT whose base is in Cape Town. While Gloria was willing to assist and help with access to members, decisions had to be taken in Cape Town. The resulting miscommunication between Cape Town and Johannesburg prolonged my field work. There was serious hesitation and lack of trust from the board members in Cape Town despite the fact that Gloria and fellow sex workers in Johannesburg were enthusiastic to be part of the research. Gloria was concerned that if she or the others participate without the consent of the board members in Cape Town they would face repercussions. Respecting the organisation and its members I needed a new approach to access sex workers outside of these organisations.

I had attempted to connect with private self-employed sex workers to be part of the research. This approach I hoped would bypass the organisational control of access to sex workers by organisations like SWEAT and Sisonke. The private self-employed indoor sex workers' privacy and security became a major barrier to arranging interviews and venue locations though. The private self-employed indoor sex workers were highly insecure and paranoid. Again my position as a male did not help me in this setting. The few I had conversations with wanted monetary reimbursement for their time while others were suspicious of me being possibly part of law enforcement.

The sex work industry especially private self-employed indoor sex work is characterised by suspicion, lack of trust and paranoia, even though this is to be expected in South Africa were the industry is illegal. On one occasion I was supposed to meet Laura a self-employed sex worker at a residence in a suburb in Northern Johannesburg. When I reached the residence which was strategically and suspiciously enclosed from the outside she didn't respond to my phone calls and nobody opened up the gate. After a few attempts it proved fruitless. The Women's Law Centre (WLC) could not put me in direct connect with sex workers. There were serious issues of confidentially and much hesitation about my research regarding sex work from the WLC. Due to time constraints and lack of access to the participants I had opted for an

ethnographic form of research where I could have conversations with my intended participants within their work environment. I was allowed this option as a male who would be immersed in the environments as I looked like a potential client and therefore blended into my surroundings.

I chose *Gigi's Place* and *Maxis (pseudonyms)* as sites for my research. These were two brothels that fronted as strip clubs. In both establishments the selling of sex was an explicit activity. The amount of data I acquired depended heavily on whether it was a busy night and if I was viewed as welcome by a clique or group of friends/colleague. When the clubs were empty the 'girls' could not leave, and many would just hang around. This allowed me to talk to them without too much stress about monetary transactions. Many simply were bored and found talking to me entertaining even if the conversation was about the most mundane topics. The rules of the club and management endured that the 'girls' were not allowed to leave work in between their shifts. This worked in my favour as a researcher as the 'girls' had 'free time'.

The change in my research tools meant moving from in-depth interviews to ethnography in which even snippets of conversation proved to be highly productive. All the 'girls' who I had initiated conversations with, or who came to offer their services, reacted in a similar manner to my approach. I had not offered any incentive such as monetary payment, drinks or food. This would have had a detrimental effect on the type of data as well as the validity and reliability of my research. Once the 'girls' knew that I was not the average customer or 'john' and wanted to just talk about them, their work, and their lives it worked to my advantage. When I told the various 'girls' I wasn't there for sex or dances they gradually changed their body language and tone of the conversation. Before telling many of the 'girls' my intentions, they had their hands on my lap, close to my groin, stroking my hair and caressing my back. Some would forcibly take my hand and put it on their lap or around their waist. This was part of the business and part of their act. They would sit and pose in a sexually suggestive manner, again as part of selling themselves as a marketer would a product. Once I had started talking to them, as someone would converse at a coffee shop and not a brothel, the tone changed, they ceased the performance, slipped out of character and opened up. At Gigi's Place once I started

talking to Rogue* one of the eldest and considered the matriarch among the sex workers it opened possibilities to talk to other sex workers in the club. These were access points which proved highly valuable to the research.

Central to the methodology and collection of data was ethical considerations. The participants of the research were protected in the research process, and are protected here in the report, as much and as best as possible. The participants were ensured confidentiality and anonymity when approached. An explanation was given as to the rights of the participants before interviews were initiated. The primary concern was the protection of the research participants. In the ethnographic write-up absolute confidentiality in descriptions has been maintained to ensure clients identities are not publicised.

At the two sex worker venues, I also ensured that the participants' conversations with me did not interfere in the making of money for management. At the same time, the illegality of sex work in Gigi's Place and Maxis mixed with a murky underworld and at times there were concerns for my safety as a researcher. The secrecy, illegality and exploitative nature of the industry meant asking too many questions could jeopardise my safety. It was clear that if the rules and regulations of the clubs are not abided by, it could create problems for customers. The reality is that sex work can be a traumatic and distressing occupation. As a result, information about counselling and debriefing facilities were provided for the participants who would have wanted it. All the above considerations were important to ensure the ethical integrity of the research.

SETTING THE SCENE

In order to understand and immerse myself in the sex industry and amongst sex workers I opted for two different clubs in different locations in Johannesburg. The one was Gigi's Place in Randburg North Johannesburg, a stone's throw away from Randburg city centre and not more than five kilometres from the richest square mile in Africa, Sandton. The other club Maxis was located in the east of Johannesburg, in Edenvale, it was close to the highway and near the down trodden centre of the town. I had four visits and over 16 hours combined at each of the two locations. Some visits would last an hour whilst some more than 3 hours. I had conversations of substance with 8 to 10 women workers at the club while I had brief – sometimes awkward - encounters with many others. Unlike Maxis, Gigi's Place had fierce competition from The Rand and Sleasers but also secretive high end brothels in suburbs in Sandton and surrounding areas. They both claimed, and to some extent were, strip clubs. There was however also explicit selling of sex by management and the 'girls'. These differences in locations effectively determined the means through which sex was sold.

The use term 'girls' is common term in the industry amongst the sex workers as well as management, staff and customers. It is not used to describe women's age but rather the nature of the occupation e.g. 'working girls' or 'career girls'. This report uses the term 'girl' not to endorse any patronising infantilisation of the women that may be implied by the term, but as part of the ethnographic commitment to using the terms the women used to describe themselves. Inasmuch as the women's interpretations of their work are prioritised in this way, the reality is that the management and staff in both clubs are central to the 'girls' experience and future prospects. The customers were also important, determining the – for lack of a better term - 'market value' for the 'girls'. Sex work is illegal in South Africa, however the law/police and the underworld of drugs are intertwined in the industry. This industry blurs boundaries into a murky illicit underworld. The club's operations were set up to encounter and accommodate the illegality of their business.

GIGI'S PLACE

ENTRANCE

Gigi's Place was situated on the corner of an intersection and was highly visible. The entire building was a bright pink and displayed a massive billboard with their best 'girls' in the most suggestive poses. In order to get in I had to pass a security guard boom and then drive around the back of the building to park the car. The parking was situated in this specific location to ensure that those clients who were worried about being seen could hide their vehicles. Secrecy and anonymity was central to managing a business of this kind. From the outside, all the windows and openings had been strategically covered. Windows were painted over by the brightening pink colour of the building, vents were positioned so as to allow minimum viewing from outside and from inside. There was a significant amount of cameras outside the building and surrounding parking lot.

At the entrance there was a mini waterfall and some exotic plants which were very green and well maintained. There were no bouncers before the turnstiles. The moment you enter the turnstiles you were faced with a type of ticket office in a barred cage. Every time I paid a visit there was a large heavy built blonde white woman who was very friendly. She made it seem as if we had known each other or that I've been a regular for ages. Behind her was a slightly visible room with many TV's, probably for security and managerial surveillance.

Depending on the time you get there you might receive a ticket stub to hand to the bouncers and security after passing another set of turnstiles. It became apparent that the security was unusually intense after my third visit. The entrance fee varied according to time and other odd specials. The club was open from Monday to Saturday it usually opened at 3pm and closed at 2am. If you entered before 7pm you were required to pay R50 on a weekday. After 7pm on a weekday and over the entire weekend it was R150. If you wore a Gigi's Place t-shirt with its brand name you were entitled to a 50 per cent discount at any time. After passing the second set of turnstiles you handed the ticket stub to the two bouncers, they sported the Gigi's Place t-shirts and were tall stocky built men but friendly to unproblematic customers.

INTERIOR

Inside the club there was a cool air-conditioned environment with a distinct smell of cigarettes and freshly sprayed perfume. It was dimly lit and the setting was a mixture of a faint red and purple. There were portraits of the most popular 'girls' on the walls. It was more elegant than one would think, as the pictures were held in grandiose and ornate frames. There were large chandeliers at the medium sized dance and lounge area which was used during the week in case the bar section reached capacity. During the week the bar section which was upstairs from the medium sized area was used.

At this weekday bar area there were two lounge sets, red and deep purple in colour and there were three tables and a bar with seating. It was situated around a barred cage and had a pole inside. During the weekends customers were seated in a totally different space to account for the capacity. This area seemed like a new club if you were a weekday customer. Unlike the weekday bar area which was situated on the left of the medium sized area it was on the right hand side and covered during the week by a large stage curtain. Behind the curtain was a large area with the premium pole dancing stage, it contained two poles but was only slightly elevated from the ground probably to enhance the intimacy during the shows. In this area there was a large DJ box in the corner and served not just as a music hub but a bird's eye view of the whole area. Unlike the bar area and medium sized area this larger space contained a raised semi jumping castle full of plastic balls and balloons where customers could get dances with the 'girls' in a playfully childish manner. These were the seen spaces. In the unseen spaces, there were the VIP booths which were meant for private and/or touch dances and these were the spaces where the selling of sex was far more explicit and stress-free.

STAFF

The staff at Gigi's Place were stratified almost in a kind of a hierarchy. The cleaners, who were mainly female and black, were at the bottom. At some points during my visits in the week there seemed to be more cleaners than customers. They would almost always linger around the toilet area near the entrance and kitchen. Each of them always held a broom or a cloth as if they were constantly ready for action.

Almost in a tier above them were the waitresses who were mainly female and black. They were always friendly and eager to show you a seat at the table or lounges where they could serve you. I had later discovered that in order to be a waitress at the club a levy of R50 per shift was charged. They worked on tips only. This made competition amongst waitresses highly intense and could be felt by customers. The club sold a variety of foods at exorbitant prices but nonetheless catered like a restaurant.

Above the waitresses were the barmen and assisting staff, they were usually behind the bar and sorting the stock of alcohol. I befriended a bartender named Milton who served at the weekday bar. He seemed to enjoy his job and developed relationships with other customers. On one occasion a customer just shouted out "Milton!" and he knew this customer's particular preference for brandy. He seemed to be a veteran staff member as many in the management joked and had fun around him. Unlike the other staff he seemed happy in his job and almost always sported a large smile.

In the next tier were the handlers and security. These were usually the main security members who were white men and a few women. They were responsible for ensuring the 'girls' fulfilled their dance quotas for their shifts. These handlers always worked with a red laser which acted as a control and management tool. Unlike the other staff management seemed to be omnipresent when customers were at the bar, at the entrance and even outside of the toilet. They were always alert and constantly seemed to be occupied by some activity or the other. When the laser pointed at a specific 'girl' they knew they were going to have to perform soon and should prepare or face penalties.

Above these were the main management which were part of Gigi's team. Gigi was an ex-dancer and performer, known for a popular main stream theatre show. She was the majority shareholder but had to sell a stake to the infamous owner of The Rand, Andrew Phillips. I had an encounter with Gigi on my second visit when she energetically encouraged me to spend money and pay attention to her new dreadlocked dark skinned 'girl' Coco. As a pimp would sell his 'girls' Gigi seemed to play that role but in a much more merchant type of manner. That was the only time I saw her. As part of her team of enforcers were a group of unscrupulous characters who seemed to serve no defined role other than just hanging around.

‘GIRLS’

The ‘girls’ did not seem to be part of the staff, rather they were more like products which were meant to be displayed and sold. The majority of the ‘girls’ were white Afrikaners, then coloured and Indian ‘girls’ followed by a minority of black African ‘girls’. The women were from different parts of South Africa like Cape Town and Port Elizabeth but also countries in Africa like Nigeria. There were no Asian women during my visits to Gigi’s Place. All the ‘girls’ were well groomed and had a certain sexual classiness. This was monitored by management and any faults in appearance could be penalised.

