

AN EXPLORATION OF THE EMOTIONAL REGULATION
STRATEGY OF DISSOCIATION ON WOMEN'S ATTEMPTS TO EXIT THE SEX
TRADE

by

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Abstract

The past decade has witnessed a substantial increase in attention focused on the sex trade and specifically, on women who engage in prostitution. Even so, there is still a dearth of research on the emotional regulation strategies that women use to cope with their experiences in the sex trade. In light of the lack of knowledge, this study sought to explore the emotion-focused response of dissociation in women attempting to exit the sex trade. Eight female participants between the ages of 25 to 45 years, who had all made at least one attempt to exit the sex trade, were recruited and interviewed. The study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design, which utilized a demographics questionnaire, an interview with guiding questions, and the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) (Carlson, 1994). The data were analyzed using phenomenological descriptive methodology (Colaizzi, 1978). Data analysis revealed six themes that were prevalent in the stories of the women in regards to the influence of dissociation on exiting the sex trade. The main themes found were: (a) coping with childhood abuse, (b) coping with low self-esteem, (c) struggling with shifting realities, (d) coping through addiction to a lifestyle, (e) coping through chemical dissociation, and (f) mental dissociation. The results imply that dissociation is a coping tool that is used in both adaptive and maladaptive ways by women employed in the sex trade, and that it plays a role in hindering women's attempts to exit. The results also emphasize that it is important for health care professionals to be aware of the effect and role dissociation plays in the lives of women attempting to exit from the sex trade.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a substantial increase in attention focused on the sex trade, specifically on women who engage in the sex trade. International statistics indicate that well over two million women and children enter the commercial sex trade annually, while a further estimate indicates that ten million women and children are involved in the trade globally at any given time (Farley et al., 2004). The number of sex trade workers in Canada is difficult to determine since prostitution is legal, though in 2002, Canadian police charged 5773 individuals with sex work related offences (Statistics Canada, 2003). It has previously been estimated that there are approximately 1500 sex trade workers in Vancouver, British Columbia (Bermingham, 1997). Research efforts to understand the realities of sex workers' lives have steadily increased in the previous two decades, though a dearth in qualitative research that allows insight into the lived experience of the women still exists. Previous research is primarily focused on discussing the reasons why women enter the sex trade or their experiences while in the trade; few studies have sought to determine what makes a difference in exiting the sex trade. This study seeks to investigate strategies sex trade workers employ to protect themselves emotionally during their work, and the role these strategies play in their attempts to transition out of the sex trade.

The Sex Trade

A sex trade worker or prostitute is defined as one who exchanges sexual favours for money, drugs, or other desirable commodities (Dalla, 2001). The trade itself has been in existence for millennia and is often described as "the world's oldest profession." A glance back at history reveals that the sex trade was present in the ancient world of the

Romans and Greeks. In ancient Greek society, sex trade workers were independent and often influential women who were praised for their beauty and grace. The first brothel, in fact, is thought to have been established in Greece in the sixth century BC (Bullough & Bullough, 1996).

Like many other professions, the sex trade has a hierarchical order of service providers, ranging from high-class call girls, who often work in safe environments with regular clientele and for whom the sex trade can be extremely lucrative; to streetwalkers, who must walk the streets in pursuit of clients (Dalla, 2001, 2002; Farley, 2004; Flowers, 1998). Streetwalking, by far, is considered to be the most dangerous and least glamorous form of sex trade work (Maher, 1996; Miller, 1993). The path into the sex trade is one that is littered with indicators that appear to be key antecedent variables.

Paradigms. When discussing the sex trade, emotions are readily available. There appears to be discord among members of society about how to react to the trade. One end of the spectrum shows moral outrage at both the women employed by the trade and the men who keep the business going, while the other end of the spectrum displays outrage against policy makers who refuse to recognize the sex trade as a legitimate occupation (Williamson, 1999). The research currently available shows that there are at least three distinct paradigms in relation to the sex trade; the legal-moral paradigm, the sexual equality paradigm, and the free-choice paradigm.

Mitigating factors. Many factors influence whether a woman will enter the sex trade, though precipitating factors have been found to be childhood abuse, economic necessity, drug abuse, and unformed attachment bonds (Berk, 2002; Farley, 2004). The sex trade is one that employs both males and females, though the focus of the present

study is female street walking sex trade workers. Research has consistently shown that the path into entry is one that is composed of complex factors. Childhood sexual abuse is especially prevalent in the research as one of the main precursors to entry into the trade (Dalla, 2001; Farley, 2005; Maher, 1996; Miller, 1993; Weiner, 1996; Williamson & Folaron, 2001).