The ages of the women varied from 21 to late 40’s for some women. The youngest I had spoken to was 21 with the eldest being in their late 40’s. The ages were significant how they viewed the industry, but also their goals and future plans in their own lives. Age was important in the effects of their occupation on their personal private lives. During the period of the research most of the women had chosen to work at Gigi’s Place without explicit coercion. Many of the ‘girls’ did not work for a very long time, many lasted only a couple of months and those who had been there for long periods of time were usually there infrequently through various months and even years.

Most of the ‘girls’ did not think of themselves as sex workers, some like Brandy and Storm were highly offended by the term even though they sold sex for a living. After my first three visits I noticed the cliques that formed and solidarity amongst the ‘girls’. The cliques crossed race, age and nationality. The ‘girls’ were not offered special amenities besides a dressing room. They had to pay for drinks and food at customer prices. They were not allowed to use their phone during their shifts. They were, effectively, seen not as workers but as entrepreneurs renting the club’s space. In this respect, they had a certain degree of autonomy over their clients. The ‘girls’ preferences for customers varied. Rogue an Afrikaner by ethnicity, the typical matriarch and the oldest woman I spoke to said “the only colour that matters is green”. This was to emphasise her lack of care for types of clientele. On the other hand Brandy a 25 year old white Afrikaner told me she would only entertain whites and Indians, when asked why, she replied “I was brought up that way”. These differences were shared amongst the different ‘girls’ at the club.

All of the women I spoke to during my visits were open about the selling of sex at the club however some would distance themselves from the activities while others blatantly offered it. Many reiterated "I know girls who do it". The fees 'girls' charged seemed to vary, even though management did regulate prices. A table dance which was done in public cost R250, a lap dance R300 and a touch dance (customers could touch but no penetration) was R450. The VIP booths served the sole purpose of selling sex. In these booths 'girls' could charge rates ranging from R1500 to R4000.

On my first visit I was taken aback by a 'girl' named Barbie a small town farm girl who wanted to "relieve me" in the back for R1500. She told me "we can go to the VIP area and where we both take our clothes off and you will be very relieved". Later after my third visit I discovered that as a customer if you're known by a 'girl' and a regular you could book a 'girl' outside of the club by paying the club R2000 and then paying the girl R2000. In this sense they were pimped out by the club. The club management was central to these activities as it is quite a lucrative way to make large amounts of money and profits.

'JOHNS' (CUSTOMERS)

The customers at Gigi's Place during my visits mainly comprised males, predominantly white and Indian. The ages of the customers varied. Many customers came in groups. I especially felt this as I was always by myself. While Gigi's Place entrance fees were nothing like The Rand (R400), it attracted a certain socio-economic group. Many customers were professionals wearing shirts, formal pants and shoes, with some even wearing full suits. The vicinity of the club near the largest business centre in Africa would attract a customer base as such. The price of food and drinks meant that you required a certain status to visit and enjoy the club. The 'girls' were always groomed and in tip-top shape. This meant they carried a higher value than in clubs like Maxis which were not at the same level of service and quality.

Many times during my visits many customers seemed to have developed relationships at the club with certain 'girls'. On one of many occasions a woman named Storm, a 22 year old athletic blond sporting a grey thong and bra interrupted our conversation as a group of customers came in. She said "I've got to make some money, there's my

friend." She pointed to a man that could be her father. "Shame," she said, "he likes me so much but will never get to talk to me outside this club". As she walked towards this elderly grey haired gentleman he hugged her and lifted her off the ground mimicking a couple that have not seen each other in a long time. These relationships served as a lucrative source of income for the popular 'girls' as they could get drinks for free and other extras that new customers would not offer. This was the 'girlfriend experience' and would demand more emotional labour than an average once-off customer.

While customers mainly comprised of males on the weekend, I also encountered a group of males and females. Some 'girls' told me that some couples get sexually aroused by the presence of other women, and whether the girls pay attention to the male or the female is their preference. Lisa, a 28 year old Nigerian woman, told me that she had experienced couples in the VIP booth where she and the girlfriend/wife would entertain the male and then the couple would turn on each other and engage in sex. Sometimes she was paid to be in their presence during the act and when not being paid would sneak out. Some couples and females were there to have a drink and just enjoy the experience. On one visit during a Friday night a large group of elderly Asian/Chinese men and women had come and watched the show with intense attention. Lisa who was a dark skinned and skinny 'girl' told me that many Asians and even white customers pay for dances with her to "touch her skin". There was interest and intrigue about the colour of her skin - or rather her blackness - which these customers wanted to explore. Lisa brought up a particular time when she was giving an Asian customer a private touch dance. It was an Asian man who could not stop giggling after caressing her breast, who paid her R1000 each time without performing sex.

MANAGEMENT

The relation between the management and the 'girls' at Gigi's Place is important to understand their position as strippers/sex workers. The structure of their work was strict and highly organised. The management had installed a system of surveillance and control. According to more than one of my sources the club not only monitored the outside but also the inside, including VIP booths and 'girls' dressing rooms, with hidden cameras. The 'girls' knew this and it kept them in control. When speaking on this issue many 'girls' would whisper or talk into my ear. There was a definite fear of

management and the tightly controlled work regime. Another important mechanism of control was the accumulated debt that all the 'girls' had at some point or another. These debts were accumulated through fees, levies, rents and penalties. These will be further elaborated on in the following sections. These means of control were not unique to Gigi's Place as they were evident at Maxis too.

MAXIS

ENTRANCE

Maxis was situated in Edenvale on a very busy public road which runs through Edenvale city centre. It was next to the popular rock club in Johannesburg. It was the openness and lack of secrecy that surprised me. Across the road was a busy petrol station and since there was no designated parking outside the club, you needed to park carefully along the main road. The outside of Maxis was basically a public pavement which was usually littered and unclean. Watching the cars were different car guards all competing for change, cigarettes or anything they could hassle you for. The outside was painted in a black and grey colour similar to the club next door except the windows were painted over and the doorway was hidden. At night unlike the other restaurants and bars which had lit up signs on the street the Maxis sign remained unlit.

On my first visit there were two large muscular African/Nigerian bouncers, who at first were very serious, and after an intense frisk they gave a smile and allowed me in. As you enter the doorway you need to pass a turnstile. At the cage, similar to the one at Gigi's Place sat a heavy weighted black lady who was terribly unfriendly almost at every visit. In front of the cage where she sat were the prices of entrance. On the right hand side was a solid steel door which reminded me of a mini bank vault which would only open once payment is made. The entrance fee from Monday to Friday was a flat R70 and Saturday and Sunday it was R50. This pricing always baffled me, as my experience at Maxis suggested that they actually needed the lower price for the weekdays and the higher ones for the weekend. The laws of the free market didn't seem to apply. It was never full or even partially full when I visited on the week and weekend. While the operating times were never displayed the 'girls' usually arrived at the club between 6pm and 7 pm. Before 6pm it was closed. On my first visit I

discovered that sometimes they are only preparing at 6:30pm. Once the required entrance fee is paid, a buzzer sounds, and the solid steel door opens.

INTERIOR

Once inside, there was an elongated large bar on the left hand side. On the extreme left at the end of the large dark wood bar was where the Hawk sat, an elderly Bulgarian man who managed and ran the club. Every time I saw him, the Hawk had a cigarette in his mouth or was busy lighting a new one. Next to him was the credit/debit card facility. Where he sat was a space/corridor which led to the back where there were rooms that contained a bed, toilet and uncovered shower facility. Towards the end of the bar there was a small gambling machine. The face bricks made the club seem extra tacky as if you had been transported back in time.

On the right hand side as you entered the steel door were red lounges surrounding a highly elevated face brick and concrete stage with a pole. It seemed like a hazard to pole dance on. Nonetheless the 'girls' worked with it. The pole was surrounded by lounges and couches. Looking beyond this area was a small DJ box with partial equipment and next to that was a semi-functional pool table.

Pass the DJ box and pool table there are other rooms and toilets. The place was lacking in cleanliness and presentation all around. Above the bar were tacky portraits of the Kama Sutra. There were mirrors throughout the club, although some were broken. It was an awkward setting where on the one hand it seemed to be a legitimate strip club but just a few metres from the main activities were men engaged in the purchase of sex. There were no boundaries or real hidden spaces. It seemed to be more of a brothel than a strip club (most of the girls did not know how to pole dance). There was no proper ventilation and circulation of fresh air. There was a small fan that was meant for personal use. This was the only relief from the perfume and smoke filled air. The staff, security, cleaners and DJ were central to the 'girls' experience but also the customers. While there were cameras which were visible they didn't seem as intimidating and controlling as Gigi's Place. There were hidden spaces where there was no surveillance, however the Hawk filled this gap with his constant presence all over the club.

STAFF

The staff at Maxis served multiple purposes at different times and in different contexts. There were two visible cleaning staff that helped by the bar and probably were more focused on the many rooms which needed their attention. The bouncers hardly came in the establishment and served the purpose of security but also as lookouts for the police. There was a regular bartender who was a young black male who always sported an Orlando Pirates soccer t-shirt and was sometimes helped by the heavy weighted black woman at the entrance. The DJ sometimes acted as security inside, and as a handler of the 'girls' who were on order by the Hawk. At times he would be playing music while simultaneously calling 'girls' to dance on stage even playing security by frisking suspicious customers. He seemed to have no specific job description. There was a plum short Asian lady who sat close to the entrance cage and near the 'Hawks' vicinity. She monitored a book which the 'girls' would sign when going to the rooms with the customers. Her role was pivotal in monitoring the exchanges of sex and money. She never left her chair while I visited. The person who played the most important role was the Hawk.

The Hawk had a spot at the extreme corner of the bar, almost hidden. It was situated in front of screens from the camera but seemed to never miss a movement in the club with his bare spectacled eyes. While he was a small framed man with a grey head and large glasses his muscle were the bouncers. He handled the customers and the 'girls' problems. At no point while I was there was he aggressive, and seemed to manage the place single-handedly. Later during my last visits I found out that he was not the owner but running and managing the club for two infamous underworld Bulgarian men. These men had two other clubs similar to Maxis around Johannesburg. That's where my investigation into the ownership and management ended.

'GIRLS'

The 'girls' at Maxis were mainly Asian while the rest and minority were Africans. The majority of the Asian 'girls' at Maxis were from Thailand but also surrounding regions and countries in South East Asia. Many of the African 'girls' were South African but also from different countries, like Wendy, who was from Swaziland. Unlike the 'girls' at Gigi's Place these women were allowed their cellphones and

handbags. This again emphasised the difference between a ‘professional’ strip club and an establishment like Maxis, which functioned more like a brothel.

Some if the ‘girls’ at Maxis could barely speak English. This made it difficult to communicate, let alone have any meaningful conversation although some women like Bhutan were surprisingly fluent in English. Many were trained to speak English only to offer sex. A sex worker named Diamond, a skinny Asian who would not leave me alone on my first visit, could barely talk about herself in English but bluntly offered me a package, ‘Half R500 and full R600’. She meant that half an hour costs R500 and a full hour was R600. The rationale for such pricing was that many men think that they are getting a discount on an extra half hour for just R100. The catch is that once a customer ejaculates, whether they paid for half an hour or the full hour their session is over. As Bonita the only white elderly self employed sex worker at Maxis told me, “the better your skills the quicker the money”. She reiterated that 90 per cent of customers are hardly ever longer than 15-20 minutes.

Many of the women found their way to the club through various means. Bhutan from Thailand told me that she was told by her friend that the sex industry in South Africa is far more lucrative and less dense than Bangkok while Wendy from Swaziland came through a dubious interview process. The ‘girls’ at Maxis always hung around in cliques usually along racial lines. The bar was a space where there was a strict division between ‘girls’ and cliques. The bar was close to 8 metres in length. It started at the entrance where the Hawk sat, next to him were the veteran Asian ‘girls’ who sat in close vicinity to the short plum Asian lady who monitored the books. These ‘girls’ were strategically placed to be the first to be seen by customers. Going down the bar further into the club sitting on randomly arranged high stools at the bar were the rest of the Asian ‘girls’. These were new recruits, friends and those who were treated with hostility by the veterans at the club. Further on down the bar passed these ‘girls’ were the African clique. I picked up on the use of the space of the bar from my initial visit. There seemed to be invisible borders and boundaries at the bar which these ‘girls’ consciously or sub-consciously followed.

Most of the ‘girls’ were busy with their cellphones when not occupied by customers. Wendy, a toned Swazi woman, told me she had no friends but had admitted to feeling

part of the clique with the African ‘girls’. They looked after each others’ handbags, cellphones and other belongings when they were occupied with customers and didn’t have time to put it in the dressing room. There was definitely some animosity between the groups and even within the groups. This was why Wendy reiterated that she had no friends. When I had highlighted the visible size difference between the Asian and African women Wendy blurted out “that’s why these Chinese don’t fuck with us”. She assumed that all the Asian ‘girls’ were Chinese and illustrated her limited interaction with these ‘girls’.

There was an interesting similarity in the relationships that were built in the club by customers and the various ‘girls’ at Maxis. On more than one occasion, a regular would come and a specific ‘girl’ would be told by others to prop themselves up in anticipation for the specific customer. I was at the bar on my third visit when this type of interaction occurred. A middle aged white Afrikaner man sporting a khaki shirt, denim jeans and construction boots made his way in. He and a specific African sex worker seemed like a genuine couple. After their ‘session’, which seemed like a regular activity, they had drinks at the bar. I was seated next to them, eavesdropping on their conversation. The customer proposed that the ‘girl’ go home with him but she was highly reluctant and started groping his chest and nibbled at his neck. They seemed to exchange numbers after some time. She clearly wanted to avoid the conversation as she never replied but attempted to distract him. The ‘girlfriend experience’ required more emotional, mental and physical labour as these women had to ‘act’ as if they were in genuine relationships. They were transformed from sex workers to ‘girlfriends’ who took on significant changes in their mannerisms and personas. These relationships are highly beneficial to the ‘girls’ as they gain trust and acquire extra benefits. The ‘girls’ at Maxis did not have a strict job description their work and relationship to management varied from customer and times.

THE ‘JOHNS’

The customers at Maxis were in sharp contrast to those at Gigi’s Place. The customer demographic was mainly white, Indian and Asian/Chinese males with a few African males (during my visit I recall seeing two). The ages of the customers varied from 20’s to late 50’s, with old man even falling asleep and snoring in the club. Many of the customers that came into Maxis did not care too much about their appearance.

Some customers wore shorts and vests while others wore farm of khaki shorts, shirt and long socks with boots. There were hardly ever customers who dressed formally if you did you would stick out like a sore thumb. The location of the club meant it attracted a different socio-economic clientele from that of Gigi's Place. The 'girls' were not as prepped and groomed. Diamond, the skinny Thai sex worker who could barely speak English, was drunk every time I visited and she had a constant odour of perspiration on her. She stood out because almost every time I visited the club she approached me offering sex almost forgetting I had refused the previous times.

The 'girls' had no real preferences for customers, though cleanliness and manners as a plus. When speaking to Bhutan she emphasised "No blacks." This fear was fuelled by the racist stereotype that black men had large penises. Bhutan had not been with a black man but heard from the other Asians and she irrationally feared for her wellbeing. While a few clients developed personal relationships with 'girls' at the club many were there purely for sex. Time after time during my visits I noticed customers were completely different when they left compared to when they entered the room areas. Many of the men coming out of the room changed their persona and entire body language. This was in stark comparison to those who had 'relationships' with their specific 'girls'. Those who were strangers seemed to experience a shame and disgust. Many if not all left the establishment immediately after engaging in sexual activity. It might have been the openness with which sex was sold. Many felt a shame or disgust with their behaviour a type of "post-orgasmic disgust". I recall two friends who had both entered the rooms at the same time and when the one finished earlier than his friend he had changed his seating from the centre of the club near the stage to an area past the pool table near the toilets where he waited. When his friend was done they immediately left the establishment. Many of the customers went in with a 'girl' (holding hands or by the waist) but after exiting the rooms they were always alone. These actions were clearly not directly related to the customers' spent energies but rather psychological. I referred to this action by customers as 'the walk of shame'.

MANAGEMENT

The relationship between the 'girls' and the management were important in understanding the 'girls' current contexts, their future plans and relations outside of

their occupation. The visible relationship between the management and the 'girls' seemed friendly. Many would joke and have a laugh with the 'girls,' however these masked the exploitative nature of the work which they were engaged in. Many of the 'girls' who were not from South Africa built close relationships in and around the club. This provided stability and productive workers. Women like Bhutan and Diamond had no direct family and support mechanisms. This meant the club was an important point of support especially with other 'girls' that spoke their language and shared their cultures. The money earned from the club was not sufficient to get back home in the short term therefore these support systems, particularly amongst the Asian woman, were important in earning an income and maintaining a sense of sanity.

LAW/POLICE

While Gigi's Place and Maxis were 'strip clubs' it became apparent that this was neither their main business nor the most lucrative aspect of their business – which was rather the selling of sex. These are illegal activities according to South African law even though valiant attempts have been, and are being made, by movements, groups and activists to decriminalise these activities. The police were central to the way these establishments run and operate daily. At Gigi's Place the heavy surveillance outside was not merely for criminals and criminal behaviour but served as a pre-emptive measure against police raids. Rogue the elderly matriarch from Gigi's Place who was a 16 year veteran in the industry told me that the police were always on the pay role. She admitted that this was not unique to Gigi's Place and that other big establishments like The Grand (where she had a few stints of work) operated in a similar manner.

There was a cordial relationship between the police and Gigi's Place. This was clearly visible as the Randburg police station was in a close vicinity to the location of the club. Rogue highlighted that many of the big clients and customers at the club were involved with the highest levels of the police, and also the judiciary and the courts. This could explain why the club had managed to carry on with its business over many years.

On my fourth visit to Maxis I had a difficult experience, as I drove towards the club at around 7:30 I noticed a few cars and more surprisingly two metro police cars parked directly outside. Scared by the sight of the police I drove right by until the road afforded me a space to make a U-turn. As I returned, to my relief the police had just taken off. When I asked the towering muscular Nigerian bouncer what was going on, he told me not to worry and that all that they came for was money. This pointed to a partnership or agreement between the management and police in the illegal activities occurring in the club.

I heard from Bhutan who had recently arrived (3 weeks) in South Africa, the she feared the police. She told me she had just been in the country for a month. She was from Bangkok and came with her friend who barely understood English. She told me how she was intimidated by immigration at OR Tambo. She was sexually harassed as one official asked her for a kiss and then hugged her. When she refrained from his sexual advances she was held for four hours with no reason but was eventually allowed through as her documentation was in line. She recalled a friend at Maxis who was harassed by the police as she got into the taxi cab right outside of the club. According to Bhutan her friend who could barely speak any English was verbally and physically abused while she was accused of being a prostitute and threatened with deportation. Lucky the cab driver paid the sum of money which was repaid to him. The clubs thus provide protection not just from criminals and sexual predators, but also from the police.

DRUGS

The sex industry is undoubtedly intertwined with drugs. At Gigi's Place most of the 'girls' admitted to the use of drugs particularly stimulants like cocaine, ketamine and MDMA. The rationale for the use of these drugs was mainly because of the intensity of their work and shifts. For 'girls' who party/work after their shifts and are required to be at work the next day drugs are needed to meet their obligations to the club or else face fines. Lisa the skinny dark Nigerian woman told me that drug dealers came into the club and supply the 'girls' with the goods that they need. Whether the club was complicit or not was unknown.

There was also a much darker side to drug use in this type of industry. While talking to Lisa on one of my visits she pointed out a skinny white woman wearing a loose fitting red dress on stage. Lisa said she felt apologetic because this particular woman was having problems with her weight (worried she was too skinny/ she looked malnourished). Lisa said a few months ago this woman had a traumatic experience where she woke up and found her boyfriend dead in bed next to her. The cause of his death was unknown to Lisa but reiterated that it was traumatic for this particular 'girl'. She believed that this fellow worker was heavily on drugs as she went from 65kg to 44 kg in less than 3 months. This worried Lisa who said she had seen drugs in the club but never bothered with it because she had also seen its effects.

At Maxis I encountered explicit drugs when I met Bonita who was probably the oldest participant I spoke to. She was a white English speaking 44 year old mother of two. She was an energetic and boisterous woman. One memorable outburst she had was bluntly shouting she "loves drinking, drugs and dick". Bonita had an element of fun/numbing out in doing her work. She asked if I wanted any Cat (ketamine) and said she could get some in 10 minutes at R150 a bag. I refused but she kept pleading making me think that she needed it more than anything. She gave me a number of her drug dealer OJ and said I should call him for anything. I kindly refused and decided I should get out before I got in too deep during this visit.

Gigi's Place and Maxis both serve as exploitative and yet also protective environments for sex workers. The management's power rested in their control and surveillance of activities in the clubs. The 'girls' future prospects and plans rest heavily on their relation to the club and management. The type of customers was central to the 'girls' earning capabilities. The customer's socio-economic status determines the prices not only of the 'girls' but the club's amenities. The illegality of the business of sex work permits exploitation and was intertwined with the murky underworld particularly in relation to drugs se. The law/police were pivotal to the ways in which these clubs operated. The combination of the location of the club, management, staff, handlers and security determined the work regime and the 'girls' experience, status and expectations.

“BLOODY SLAVERY, EVEN WORSE”

Throughout my visits to Gigi’s Place in Randburg and Maxis in Edenvale, and in conversations with the girls, their lives and their work were shaped by a complex combination of factors. Sex work debates have focussed on ‘victimisation’ and ‘well being’, ‘force’ and ‘consent,’ however the lived realities of sex workers are far more nuanced. The lives of these women cannot be viewed as a simple binary of structure versus agency, coercion versus consent. Both are interdependent in their lives and their work. This research demonstrates that many of the women are agentic in their lives, however their choices are constrained by structural factors. This section will discuss the structural constraints on the ‘girls’ lives outside of work but also of their work itself.

MIGRANT SEX WORKER

Economic globalisation has seen a widening gap between developed and developing countries forcing millions into migrant work. Diminished economic prospects at home push many to leave in search of better economic prospects. Bhutan and Lisa were migrant sex workers who came to South Africa in search of better opportunities to make money. Bhutan came to South Africa as a sex worker after the cut-throat competiveness of the sex industry in Bangkok drove her to move abroad. Lisa entered the sex industry in South Africa initially as a ‘stripper’ and then later a sex worker. Although both were educated Thailand and Nigeria did not offer them work opportunities that would allow their families a decent standard of living. They were not seasonal migrant workers but were in South Africa for an indefinite amount of time until they accomplished their goals. While the nature of the sex industry is exploitative it should not simply be equated to human trafficking (Ditmore, 2010). While the gendered structure of the family and low economic status limited these women’s choices they expressed a degree of agency in coming to work in the South African sex industry. South Africa was viewed by Bhutan and Lisa as more economically advantaged then their own countries.

During my third visit to Maxis I was introduced to Bhutan, a short Thai woman wearing black fish nets and a tight one piece which barely covered her rear end. She had short black hair which covered half of her face. She was surprisingly fluent in English and seemed more educated than a lot of the other girls in the club. Although she didn't want to tell me her exact age, she was between 22 and 25 years old. She had arrived a month before and had a frightening experience at OR Tambo airport immigration. She claimed it was her cleverness and fluent English which helped her get through a horrific experience. She had been sexually harassed by officials at the airport who held her for 4 hours with no charge or reason even though according to Bhutan all her documentation was in line. She told officials to deport her back to Thailand or to call their superiors if she was going to be held for no valid legal reason. This eventually afforded her the chance to leave the airport. Bhutan had been offered a place by some friends, two Thai 'girls' who worked at the club. They stayed in a flat in Edenvale near to the club. This allowed them to share the cost of rent and food but just as importantly to have a sense of home and relationships in a new country. I asked if she had seen Johannesburg since she had arrived. Surprisingly she had not even left Edenvale after arriving from the O R Tambo airport. She told me her routine is: work and back to the flat and then back to work. This was her life in South Africa, centred almost entirely on her work.