Inherent victimization. Mitigating factors aside, once women become involved in the sex trade, the violence that abounds quickly becomes apparent. The sex trade is an environment that seems to encourage violence and victimization (Farley, 2004; Miller, 1993). Women commonly report feelings of worthlessness that result from interaction with both customers and the street community (Williamson, 1999). It is also worth noting that few women who have been assaulted ever report the crime. This may be due to a complexity of factors, including a fear of not being believed, being stigmatized by the system, and fear of retribution (Jolin, 1994; Kramer, 2004).

Coping

Coping is the process of managing taxing circumstances, expending effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems and seeking to reduce or tolerate stress or conflict (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004). Many research articles have concluded that prostitution is extremely dangerous and causes psychological damage to those involved in it (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Farley, 2004). Moreover, it has been established that those involved in the sex trade use various strategies to cope with the negative emotions they experience while performing a sex act (Kramer, 2004). Coping strategies can be adaptive or maladaptive.

Once a woman becomes immersed in the lifestyle of a sex trade worker, it becomes increasingly difficult to exit the trade. Research has shown that exiting the lifestyle requires social and economic support (Williamson & Folaron, 2003). The transition out of the sex trade is also impacted by poverty, drug addiction, lack of support systems, and the stigma associated with being a ‘woman of the street’ (Dalla, 2000). Moreover, it is estimated that a woman attempts to exit the sex trade approximately six times before she is successful (Benoit & Millar, 2001). Using a phenomenological approach, my¹ study seeks to investigate the strategies sex trade workers use to protect themselves emotionally, specifically, the strategy of dissociation.

Dissociation is defined as a psychological state or condition in which certain thoughts, emotions, sensations, or memories are separated from the rest of the psyche (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004). In the literature, there are also terms that are used interchangeably that are meant to connote dissociation, terms such as depersonalization, derealization, and repression (Kramer, 2004). It is important to note, however, that each of these terms, though similar in nature to dissociation, mean different things. Depersonalization refers to a change in the perception or experience of one’s self. Derealization refers to a change in perception where the individual is unable to deduce what is real and what is not while repression is defined as actual forgetting of traumatic experiences (Hirakata, 2007). In the present study, the focus of research will be on dissociation. During the sex act, dissociation is thought to assume a functional purpose as women learn to dissociate where they are far from the sexual act they are performing. This allows life to go on by dividing up the unbearable experience and distributing it to

¹ I recognize that APA format typically involves use of the third-person voice. However, the first-person is a more appropriate way to write in my chosen paradigm. Therefore, I will be using it rather than third-person throughout the thesis.

different compartments of the mind and body. In this way, dissociation might serve as a protective coping strategy that maintains emotional distancing between the customer and the sex trade worker. Unfortunately, what may work as an adaptive, protective coping strategy within the sex trade may also hinder women who wish to transition out of the sex trade. However, this possibility has not yet been studied empirically.

My research question begins to address the paucity in qualitative literature identifying the factors that assist a woman to exit successfully. This study attempts to expand the existing body of knowledge, which is scant, on the topic of the effects of dissociation on transitioning out of the sex trade through qualitative phenomenological inquiry. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with sex trade workers who have been street walking sex trade workers in Vancouver's downtown eastside.

This thesis will be described in four chapters, consisting of (a) an introduction, (b) a review of the pertinent literature, (c) an outline of the research design and methodology, and (d) my findings and discussion, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study, and ideas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Sex Trade

The sex trade is an industry that evokes a variety of emotions from different members of society. Until recently, research conducted in the field of the sex trade espoused much emotion but little in the way of scholarly study (Bullough & Bullough, 1996; Bullough & Sentz, 1992). Early writings were often moralistic, adopting the view that unless women involved in the sex trade changed their wicked ways, they would be damned (Bullough & Bullough, 1996). The lack of scholarly research about the mitigating factors for entry and the nature of the sex trade have resulted in myths that abound. A common myth that exists is that the sex trade is a lucrative industry. Contrary to popular belief, the monetary gain is dependent upon the type of sex trade venue in which the woman is employed. Women employed by streetwalking prostitution make a desolate amount (Farley, 2004). Another common myth that exists is that being a sex trade worker is a glamorous profession, one in which women live a life of luxury. Unbeknownst to most individuals in society, a sex trade worker is privy to severe sexual and physical violence and is consistently stigmatized (Stark & Hodgson, 2004). More recent studies have sparked debates among policy makers about the possible benefits of legalizing prostitution (John Howard Society of Alberta, 2001) though others suggest that legalization would lead to more harmful consequences than benefits (Raymond, 2004).