For Bhutan, her life choices were severely circumscribed. Like many of the other 'girls' there was a certain intrigue as to why I was interested in them and their lives outside of their work. I had managed to connect with Bhutan because I had previously visited Bangkok and my experience had helped in my conversations with her. Before coming to South Africa she lived in Bangkok. She lived with her father, while her mother and younger brother stayed about a six hour drive north of Bangkok. Her mother and brother lived in a more rural area than the metropolis of Bangkok. Bhutan and her father stayed in the city. Her father had moved to Bangkok for work opportunities and also better schooling for his daughter. In her final schooling years she worked and studied simultaneously. Her main motivation was to earn her own money and to help her dad provide for the rest of her family. She did not say exactly what type of work her father was involved in but admitted that he worked very hard every day and she hardly saw him. Their low economic status was the main motivation for Bhutan to leave Thailand.

At the end of her schooling career she found work at the Toyota Car Company. She worked as a promotions person for Toyota. She spoke of her job as though she genuinely enjoyed it. This joy was short lived. She told me "Once you reach 22 years old or are not pretty and young enough you have to go." Bhutan was eventually retrenched at 23 years old. This experience seemed to affect her, the solemn tone and body language told this story. Her constant worry about earning money and work meant there was little time for boyfriends let alone getting married and starting a family. After her experience at Toyota she found a space in cosmetics in a shopping mall. Bhutan had to promote cosmetics products in various malls in Bangkok. She admitted that the pay was dismally insufficient. She could barely cover her transport cost with the measly pay she received. Her next job led her to her current occupation in the sex industry. Unlike South Africa the sex industry in Bangkok is far larger and more immersed in mainstream society. While it was taboo for girls of Bhutan's age to work in these large club/brothels in Bangkok, she said "lots of girls in Bangkok do it and make money". This pursuit of money exposed her to the cut throat nature of the industry, the amount of clubs/brothels in dense city like Bangkok meant working for the right brothel for the right pay was central to being successful however this did not materialise for Bhutan. The competitiveness in the sex industry in Bangkok was intense and afforded minimal opportunities to make a decent living for her and her family.

After an exhausting period in the sex work industry in Bangkok she decided to come to South Africa. According to Bhutan she could not make much money and her daily work was precarious in the sex industry in Bangkok. Bhutan admitted that she did not know how to dance, let alone pole dance. She said that her friend who she was staying with in Edenvale called her to tell her about "better money and chances in South Africa". The reality of her aspirations and dreams never materialised during our conversations. She confessed that she felt her occupation as a sex worker was "bad". Her dilemma was further exacerbated by the fact that she could not return home unless she has made a significant amount of money. Bhutan's family was central in her decision as they were unaware of her occupation and believed she was making money in South Africa. As long as they believed she was making money 'legitimately' to support them they were content. She told me she had a return ticket

but making money to take home was a determining factor. Maxis did not afford her the opportunity to fulfil her wish to go back home as soon as she would have liked. The 'girls' at Maxis including Wendy and Bhutan consistently complained about the lack of business at Maxis. This was due to the ratio of 'girls' available to the customers. There were far too many 'girls' in relation to the amount of customers. Bhutan reiterated during one of our conversations "This place is never full, never!" this view was similarly shared by Wendy, a sex worker at Maxis, during our time together.

At Gigi's Place on my third visit I had met Lisa. Lisa was a dark skinned skinny Nigerian woman. The first time I met Lisa she wore a black cocktail dress with bold white stripes, she was eager to talk to me especially because the club was not at capacity and she found me genuinely interesting. Lisa was intrigued by my race; she continually asked if I was Indian or coloured. She was 28 years old and from Northern Nigeria. She lived in Weltrevreden Park and had been working for just over a month in Gigi's Place. She had completed her schooling and headed to Lagos to study at a college. When she completed her studies in Lagos she searched for work in the city but also in Abuja. Lisa had worked temp jobs where she could enjoy being a waitress in Lagos but highlighted it was not sufficient. She had wanted to open a beauty salon but could not make enough money in Nigeria. Lisa came to South Africa hoping for better opportunities than those in Nigeria. The reality was far from what she wanted and expected. She had experienced a horrible incident at a club/brothel called The Penthouse when she arrived. Lisa did not want to talk about what had happened but I could gather from her defensive tone and seriousness that it was a traumatic experience. She had left that club to work at Gigi's Place. Lisa had spoken in passing of her brother and mother in Nigeria. Her family didn't know of her true occupation and were not too worried as long as money arrives home. They are under the impression that Lisa is a waitress in South Africa. I asked if she was Muslim because the majority of Northern Nigeria has a heavy Muslim influence. She was shocked and shouted at me saying "How can you ask me that here?" I gathered from this and her sarcastic tone that she may have come from a Muslim background. She had also questioned my religious beliefs and practice because of my name. This is one of the reasons why her family were not informed of her true occupation in South Africa. Lisa had seen the effects of drugs in the industry. She clearly stated that she was

saving and planning to go back home. Unlike many of the girls Lisa could drive and shared a place with a single roommate. While she seemed more financially secure compared to other girls at the club she complained of petrol, food and rising rent. The notion that Lisa was coerced or a victim was far from the truth. In a situation of temporary security she spoke of herself as a "working girl".

Many sex workers view themselves as "career" and "working girls" than mere victims of an exploitative sex industry. This is different from the 'anti-prostitution' view where there is no possibility of reclaiming the sexual terrain for women because the very meaning of sex is male domination (Chapkis, 1997). She straightforwardly pointed out that once she had sufficient funds to fulfill her aspirations of opening a beauty salon in Nigeria and becoming an entrepreneur, she would leave. She had developed a dislike for the sex industry she worked in but also of South Africa and longed to get back to her family.

FAMILIES, MOTHERS, AND BREADWINNERS

In the sex work literatures little attention is paid to sex workers' subjectivities and the way they exercise choice, even in the context of severe structural constraints. Many of the women were not coerced into the sex industry. It was a choice which was heavily influenced by the need to provide for their children and families whilst economically insecure. The main motivation for Wendy, Brandy, Rogue and Euphoria were their children. These women were the breadwinners and faced immense pressure to provide for their families. The social stigma of sex work and stripping had not deterred these women from making a living. While the girls at Gigi's Place loathed the term sex worker this was not the case at Maxis. This difference can be attributed to the way the clubs operated, the former more of a strip club front while the latter as a brothel. One title and role that all these women were proud of was that of being a mother. To my astonishment a lot of time was spent talking about their families in the clubs but talking about this took some time and developing a solid research relationship. Family was the single most powerful motivation for the women's work.

I met Wendy on my final visit to Maxis. She was Swazi and did not want to tell me her age. According to her "A gentleman never asks a woman's age". She initially approached me as a customer wearing a short tight bright red mesh one piece. Wendy had just started working at the club; she had been there for only two weeks. She had a son who was in an affluent private school in Johannesburg. When I asked how she managed the fees she began to open up about her current status and circumstances. Her main concern was her rent as she lived in Glendower which is a wealthy suburb in the East of Johannesburg. Wendy could not afford the rent and had given a notice of her departure. She could barely maintain her lifestyle. Wendy had grown up in Swaziland and met her husband there. Her husband was a white Englishman who came from a wealthy family in Swaziland. They had met when he was 23 years old. These were joyful years I gathered because she spoke with a genuine smile and a sense of nostalgia. After being married for 10 years he passed away. She highlighted that her husband had ensured that their son would be taken care of with a trust fund particularly for education. This was the main reason why she had decided to come to South Africa, i.e. for her son's education.

Wendy's son was a central pillar and motivation in recently entering the sex work industry. She reinforced this by saying "that boy is the only thing I have left". She was in South Africa with no family, friends or relatives. Her son's education had been prioritised above her own lifestyle and comfort. When I interrogated her relationship with her family and in-laws she continually avoided the question and reinforced her lone ranger attitude. With her last remaining monies she had decided to take up pole dancing in the hopes of entering the major strip clubs (Sleasers, The Rand etc.) to earn money. She had realised the darker side of the industry when she could not get into the major clubs and had to turn to sex work as a means of making money. She loathed being at Maxis and selling sex but realised the desperation of her situation. Wendy's choices were severely limited by her rising living costs and downward spiralling circumstances.

On my last visit and probably my lengthiest duration at Gigi's Place, over four hours, I met Brandy. She was a short thickset girl with a blond bob-hairstyle. Brandy was 25 years old and had been working at Gigi's Place for just over four months. There was a

definite lack of enthusiasm when she told me this. She was a mother of two children and married close to ten years. The family all lived together in Vanderbijlpark. Brandy's husband had been out of a job for three years and it had a negative effect on their relationship and the family as a whole. Her husband knew what her occupation was, and he even drove her to work, but she reiterated that he had experienced emasculation in being reduced to a "soccer dad". The pressure on her to make money was immense as she was the single breadwinner. Her work and their financial situation according to Brandy led her husband to infidelity. Her husband had then blamed her work as the main reason for his infidelity. She confided in me that she doesn't know how much more she could take and that her children were her main motivation in her life. Brandy's circumstances were reaching a dire point and the work at the club did not offer a substantial and sustainable future for her. Brandy would not be considered a mega earner at the club and would be ranked at the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of the demand for 'girls'. Given the precarious nature of Brandy's work her view of the future was terribly bleak. The last time I had spoken to Brandy the situation at home with her family forced her to move out with her children however she emphasized how she would not be able to afford it. The precariousness of her domestic situation made keeping her job vital regardless of the type work regimes discussed below. The pressure to conform to the ideal type of mother had definitely taken its toll on Brandy.

The veteran dancer from Gigi's Place was undoubtedly Rogue, an athletic, tall orange sunbed tanned figure. She was in her mid 40's and refused to give me her exact age and told me I was rude to ask. Rogue was a mother of two children, one aged 13 and the other 19. She was a 16 year veteran of the industry. Her demeanour and tone of voice certainly established her at the top of the hierarchy in the club. She was very popular among all the 'girls' that passed her and some had actually come from the other side of the club to greet her. She served as an important point to find out about the structure of the industry and the club itself. She knew that the industry was far more dangerous than the new 'girls', whom she described as naïve, thought. She spoke of how she had seen 'girls' succumb to drugs, alcoholism and had seen many deaths through her years emphasising "it's a slippery slope". Rogue had seen top girls - the mega earners - fall quickly and become liabilities to establishments. While she knew the industry well and the means of getting out were difficult she had aspirations

to study. The manner in which she spoke about this seemed more like an empty dream than a lived reality. Rogue acknowledged her age but also a deep concern about her children's future. She highlighted that her children were her single motivation and they were the centre of her world. She complained about the cost of school and university because her children were at these institutions. She openly admitted that she sold sex but not always. For Rogue selling sex was used to supplement her income from dancing. If she earned enough from dancing in a week or month she would not engage in the selling of sex. When she came across rougher financial times and could not make the necessary ends meet she would sell sex as a means to lessen the burden especially if it meant lessening the burden on her children. She spoke of many other girls who faced a similar situation. Stripping and sex would become one and the same thing during difficult times. Rogue gave me an example of when her car was damaged/ serviced or when her children fell ill. These unforeseen circumstances usually meant that selling of sex became a necessity for her as a means to supplement her income. Rogue represented the person who knew the realities of an exploitative industry but remained optimistic and agentic about her own negotiation of the structural constraints.

One of the last girls at Gigi's Place I had spoken to, Euphoria, was a minion of Rogue. Euphoria had worked at Gigi's Place for close to six months. She was a tall fair skinned coloured woman with long black hair who wore a tight transparent white one piece with long black leather boots. Euphoria was from Cape Town, loud and proud about it usually shouting something in Afrikaans which could not be made out by anybody else but her. She was boisterous: she kept putting my hand between her thighs and on her behind until I told her I felt uncomfortable. My inaction made her ask whether I was a "moffie" (homosexual) which I shrugged off and she jokingly laughed. Euphoria was 27 years old. Johannesburg was not her choice as she explained that the strip club industry is much smaller in Cape Town than the size of Johannesburg sex industry. She emphasized this point by stating that "Joburg is the city of Gold". She had a 3 year old child and emphatically declared that "I live for my child, everything I do is for that child". Euphoria had a clear affection and bond as a mother would of her child. She was frank about the fact that she sold sex and admitted that it was highly profitable in comparison to just pole/lap dancing. Selling sex was central to Euphoria's earning capacity and therefore providing for her child.

These ‘girls’ experiences were thus highly nuanced, with their children and their desire to be good mothers shaping their future prospects and plans. Most of the participants’ main aim was to earn an income and a decent living for them and their families. Some, especially those not from Johannesburg, have aspirations to get back home with money to follow their own chosen life paths. Many are transient and their work is not stable; for example, not many of these women have been at their particular club for over 6 months. Those who have been the longest in the industry like Bonita and Rogue have not remained at the same club for their entire time in the industry. Many have moved from place to place, club to club. While the structure of their lives outside of their work are important and influential in their current situation, just as important was the work regimes that occurred in the clubs, which produced particular forms of relations between the girls and management. More importantly, these relations affected their earning capacity and thus their lives outside of work.

WORK REGIMES AT GIGI’S PLACE AND MAXIS

The type of work regimes in place at Gigi’s Place and Maxis are central to the ‘girls’ lives. These work regimes determined their time, income and essentially control of their lives outside of their work. The clubs offer a lucrative and a relatively safer means of making money than private dancers/sex workers, or street sex workers. At both clubs the ‘girls’ age, race, and nationalities add value to the club as a ‘money maker’. Throughout my research I had uncovered despotic work regimes at Gigi’s Place and Maxis. Both are profit-making businesses and the ‘girls’ are products of the club that were squeezed through various means and avenues to get the greatest profits for the club. In both clubs the illegal nature of the activities offered the ‘girls’ little to no protection from management and staff. The work regimes uncovered meant that for some girls working at the club they were working under an exploitative usury system. It has been shown that exploitation and abuse are common in the sex work industry (Leggett, 2001). These relationships are based upon unequal power relations between customers, sex workers and club owners. The law against adult prostitution acts as a further constraint on the ability of sex workers to determine and control the nature of their relationships with customers and brothel owners. It is these work structures and

institutions that have meant some ‘girls’ need to supplement income made from the club through other means. The ‘girls’ told me that when periods of income were insufficient they would have to work as private sex workers after their shift at the club. This increased their risk in terms of health and personal safety beyond the confines of the club. This usually meant their lives were characterised by insecurity, exhaustion and disenchantment.

GIGI’S PLACE

All the girls I spoke to at Gigi’s Place complained and were frustrated with the management. Gigi’s Place surveillance and control were central to managing operations, the ‘girls’ and making money for the establishment. There were a range of mechanisms which the ‘girls’ spoke about that severely limited their movement, time, speech and means of earning a living. The management comprised of the security, handlers (those with the lasers) and the cleaning staff as a component of their team. The girls were not directly paid by the club but instead a type of rental had to be paid to the club. The club represented an oppressive management system which all the ‘girls’ were disgruntled about. Instead of working as a team with the management the hostility between management and the ‘girls’ could be felt.

The club employed a regimented work structure that affected all the ‘girls’ I spoke to during my visits. All of the ‘girls’ at Gigi’s Place have to check in when they arrive for their shift. The shifts were usually from 2pm and 7pm and the second from 7pm to 2am. The ‘girls’ had to be punctual. If they arrived 10 minutes later than their actual shifts which they were allocated and were not chosen they would be issued a fine of R300. If any ‘girl’ leaves before her shift has officially ended she would incur the same fine. When the ‘girls’ were checking in they were subjected to an inspection, a type of quality control from the management. If a ‘girl’ seemed less ‘worthy’ aesthetically the club would tell them to shape up or they were sent back home with a lefty fine sometimes as much as R6500. On my third visit to the club it was the weekend before ten girls did not pitch up to work and each was fined R6500. This was a major issue amongst the ‘girls’ at the time. Rogue who was one of the ‘girls’ fined informed me that the rationale for this was that it was a loss of income for the club. Euphoria describes the work regime as “…Milking us from our tits”. The girls were not allowed access their cellphones and handbags. These were left in the

dressing room. This had a profound affect on those who were mothers with young children like Brandy and Euphoria. Another iniquitous means was that no special amenities were given to the ‘girls’. The ‘girls’ were meant to pay customer prices for drinks and food.

When it came to pole dancing and stripping many of the ‘girls’ were forced to perform without pay. Pole dancing is an acquired skill; training is essential and injuries are common. These ‘girls’ were required to perform for no pay. It put immense pressure on those like Lisa who was an amateur but who had to compete with Rogue and Euphoria who were highly skilled. An average dance was the length of one song and the ‘girls’ had no choice of songs. The ‘girls’ were not allowed to select the music but had to dance to it. This was challenging for many ‘girls’ as the main pole dancing served as an ‘advertisement’ for potential customers. I recall Lisa after her dance say to me bluntly “fuck this DJ”. She was not satisfied with her dance and blamed the DJ’s choice of song.

The numbers of dancers on the general stage were regulated by a token system. The amount of tokens depended on the amount of customers in the club and amount of girls available that time. At times ‘girls’ can receive 10 tokens while at times 5 tokens per shift. If tokens were not used up you get fined R150 per token. At times ‘girls’ were required to do themed shows e.g. school girl, nurse, dominatrix lesbian etc. Brandy told me that she and her friend Storm were performing a lesbian show which they were not being remunerated for. The show ended 3 minutes earlier than required. The management took up the issue by fining each of them R1000. Arbitrary fines were issued for discussing other clubs in Gigi’s Place. These types of fines point to the highly competitive nature of other clubs in the surrounding area.

The ‘girls’ were meant to make their money from table dances, touch dances, private dancers and selling sex. While the prices for the dances were structured by the club, the club took a percentage of 20 per cent. When it came to the selling of sex at the club the ‘girls’ usually determined the price. The ‘girls’ knew there were hierarchies in terms of demand functioning as a type of free market. Some ‘girls’ whom I encountered like Barbie charged R1500 however she would rank near the bottom in terms of demand by customers. The physicality of a ‘girl’ was important but so was

her mannerisms and overall persona. Barbie exhibited desperation, lack of care in her appearance and more often than not seemed inebriated. This certainly worked against her earning capabilities. The demand was to some extent established by the attention and time customers wanted to spend with a particular 'girl'. The more attention a 'girl' had the higher her price would be. On the top of the hierarchy were the younger high demand 'girls' who charged R4000 and upwards.

'Girls' who sold sex were required to pay a R300 per half an hour as rental of the VIP booths to the club. This was meant to ensure that the 'girls' were not too long and could move to other customers. In all of these cases management acknowledged the selling of sex because they take a commission of 20 percent. This implicates management directly in the selling of sex. The selling of sex in comparison to 'normal' dances is very lucrative. As discussed the club allows the hiring of 'girls' outside of the club. The club is paid R2000 while the 'girl' being hired is given R2000. She is then picked up or dropped at the location where she is required. The problem is that the 'girl' is left outside of the protection of the club leaving her vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse. If 'girls' left with customers without the knowledge of the club's management they would be charged excessive fines.

Part of ensuring and enforcing this type of work regime in the club meant an intense system of surveillance which allowed management such extensive control. During my conversations with Brandy she needed to use her cellphone but could not. One of her children had been ill and she wanted to check up on them. She told me that the whole club had hidden cameras. These were not restricted to the public areas but also the VIP and areas around the toilet and girls dressing room. The management made use of the cleaning staff as surveillance and offered measly rewards for reporting arbitrary indiscretions by the 'girls'. Brandy referred to the cleaning staff as "Rats". They were all over the place and quick to run to management to receive monetary compensation, she said. The security and bouncers were also encouraged to do the same for a reward.

On the main floor the elevated DJ box functioned as a bird's eye view of the entire area and gave handlers easier pointing access with lasers to the 'girls'. The handlers as part of management were central in this type of work structure. There was usually one handler per shift but on busier nights there would be two. They walked around with

lasers which they pointed at ‘girls’ who were required to pole dance. They ensured the ‘girls’ danced their required amount of times by collecting their tokens. The handlers were encouraged to fine and penalise the ‘girls’ for the most arbitrary of things because they usually took a slice of the fine. This was exemplified when the club encouraged the ‘girls’ to get customers to buy them drinks. Shrewdly the management would fine ‘girls’ who got drunk or were thought to be drunk. In her own words ‘Rogue’ described the work regime as “…bloody slavery, even worse”.

The girls I spoke to during my visits to Gigi’s Place were directly affected by the structure of their work. Brandy told me that a few months ago she had accumulated around R9000 in debt that she owed to the club. At that point she had to borrow money to pay the club back. When I was talking to her she had owed the club close to R2000. Rogue who had received the R6500 fine for not coming to work said that her experience has taught her to pay the fine as soon as possible because it is too easy to become trapped in a continual payment of the accumulated fines and debts. The ‘girls’ were meant to follow rules that they were unaware of and they seemed to change according to management. The exploitative nature of the business had put some girls in more precarious and financially detrimental situation than not working at all. The myth of ‘easy money’ in this industry evaporates after uncovering and examining the structures of work which these ‘girls’ face.

MAXIS

Maxis did not seem as costly and pricey as the large-scale operations of Gigi’s Place however there was an exploitative work regime for the ‘girls’ at the club. This type of work regime like at Gigi’s Place ensured control. In ensuring control money could be made by the establishment. The ‘girls’ at Maxis were not pole dancers, most of them could not pole dance and never offered table and touch dances. There was a far more basic operation than the complex rules and penalties at Gigi’s Place. The amount of staff, managerial control and surveillance was far less than Gigi’s Place. This does not mean that it was less exploitative. More than anything Maxis resembled a sex drive-through where you could come in, pick a ‘girl’, pay your R500 or R600 and be out in less than 15 minutes. This can be viewed as part of what Agustin (2007) refers to as the “Macdonaldisation” of the sex industry. More and more of the sex industry are

operating in a type of industrial scale. At the club there were far less sophisticated means of squeezing the ‘girls’ for money.

Many of the ‘girls’ were required to sign and pay a fee of R100 to the club. There were no double shifts. It was usually one shift which lasted from 7pm to 2am. Some girls like Bonita a private sex worker came to the club as a means to supplement her lost income. Many of the Thai ‘girls’ only knew Maxis as a means of making money. All the ‘girls’ were required to do a dance on stage. However, as highlighted above, many did not know how to pole dance. The ‘girls’ were not paid to dance on stage. Many were put in awkward positions when on stage. Unlike Gigi’s Place the dances usually lasted for three songs. There was an attempt to show some diversity in an environment that was dominated by South East Asian ‘girls’ by alternating between African and Thai ‘girls’. This was however detrimental to the African ‘girls’ like Wendy. The African ‘girls’ were vastly outnumbered by the Asian ‘girls’. This meant the African ‘girls’ would have to dance a lot more than their Asian counterparts in order to fulfil the alternating quota. The DJ/security was responsible for telling the ‘girls’ to dance however when they were occupied the Hawk would step in to ensure that there is a dancer on stage.

The price at the club would be R500 for half an hour and R600 for a full hour. This was usually oral sex, blowjobs and full out intercourse. The paid amount usually lasted until the customer ejaculated and not the half hour or full hour. The club would take 50 percent of the amount that customers paid. Bhutan had complained saying “they take too much money”. The ‘girls’ were not allowed to leave the club with customers. If they left the club with clients they would be issued a fine of R1000. The ‘girls’ were allowed more freedom in terms of using their phones. It actually worked to the advantage of the club as many ‘girls’ would call customers from outside of the club to come to Maxis. This allowed the club to make money.