A sex trade worker or prostitute is defined as a one who exchanges sexual favours for money, drugs, or other desirable commodities (Dalla, 2001). Prostitution has often been called the world's oldest profession and, if this is to be taken at face-value, one would expect far more research to have been conducted on the effects of the sex trade on

communities in which the sex trade worker is employed, the family members of both the worker and the employer, and the dire effects on the sex trade worker themselves.

Paradigms of the sex trade industry. The issue of the sex trade calls an individual's beliefs and morals to the forefront. When discussing the trade, one must be open to examining one's own prejudices, which can be a daunting task. The research that is conducted in every discipline is used by politicians of the time to their advantage, and research conducted on the sex trade is no different. The political lens through which the sex trade is viewed will have a direct effect on how research findings are interpreted in policy and practice. There are currently three main paradigms for viewing the sex trade: the legal-moral paradigm (Benoit, & Millar, 2001; Bullough & Bullough, 1996; Dalla, 2001; Farley, 2004; Flowers, 1998; Kramer, 2004; Miller, 1993; Sacco & Kennedy, 1998; Shaver, 1994; Weiner, 1996; Weitzer, 1991; Weitzer, 2000; Williamson & Folaran, 2001), the sexual equality paradigm (Bell, 1994; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Bernstein, 2001; Dalla, 2001; Dalla, Xia, & Kennedy, 2003; Farley, 2004; Farley, 2005; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997; Kramer, 2004; Lorber, 1994; Lowman, 2000; Maher, 1996; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Monto, 2004; Spinner-Halev, 2001; Shaver, 1994; Sterks, 2000; Weiner, 1996; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002; Williamson & Folaran, 2003; Young, Boyd, & Hubbell, 2000; Zakin, 2000), and the free-choice paradigm (Bell, 1994; Dietz, 2003; Harding, 1991; Jolin, 1994; Stewart & McNeece, 2000).

The sex trade has been historically present in most societies and has been viewed from differing vantage points. Moral religious codes often condemn prostitution as a predatory evil, and many religious leaders view prostitution as sinful and immoral (Bullough & Bullough, 1996). From this vantage point, women involved in the sex trade

are thought to be 'fallen women' who are not following the path of righteousness (Farley, 2004). Moreover, Flowers (1998) states that "supporters of moral and religious perspectives...come in all denominations, classes, races, and demographic groups" (p. 159), with the objective of supporting legal sanctions that may clean up society by eliminating the immoral sex trade. When viewing the legal aspect of this paradigm, it is interesting to note that definitions of prostitution have historically held a double standard by focusing on female prostitutes and not male customers (Benoit, & Millar, 2001). In the early 1900s, for example, the law in the United States read: "any female who frequents or lives in a house of ill-fame or associates with women of bad character for chastity, either in public or at a house which men of bad character frequent or visit, or who commits adultery or fornication for hire shall be deemed a prostitute" (Flowers, 1998, p 7-8). Furthermore, it is apparent that legal definitions and enforcement practices have been largely influenced by the way society views women in the sex trade. Negative labels such as 'fallen women', 'street walkers,' and 'drug addicts' influence the way society perceives women's participation in the trade. Women involved in the sale of sex are thought to embody defects in character, psychological disorders, and maladaptive lifestyles (Kramer, 2004; Miller, 1993; Weiner, 1996).

Social interpretations of women who sell sex are translated into that of a "whore;" a stigmatized social status that threatens societal position and social standing (Dalla, 2001). Moreover, women involved in prostitution are thought to bear responsibility for the moral decay, social disorder, and criminality associated with prostitution. These negative social interpretations are not attributed to men. Through the lens of the legal-moral paradigm, the role of "sex client" is not viewed as a social status, but rather an

activity (Flowers, 1998). This being said, the male client is seen as having a lapse in judgement when procuring services from a sex trade worker, whereas the woman is seen as a debased human being.