The ‘girls’ were not only meant to sell sex and entertain customers at Maxis. The ‘girls’ had to fulfil various jobs while at the club that are usually outside the job description of a sex worker. The club had no waitrons to serve drinks to customers who were not at the bar. The bartender usually served customers at the bar but the

majority of the seating was situated around the stage at the lounges. This meant that most 'girls' who sat with customers away from the bar had to work as waitresses. This was done while still trying to entertain and seduce customers. The 'girls' were not given discounts on drinks and food was not sold. On my third visit I recall walking to the toilet and seeing a group of Asian girls huddled around a small table at the back. On the table were tapas with different oriental foods and the 'girls' were eating with their hands as to satisfy their ravenous appetite.

As discussed above there were a few cleaning staff at Maxis. If customers spilt drinks or broke glasses the 'girls' had to clean up the mess. It was an awkward scene because on the one hand the girls were trying to be sexually attractive and seductive then they would be wiping the table or mopping up the floor in skimpy underwear. I had witnessed this on several occasions during my visits to Maxis. Wendy who was new to the club had been highly upset and frustrated at the way the club was run. The 'girls' had to do various jobs which the club never paid for but the girls were required to do. This saved the club the cost of hiring waitrons and cleaners. The size of the operation of Maxis alludes to its explicit nature of strictly selling sex whereas the large scale operation at Gigi's Place required a more strip club scene as a front.

THE 'TRIPLE' SHIFT

The structures of the work regimes in the clubs are highly exploitative. Many 'girls' who were mothers took on 'second' jobs as private sex workers outside the club to supplement their income. The 'girls' do not have protection from unions or sex worker organisations. When I spoke to Rogue about the idea of unionisation she laughed at me and said "…going against this shit management of club means you going against the management of other major clubs". This meant the repercussions of challenging management may have implications in other work opportunities in the industry. The fear of losing their job at the club was an overriding concern. Many 'girls' would rather have a debt with the club than lose their job. The system of debt accumulation would not have been as perverse if the 'girls' could simply quit their jobs. Whilst talking about her domestic situation Brandy said she had limited options in her choice of work particularly because of her circumstances at that time. Having a job meant that regardless of the debt owed to the management there still was potential to earn money. The vulnerability and precariousness of work inside the club allowed

the establishment increased control. As described above many of the girls are earning money to live and some are barely scraping by.

The work regimes inside the club had a detrimental effect on the 'girls' earning capabilities. This in turn leads to many 'girls' taking on second occupations, many selling sex privately at their homes or customers' places. This increase the risk of violence and sexual assault. The safety of the club usually protects the 'girls' from the risks associated with street sex workers and indoor individual self-employed sex workers. Many of these women are mothers and breadwinners of their families and many cave in to the pressure of taking on work outside the club. The club, as shown, exploits these 'girls' who seek the safety of the club and an opportunity to make money. Many 'girls' worked the 'double shift' but also attempted to fulfil ideals of being present and caring mothers to their children. As highlighted above, the 'girls' extended working hours, double shifts and second jobs may lead to drug use.

The use of drugs became part of the occupation for many girls at the club. The structure of the work in the clubs exerts pressures to find other sources of income. Lisa, Bonita and Rogue spoke of many girls working as sex workers after their shifts. Rogue pointed to the fact that many girls leave after their shift at 2am or 3 am to service customers and then are expected to be back at the club at 1pm. Taking on second occupations in sex work is highly risky in terms of health and safety. Many girls, as shown, had used drugs to fight fatigue and extreme exhaustion which they face on a daily basis. The physicality and the performance of their work is also physically, mentally and emotionally demanding. The use of drugs means the 'girls' can increase their earning potential but at a higher risk to their health and safety. More troubling is that there has been little to no research on the vulnerabilities of sex workers' children, particularly in relation to sex worker drug use.

Sex work is not just about making money, it is about hopes, dreams and possibilities. Bhutan and Lisa illustrate the effects of transnational capitalism and the migrant labour system which is central to it. While both attained a certain degree of education the job opportunities prior to sex work, this was insufficient to live a decent life for them and their families. South Africa was viewed as a means to increase their economic status to provide for their families but also to pursue their own future

prospects. While there is no way to gather how long they would need to work, the decision to go back home was dependent on their work, especially the work regimes at the clubs. Most of the 'girls' were single breadwinners and mothers whose main motivation were their family and children. These structures were central to their chosen work occupation as the current work and capitalist regimes did not offer viable job opportunities to afford their family and children a decent living.

The work regimes in the clubs did not assist 'girls' in their personal lives, as the main function of the club was to make profits. Like any profit-making business control, surveillance over production and selling 'goods' was critical. The clubs despotic work regimes were crucial to making money. 'Girls' paid rental, levies, fees and arbitrary penalties while not earning sufficient incomes. When these payments to the club outweighed their earning capabilities many entered a system of bonded debt. They were solely working to pay of debts accumulated. Despite this coercive structure, the resilience and optimism of many of the 'girls' was remarkable, many being motivated by a commitment to escape their conditions through an industry that nonetheless proved highly precarious and exploitative.

WORKING AND CAREER GIRLS

The structures of family, migrant work, future prospects and the despotic work regimes at the clubs affected the women. However they could not be viewed as mere victims. To view these 'girls' as mere victims is to ignore the fact that they had the capacity to engage in acts of resistance, subversion and negotiation (Chapkis, 1997). By using their work and the industry to pursue their own independently determined goals, they exercised a certain degree of choice, however limited that choice may be.

While the sex industry is underpinned and reinforced by patriarchy, and therefore affects women and all gender relations, on the other hand the participants' experiences clearly showed that sex work is a freely chosen form of work and should be afforded the same human and worker rights as any other form of labour. While there are many women who never leave the industry or are unable to leave the industry, some do choose this type of work. The overriding reason why these 'girls' choose the sex industry is the underlying notion of 'easy money'. This is a false assumption, given the coercive structure of work in the club. For some 'girls' this type of industry can prove highly profitable while for other 'girls' it does indeed become a form of near bonded slavery. Women are in especially disadvantaged positions because of the hierarchical structures of sex, race and class, therefore women working in the sex industry operate within the constraints of social prejudice as well as unequal privilege and these differences produce different experiences of sex work (Chapkis, 1997).

Part of their personal lives cannot be easily detached from their work but are intricately linked. The pressures at work were compounded about trouble and worries about their families. Many had relationships and connections with families, husbands and boyfriends. There were means of differentiating between work and personal relationships while engaging in sex work. Symbolic and physical boundaries through performing, hugging, kissing and condom use were central in maintaining these boundaries. While some 'girls' did not necessarily choose their profession many did not want to be waitresses, cosmetics and promotions saleswomen. While the structure of their work at Gigi's Place and Maxis was highly exploitative they did nonetheless choose the type of customers they would entertain and have sex with. Whether it was

based on race, age, and ethnicity or even hygiene some girls exercised control in their preference for clients. During my visits to Maxis and Gigi's Place no 'girls' were forced to be with any customers they did not want to be with. Many who I had attempted to talk to without offering monetary incentives or drinks would simply ignore me and move on to customers willing to spend money. The 'girls' who had the greatest capacity to choose their clients were those that were in high demand, and they could charge exorbitant prices for sex and other activities. For these 'girls', indeed, sex work could be a "liberatory terrain for women" (O'Neill, 2001). As a researcher it was far more difficult to engage in conversation or an interaction with these in-demand 'girls' without offering monetary incentives. Demand was determined by age, as I will discuss later.

REBELS

Despite the kind of labour regime in place in the clubs, the 'girls' did not necessarily accept these without attempting to claw back some control from management. At the same time, they exercised the same determination in their personal lives. Coco, Brandy and Storm decided to rebel against both the work regimes in the clubs, as well as family and gender roles. Bonita, for example, personifyed the ideal of the "working" girl. During my second visit to Gigi's place I decided to go in the late afternoon and utilise the lack of customers to get the 'girls' attention. I met Coco.

She was a young dark skinned dreadlocked South African girl with a nose piercing. She wore a red one piece that rolled from a t-shirt to a mini type of dress. Coco had just started working at Gigi's Place. She had been there for less than a week. When I spoke to her she had barely learnt how to pole dance but said she wasn't concerned as she had been teaching herself using YouTube. She had just turned 21 years old. Coco was the newest 'girl' to the industry that I had spoken to during my visits to Gigi's Place and Maxis. She was from Johannesburg, and lived in Alberton but stayed with her sister in Randburg as it is closer to work. She had schooled at an Afrikaner school in Alberton and described her family as very progressive. Her mother came from a Muslim family and she had surprisingly had a stint at Madrasah during her childhood. She was the youngest sibling of three and her parents paid special attention to her. After school Coco had studied IT which she never finished but said it was mainly to

satisfy her parents. She had told her parents that she worked at a casino and managed to maintain this lie as she lived with her older sister. Coco certainly feared the social stigma of the work but chose it herself. She had come from a background of professional dancing, and a type of Caribbean genre was her speciality. This with her dreadlocks set her apart from the other girls at the club.

Unlike many other girls she could tell me how she was persuaded into the industry. While she was at a popular nightclub she was approached by a type of scout who gave her a proposition. She was told by the scout that her look was unique (dreadlocks) and that she had an athletic body. This encounter gave Coco a real sense that she could make a lot of money from this type of work. This type of money could be used to fulfil her dream of opening her own dance academy. More than just money she spoke of gaining experience and dancing in other settings that she had become comfortable in. At that time she said that she was fitting in and everything seemed good. To me it seemed as if she was liked and favoured at the club. During our chat she had to dance as required by the token system. While she was dancing I had my first and only encounter with Gigi, the real matriarch and owner of Gigi's Place. As Coco performed her routine Gigi came toward me with a smile and applauding in the absence of Coco. Gigi said "This one is not new she knows what she's doing, take care of her". This seemed like a sales tactic but her attention to Coco illustrated her newness to the industry and the club. While Coco was new to the club she was not naïve to the actual workings and operations at the club.

Coco knew that the 'girls' sold sex at the club but flatly refused to participate or even be associated with those kinds of activities. She had spoken about trying to learn from the 'girls' who had been at the club for some time and she highlighted that most of the work done at the club was a performance. As a researcher trying to speak to the 'girls' I had noticed this description by all the 'girls'. As I've discussed, I was unlike the average customer looking for sex, a dance or companionship. Once this was established a kind of wall broke down and the 'girls' body language and tone in conversation changed. This was part of the work that excited Coco as she compared her professional Caribbean genre to a performance and story on stage. Part of the performance for Coco was choosing a pseudonym and assuming a separate identity. She believed that it helped the other 'girls' carry out and perform their work while

masking any problems and issues. The pseudonym she had, Coco, was chosen by her and the 'girls' at the club, she admitted it was mainly due to the colour of her skin.

Coco was shocked at the amount of drug use but understood it, as the other 'girls' did, as a "necessary evil". It helped fight fatigue and exhaustion which can lead to lacklustre performances and which can lead to hefty fines and penalties. She complained about the token system and described it as "controlling". She spoke of her shock at how her racial interactions occurred in the club stating that some white men are scared and afraid of her but they are intrigued by her colour and voluminous body. This has made Coco a substantial amount of money relative to the time she had been at the establishment. After this visit I never saw Coco again.

During one of my visits to Gigi's Place when I had met Lisa the Nigerian 'girl' and I had discovered what had happened to Coco but was hardly surprised. Lisa and Coco had formed a friendship at the club, especially because they arrived at Gigi's Place at the same time even though Lisa had not been new to the industry. Both Lisa and I concluded that Coco's personality and outspokenness did not go well with the type of work regime at the club. We both acknowledged her outgoing personality and talkativeness. Lisa had described her as "just too much". Not long after my conversation with Coco she had fallen out with management. She was fined for coming to work 15 minutes late and decided to continue the trend as a deliberate rebellion against management. According to Lisa, Coco could not handle the management's strict control over her time and movement. After my conversation with Coco it seems like her relationship with the club and management soured. She continually told Lisa that she was not going to waste her time and leave the club. Relations between Coco and management reached a tipping point when during a stage performance one night she did a dance that Lisa described as "scary and ugly". This infuriated management, who piled up the fines and penalties on Coco. Eventually she just didn't turn up for work. Coco was an example of someone who stood up against a highly exploitative work regime. She was fortunate enough to have her family, sister and parents, who were a safety cushion she could fall back on. This was unlike most of the girls I had spoken to who are the breadwinners for their children, families and themselves.

Brandy represented a case where the combinations of family and work limited her choices in life. Her private life and work intersected and was the cause of many disruptions in her life. Brandy's husband would not only drop her off at work but would sometimes come into the club to watch her. At first she said he didn't seem bothered about her occupation. This changed when he lost his job, and changed his attitude to her work. These domestic issues had taken a toll on Brandy and her husband. She told me that she had his response to her confrontation about his infidelity more appalling than the infidelity itself. He had blamed Brandy's occupation on why he decided to cheat on her. This situation for Brandy was exacerbated by their children because as she told me she was ready to leave him. This was her husband for 10 years and they had two children together. She mentioned that she had begun to save money that she could use in order to move out with her kids but admitted that it might be difficult because of her husband. More troubling was that even though she was the breadwinner in the family, her in-laws had ostracised her. She was grateful that they did not direct those feelings towards her children.

Brandy realised the implications of working in Gigi's Place but also the potential of making money quickly, as she spoke of a recent night where she made R3000. The problem was the instability and insecurity of this type of work. The last time I spoke to Brandy she was going to stay over with another girl from the club, her friend Storm, in order for her to hunt for properties without her husband's knowledge. Brandy had decided to rebel and make her own decisions for her and her children.

Storm was Brandy's best friend, and also worked at Gigi's Place. She was younger than Brandy and more energetic, bubbly – an in-demand 22 year old. Like Brandy Storm chose her name after her favourite alcoholic drink. Storm and Brandy were making plans to possibly live together given both of their dire domestic situations. In the club 'girls' provided crucial support for each other especially in times of trouble and despair. Storm was a small town Afrikaner by ethnicity that had been working at Gigi's Place for four weeks and lived in Key West near Klerksdorp. Storm was enthusiastic about her work and could be considered amongst the higher in-demand 'girls'. She was young blonde, athletic but also friendly, I came to the conclusion that she was popular because during my relatively brief conversation with her, three

different customers had approached her to get her attention which she willingly obliged.

She stayed with her mother and step-father and seven siblings. The two including her were from her mother and five from her step-father. Storm openly admitted that "I've got daddy problems". She told me about the death of her biological father when she was 3 years old and that she had missed him. She had not gotten along with her step-father. He and her mother drove Storm to work every day. Her step father charged her R250 for the one way trip as her mother could not drive but always drove with them. This was a highly disproportionate cost to the travel distance because after her shift the cost to ride home with a security staff is R100. Storm was highly infuriated by this cost she incurred from her step-father as she contributes heavily to the finances of the household. Storm told me that her step-father had taught the younger siblings to "hate" her. She said that her previous boyfriend had left her because her step-father had told him that she was a sex worker. These experiences were the main motivation to leave home and seek better conditions of living with Brandy. Storm had not experienced the exploitative work regime probably because she was not at the club long enough, or she makes enough money as a highly in-demand girl. She was fined with Brandy when their Lesbian show ended early but unlike Brandy she shrugged it off.

At Maxis Bhutan had travelled all the way from Thailand like many of her colleagues. She had travelled in search of better opportunities to make a better life for herself and her family but was sadly disappointed when she saw the operation at Maxis. It probably did not even compare to some of the massive clubs that were in Bangkok. During our conversations she continually spoke nostalgically of home. She stayed in a flat in Edenvale with girls from Thailand. She spoke of how they cooked Thai food and it reminded her of home. Bhutan had benefitted from technological globalisation as she skyped with her father, mother and brother at least once a week. A regret she said she had was that she never had a proper relationship with a boyfriend. In Thailand 'girls' who work in the clubs are not usually prized as wives and girlfriends according to Bhutan. She was not happy at the size and lack of business at Maxis however she had not known anywhere else in Johannesburg let alone South Africa. On my last visit to Maxis I was approached by a friend of Bhutan. She had seen me

talking to Bhutan previously and was curious to know where she was. I was just as shocked as I knew she had never left Edenvale when she arrived from the airport. Her friend continued to tell me that she has been missing for 4 days. This troubled me as I had developed a good research relationship with Bhutan. Using hindsight I can say that there is a much darker side of the sex industry that I had not uncovered but merely scratched the surface of. Though girls like Wendy and the African 'girls' were from around the surrounding areas the accumulation of Asian 'girls' at the club, some who could not speak English or didn't know where they were led me to believe that there might have been trafficking at the club. That, or she simply decided to leave.

The constraints in the lives of various 'girls' were central to their current situation but did not define it. Bonita was a private self-employed indoor sex worker, a 44 year old veteran of the industry and mother of two who seemed to exercise a degree of choice in her occupation. She had been at Maxis because her car was broken and she could not travel to see customers. Bonita was the oldest participant and the only white woman at Maxis that I had spoken to. When I met her at the bar she had long black hair against her pale face sporting a classy black cocktail dress. She had two children, who were 14 and 24 years old. Bonita lived in a flat in Bedfordview with her brother and two children. She was from Johannesburg and admitted to being a "wild girl" who still hadn't grown up. She was a true veteran of the sex industry. She worked as a cabaret dancer, pole dancer, escort and a lot of other titles she mentioned to prove her status as a veteran. She initially entered the dance industry as a cabaret dancer at a club in Braamfontein called Flamingo. She admitted that at some point in her life her circumstances were terrible, drug abuse as well as money insufficient, she highlighted her experience at The Rand. The Rand is a high end 'strip club' based in Rivonia but usually operates as a brothel with a strip club up front. There the realities of sex work came to the fore in her experience. Bonita was not making near as much money as she liked or as other 'girls' at The Rand and decided to get involved in selling sex which proved more lucrative. This changed her experience, and she now considered herself a sex worker. She expressed an entrepreneurial attitude in talking about sex work. Bonita said she was self-employed and loved her freedom, she did however admit "as long as it put food on the table and money in my pocket." Her eldest daughter and brother knew of her occupation but her youngest child did not. She did not feel any shame or stigma in her occupation. We talked of her relationship with her oldest

daughter which she described their relationship as best friends. Bonita described their relationship as "We party and have fun together". She was glad that her daughter had been given many expensive gifts, one being a Harley Davidson motorcycle. This was acquired through her daughter's relationship with a 60 year old man who was a wealthy businessman. When I interrogated how she felt and what she thought she said she was ecstatic. She had encouraged her daughter to pursue this type of relationship and added that she gets to go on expensive vacations with her elderly boyfriend. It almost seemed that Bonita was trying to live through her daughter as her over-enthusiastic tone suggested. She believed this was the future for her daughter as it had brought many pleasures to their lives.

While 'girls' like Storm would be considered "money makers" and are at the top of the club hierarchy there were those that are considered 'bottom feeders'. At Maxis 'Diamond' was one of those girls. During my visits to Maxis she directly offered me sex three times over the period of visits. Every time I had seen her, she was alone and many of the 'girls' stayed clear of her. She represented a less seductive side to the industry. She was usually chain smoking, drinking heavily and trying to catch any customer unaware of her. I could not talk to her as she could barely speak English except tell you that it's "R500 R600" for sex.

At Gigi's Place the girl I encountered who directly offered me sex without much conversation was Barbie. On two occasions, she approached a group of men at the bar who all, shockingly, turned away from her. This was a usual occurrence for Barbie. When I told the other 'girls' how she approached me and offered to sell sex they knew that's the way she operated, Rogue reaffirmed Barbie's desperation by feeling pity, saying "Shame man". These 'bottom-feeder' sex workers choices could not exercise any preference of customers. They were almost forced to take anything that walked through the door. For the other women that I talked to preferences and likes in deciding and choosing which customer to be intimate with was a significant way in which they asserted control over their work.

CUSTOMER PREFERENCES

The 'girls' that I spoke to did not entertain any customers. They chose their clients. The socioeconomic differences in customers and locations between the two clubs

meant that the girls at Gigi's Place were more "picky" than the 'girls' at the Maxis brothel. Storm and Brandy spoke to me about their dislikes and criteria for choice of customers. They typically avoided customers with bad hygiene. They said that it was virtually impossible to be with a man when his breath, feet and under arms have a foul odour. This would be a definite criterion in deciding whether to be intimate with customers or not even though they did acknowledge that it is difficult to be too discerning in their occupation.

Brandy refused to entertain any black customers at any cost, and reiterated that it was racist attitude, saying "I was brought up that way". Bhutan and other Asian 'girls' at Maxis, where some had not experienced being with an African customer, were awash with such racist notions. It made Brandy scared and afraid of this category of customers. This fear usually translated into racialised treatment of African customers by the Asian 'girls'.

Many of the 'girls' like Rogue, Wendy and Lisa discussed well-mannered men as attractive. It was unclear whether they spoke about men in their private personal lives or at work. These preferences were almost always overridden by the pursuit of money. While the high in-demand 'girls' could have stricter criteria on customers the intensity of competition in the clubs meant that these criteria did not mean much. For the in-demand 'girls' sex work provides a terrain of freedom and high earning incomes. This was especially the case when the club was empty and business was slow.

BOUNDARY MAINTANENCE

PERFORMANCES

The pseudonyms, dress attire, accessories, mannerisms and personas of the 'girls' were part and parcel of the job. Not only were the dances a performance but all the 'girls' performed for customers. Even to overcome these preferences, which many of the 'girls' claimed they had, it meant performing. Performances or acting helped to establish an emotional distance and barriers between their work relationships and their private personal relationships. These performances are part of the "manufactured identity" of a sex worker (Sanders, 2005). It was vital to earning potential as well: to

act as if you are interested and attracted to the customer to ensure that the customer will spend as much money as possible on you.

This was a common understanding and could be viewed all around the club by all the 'girls.' Only when you break the ice, as I eventually did, did they let down their guard and stop the performance. This was typified when I was with Brandy and Storm. Initially Storm and Brandy were sultry, bare breasted and all over me. This changed as they acknowledged my role as a researcher. On this occasion we were seated at one of the lounges and Brandy had removed her high-heeled stilettos and stuffed it in Storm's face to ask her if her feet smelt. This type of behaviour would not have occurred had they thought I was going to spend money on them. It made me think of the objectification of women, particularly in this industry where they are viewed as products, or objects, and sold. But as I had discovered these are ordinary women trying to make a living.

These performances for customers were entirely about earning money. The 'girls' sold themselves as part of their acts. These performances point to the "emotional labour" that is needed in this type work. Not only is it physically and mentally demanding but also emotionally. According to Hochschilds (2003) emotional labour which in gendered service jobs are viewed as necessitating the production or appearance of 'appropriate' emotions. The term emotional labour is used to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display, emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has an exchange value. These processes of emotional labour can be viewed in the performance by the 'girls' in the club to attain customers. These performances are intrinsically linked to the earning potential of the 'girls' in the club. The 'girlfriend experience' typified emotional labour in the club. The 'girls' in these club relationships had to act as loving, caring and compassionate companions however as highlighted it was a key means of attaining a secure income with additional benefits. Sanders (2002) argues that emotional labour constitutes both an effective business strategy for gaining and maintaining clientele. These 'relationships' required more emotional labour than the average non-regular customers. Sex workers who perform emotional labour and work are just as susceptible to alienation as those who use physical and mental labour. This could have detrimental effects not only on their emotions at work but also at home.

HUGGING

One of the differences between relationships at the club with customers and those outside in a personal capacity is physical contact of hugging. Over my 16 to 20 hours at the clubs it stood out to me that hardly any of the 'girls' and customers hug each other. The times that I did notice a hug were with customers who come specifically for 'girls' they have as regulars. For the customers this may resemble a 'true' relationship with the girls but from the girls perspective it is a secure and stable means of income. These 'relationships' which I had witnessed at Maxis and Gigi's Place meant that the customers expected their 'girls' to be available when they came to the clubs. At Maxis I heard a customer asking a 'girl' he had an 'in-club' relationship with to go home with him. This never materialised. Many of these customers may not even want to have sex but come to the clubs for companionship which is a means for some 'girls' to make money or simply get free drinks and food. These types of customers were the only ones who seemed to express affection by cuddling and hugging their girls. The affection expressed in these relations was unique in the club as many of the actions by customers were intrusive and violating like groping and pulling.

I recall on one of my visits to Gigi's Place when I was with Rogue and Lisa spotted me and came towards me and gave me a hug realising my position in the club I felt awkward when normally I wouldn't have. While the 'girlfriend experience' seemed to mean something genuine to the customers these 'girls' acted like the girlfriends for economic reasons. Though society has made the use of money in intimate relationships a type of taboo, these relations in the club were based on these interactions. Most personal relationships outside of the club were not viewed by the 'girls' on the basis of monetary exchange.

KISSING

There was one strict boundary between personal and work relationship of physicality that was strictly abided by in both the clubs: kissing. At both the clubs I had never witnessed any attempts to kiss the girls. The girls who sold oral sex and sex would not kiss customers. I found this ironic that they would allow oral sex but not allow the customers to kiss them. This was reiterated by various girls I had spoken to at Gigi's

Place and Maxis. Bonita who was a private sex worker who was temporarily supplementing her income at Maxis told me straight that while she loves partying, drugs and men, she does not kiss. This intrigued me but she was not alone. Storm and Brandy whilst talking about being germaphobes, said they did not kiss customers. When I tried to interrogate the idea of kissing customers Storm with smirk of disgust blurted out "sies" meaning disgusting in Afrikaans. The one woman that mentioned kissing was Barbie however this was not meant in the conventional sense, she meant kissing "anywhere" all over her body. The idea of locking lips and tongue was sort of taboo in a place that sold sex. This was almost always was at the back of my mind when scanning and taking in my environment but seemed never to happen between the 'girls' and customers. The act of kissing can be viewed as a means of self-preservation while performing intimate interactions required for sex work. Kissing was an action reserved for private personal relationships. The 'girls' acknowledge that some customers wanted to kiss however there was a taboo on kissing in the clubs which almost all the participants adhered to. While almost any physical and emotional intimate interactions could be exchange through monetary exchange, kissing was not an option. For Bernstein (2010) the 'girlfriend experience' is part of what she terms 'bounded authenticity'. In the clubs the most "natural" of intimate gestures - the kiss - has become the symbol of intimacy and authenticity. The 'girlfriend experience' may be a way of reintroducing this intimate gesture into a commercialise transaction. While sexual intercourse puts you at a higher risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases this was less intimate than kissing. Kissing is reserved for private personal relationships and viewed as the epitome of intimacy even more so than the act of sexual intercourse.

CONDOMS

While kissing and hugging might seem like the everyday mundane activities in a sexual relationship this did not occur and were viewed as a taboo, kissing more so than hugging. Another taboo that was heeded to at both clubs was the use of condoms. The use of condoms was a general rule amongst the 'girls' I had talked to. Many like Rogue, Brandy and Storm thought it was an irredeemable mistake not to use protection. During my third conversation with Rogue she said something rather profound to another younger 'girl', "… If you don't wrap it up start reading a book for baby names or worse an epitaph for your grave stone". The uses of condoms were

for health and unwanted pregnancies. Like kissing, condoms were a means of self-preservation while working performing sex work. It was also a means of differentiating between work and private personal relations. Using condoms in private intimate sexual relations make it seem "like a job".

Sex worker researcher Sanders (2005) argues that they use condoms as symbolic barriers, providing emotional distance in the moments when maintaining personal boundaries becomes most challenging. Condoms therefore do not only prevent STI's and unwanted pregnancy, they prevent clients from entering their minds and affecting their personal relationships. What did occur during sexual activities between customers and some of the 'girls' at Maxis was something more sinister. At Maxis, I heard from Bhutan and Wendy the practice of not using condoms for extra pay. This was an extremely dangerous practice which was occurring in the club. Once you pay your R500 or R600 you are escorted to the room where you are out of sight of everybody even management. While there are condoms in the room and girls carry them in their handbags this practice goes on. This is usually dependent on negotiation between the customer and the 'girl' in the room. The prices are unknown however this practice is motivated by the need to earn more money. The amount of money made however does not equate to the risks of not using protection during sexual intercourse. This placed many 'girls' at high risk of STI's and unwanted pregnancies. I did not hear of this practice at Gigi's place. Under despotic work regimes like those at Maxis and Gigi's Place girls may choose to have unprotected sex for extra money. This was a contradictory practice if one explores the future hopes and prospects of many of the 'girls' that I had spoken to.

THE FUTURE: 'WHITE PICKET FENCES'

Sex work is not just about money and sex but it's also about hopes, dreams and possibilities. At both clubs, Maxis and Gigi's Place, the 'girls' talked of a future/goal that they were all striving for. The relatively younger 'girls', particularly Storm, Coco and Bhutan had a serious belief in an ideal-type family which they would be part of at some distanced point. The idea of a 'good husband' with two kids and 'white picket fence' kept on recurring in conversations. The 'good husband' was the man who

worked for the family, the man who didn't cheat and especially who did not go to the places where these women worked.

This meant that the men these 'girls' were looking for or going to meet were not going to be in the clubs where they worked. This is not difficult to comprehend given the many unpleasant experiences with the men at the club. The sex industry in which these 'girls' operated were within constraints of social prejudice as well as unequal privilege and patriarchal capitalism. They still believed in fulfilling society's prescribed gender roles like the ideal 'housewife' and 'mother' hoping it would better their lives. The 'good husband' was viewed as like a prince in shining armour that will cure all their ills. Rogue one of the oldest girls I spoke to at 44 years old, had forgone this ideal type of family life. She had been in the industry for such a long period of time that this was merely a dream. For Rogue the only thing that mattered was her children and their future.

For the younger girls at the club the experiences and traumas of work required sustaining these dreams in order to carry on with the work at hand. The idea of family, love and genuine relationships were paradoxical; to the club and their work. The 'girls' who spoke of their private lives and relationships usually illustrated the difficulties in their lives, infidelity by their husbands, 'daddy issues', in-laws etc. These future prospects/dreams were a means of escape but also a coping strategy that was utilised by the 'girls' Some were not about marriage but about being a provider to their families. Bhutan from Thailand and Lisa from Nigeria both saw their work as necessary to help their family, and both were determined to get back home with a substantial amount of money to help their family and themselves.

These 'girls' experiences of their work differed according to the clubs, the type of work regimes, the customers, but also their own personal life circumstances. Some sections of society views sex work as a highly exploitative occupation tantamount to slavery. This is not true as many of these women's experiences of sex work demonstrate. Sex work can be, particularly for the young high in-demand 'girls', a very lucrative occupation. For these types of 'girls' sex work can be a liberatory self-empowering form of work. This is not to say that the industry is not characterised by domination and exploitation. The girls who are not considered in-demand face a different reality. The 'girls' that were interviewed however cannot be considered

victims of the sex work industry. Many demonstrated control over their work and private lives regardless of their different experiences of the industry.

Coco, Brandy Storm, Bonita did not view or speak of themselves as victims. On the contrary, they viewed themselves as “working” “career” girls. While their lives were constrained by being breadwinners, having family and work, they certainly expressed an entrepreneurial attitude. The ‘girls’ were not forced to be with customers and many had different preferences. The realities of work cannot be separated by their private personal lives. There were means to keep boundaries and self-preservation while performing intimate acts. The ‘girls’ personas and characters at the club helped in this process, they performed for customers while distancing themselves form the intimate requirements of sex work. Hugging, kissing and condom use acted as the only symbolic barriers but providing emotional distance in the moments when maintaining personal boundaries becomes most challenging. Sex work is seen as a choice (uneven under patriarchal capitalism), which is not to deny that some sex work is involuntary and coercive. These women should not be viewed neither as victims nor as liberated women who have escaped patriarchal capitalism.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to address how sex workers draw boundaries between their work and private lives, how they maintain emotional wellbeing within their work, and how they manage the impact of their work on their personal lives? Do sex workers perform "emotional labour" to only maintain clientele or to separate business and work relationships from private personal ones? Qualitative data collection was most appropriate to address the research question through a 'limited' ethnography described above. The research uncovered different narratives of sex workers but also structures of establishments in which they worked. This was important because the work regimes at the clubs were central to the private lives of the 'girls.'

The research question focussed on boundary maintenance however the difficulties of access and time constraints meant opting for an ethnographic to address the question. The research uncovered the social universe of the two clubs. It increasingly provided incite into the secretive workings and processes in the club from the work regimes and labour process to the control, surveillance, drugs and money. This approach did allow me to address the original research question but the report provides an entire range of experiences, narratives and setting of the clubs in order to contextualise these women's lives.

The two establishments Gigi's Place and Maxis were both brothels that fronted as strip clubs. The locations of the two clubs were central to their means of making money and the 'girls' experiences of work. The type of customers -'Johns' - that the clubs attracted depended heavily on the locations. Gigi's Place in Randburg North Johannesburg was a stone's throw away from Randburg city centre and not more than five kilometres from the richest square mile in Africa, Sandton. Maxis was located in the east of Johannesburg, in Edenvale, it was close to the highway and near the down-trodden centre of the town. The type of customers and locations were influential in the security, surveillance, managing 'girls' and control over operations at the clubs. Gigi's Place was a far bigger and more complex operation than Maxis.

The research demonstrates that many of the women are agentic in their lives however are constrained by structural forces such as their family, money, future prospects and plans. Some migrant workers hoped to earn enough money to send home and eventually return to pursue future plans. Most of the women's main motivation for working was their families and children. The role of the ideal type mother affected those with children profoundly, especially the single breadwinner. The work regimes in the clubs did not assist 'girls' in their personal lives, the main function of the club was to make profits. Like any profit-making business control and surveillance over production and selling 'goods' was critical. The club's despotic work regimes were crucial to making money. 'Girls' paid rentals, levies, fees and arbitrary penalties while not earning sufficient incomes. When these payments to the club out-weighed their earning capabilities many entered a system of bonded debt. They were solely working to pay off debts accumulated. This did not just serve to control the 'girls' but also to make money for the clubs. Despite this, the resilience and optimism of many of the 'girls' was remarkable, many being motivated by their children, and who used an industry that proved highly precarious and exploitative to pursue a better life for their families.

The binaries of the structure and agency debate are simplistic in sociological analysis and there have been theoretical advances which have overturned the debate. One does not simply have to choose the one over the other. Giddens (1979) developed the theory of "structuration", which he argues that structure and agency are mutually dependent rather than opposed. This is a far improved way of analysing society and individuals. The women in the research were affected by this theory of "structuration" while they were agentic they were constrained by structural forces. Similarly Bourideu (1984) argues that the social world functions simultaneously as a system of power relations and as a symbolic system in which minute distinctions of taste become the basis for social judgement. The structure agency debate is naïve as it does not acknowledge sociological theory over the last decade's advancements that have moved us beyond the structure agency debate. Nonetheless this research report took this as an implicit debate because as indicated in the literature review it remains the primary way in which research on sex work is organised.

To view these ‘girls’ as mere victims is ignoring the fact that they are workers, and that they engage in acts of resistance, subversion and negotiation. Part of their personal lives cannot be easily detached from their work, but are intricately linked. The pressures at work were compounded by trouble and worries about their families. Many had relationships and connections with families, husbands and boyfriends. There were means of differentiating between work and personal relationships while engaging in sex work. Symbolic and physical boundaries through performing, hugging, kissing and condom use were central in maintaining these boundaries. While some ‘girls’ did not necessarily choose their profession many did not want to be waitresses, cosmetics and promotions saleswomen. Sex work is seen as a choice (uneven under patriarchal capitalism), which is not to deny that some sex work is involuntary and coercive. Sex work is not just about sex and money it is about possibilities, hopes and dreams. It is important to demonstrate that if these people are to be treated as workers, and more importantly as equal citizens, we need to understand how their work affects their lives, and the relationships between their work and their lives beyond their work. Given systemic and societal constraints these workers are still fully realised and agentic human beings performing work inside a complex web of personal and social relations.

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