Since the legal-moral paradigm is concerned with social control, enforcement and deterrence are the key approaches used to contain and suppress prostitution (Williamson & Folaron, 2001). Deterrence theory, a popular approach among classic criminologists, depicts crime as that which can be deterred by creating a judicial atmosphere that guarantees certain, swift, and severe punishment of the criminal (Sacco & Kennedy, 1998). In relation to the sex trade, proponents of the legal-moral paradigm believe that if energies are focused on prosecution of sex trade workers, the trade will dissipate. Criminal research, though, has shown that the cycle of criminality is vicious and that deterrence does not work uniformly on all individuals (Sacco & Kennedy, 1998; Weitzer, 2000). Criticisms of the legal-moral perspective have pointed to its failure to resolve problems associated with prostitution (Shaver, 1994).

In direct contrast to the legal-moral paradigm, the sexual equality paradigm argues that women have long been viewed as second-class citizens, where sexual oppression by men is rampant. Equality cannot exist so long as sexual subordination to men continues to exist (Lorber, 1994; Spinner-Halev, 2001; Zakin, 2000). Historically, women who were not considered male property, such as divorcees and unmarried sexually active women, had a more difficult time obtaining legal protection than did married women and virgins (Miller & Schwartz, 1995). As marginalized women, sex trade workers are not afforded the same privileges and protections as other individuals in society (Shaver, 1994).

Contrary to the evidence that is readily available, societal attitudes concerning sex trade workers continue to be that they are unrapeable, they do not suffer physical attack, they deserve the violence inflicted upon them, or that no harm is done to society when prostitutes are hurt or killed (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2001; Dalla, Xia, & Kennedy, 2003; Farley, 2004, 2005; Kramer, 2004; Maher, 1996; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Sterks, 2000; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Moreover, since prostitution is thought to be deviant behaviour and is viewed by many as morally wrong, sex trade workers are most often hidden from sight (Weiner, 1996).

Advocates for the sexual equality paradigm suggest sex trade workers are victims and that victimization occurs in three ways. Firstly, sex trade workers are viewed as victims of psycho-social factors associated with street prostitution, such as violence, drugs, and HIV risks. Secondly, the women can be victims of societal shaming, namely, 'outcasting,' where a person is stigmatized for being perceived as being outside the social norms of the culture, and labelling, where an individual is categorized and described by others in society (Aronson, Wilson, Akert, & Fehr, 2001). Finally, they are often victims of negative childhood experiences including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997; Williamson & Folaron, 2003; Young, Boyd, & Hubbell, 2000).

In accordance with this paradigm, WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), a group comprised of women who have left the sex trade, was established in 1985 in New York. WHISPER members propose that prostitution is exploitive, oppressive and dangerous (as cited in Bell, 1994). Moreover, research indicates that the process of becoming a sex trade worker entails the systematic

deconstruction of an individual woman's beliefs, feelings, desires and values (Monto, 2004). In addition, upon entering the sex trade, a woman typically acquires a new name, changes her appearance, and creates a fictitious past, thus erasing her former identity (Bernstein, 2001; Lowman, 2000).

Sexual equality proponents suggest that prosecution actually exacerbates problems associated with sex trade workers and does little to rid society of the prostitution problem other than to force it underground, where it becomes even more risky to the victims involved (Farley, 2004; Zakin, 2000). In addition, rescue, rather than enforcement, is believed to be of most service when creating social policy and programs regarding the sex trade workers. The supporters of this paradigm feel that social services should be geared towards aiding sex trade workers escape or avoid the trade altogether. Sex Workers Anonymous (SWA), formally known as Prostitutes Anonymous (PA) is a group that was formed by Renee LeBlanc in 1987. The mission of the group is to provide an arena where an addiction to prostitution can be addressed. SWA follows the traditional steps and principles of Alcoholics Anonymous and does not condemn the sex trade. Instead, SWA believes that addiction to prostitution is a disease (Bell, 1994).

The third paradigm mentioned in this study for viewing the sex trade is the free-choice paradigm. Choice is seen as central to an individual's autonomy, while restricting choice can be viewed as a violation of the rights of the individual. Proponents of this paradigm believe that the freedom to choose is a precondition of equality, and as such, restricting a woman's choice to be employed in the sex trade reduces her status as an equal (Jolin, 1994).

Free-choice proponents argue that legalization will decrease the amount of violence and risk suffered as a result of the lack of societal protections afforded other professions. Moreover, supporters feel that by regulating the profession and providing benefits and protections under the law, the sex trade will become a safer enterprise (Bell, 1994).

In the United States of America, COYOTE (Call off Your Old Tired Ethics) and PONY (Prostitutes of New York) are two vocal groups active in the struggle to decriminalize the sex trade. The goal of both groups is to ensure that sex trade workers are afforded the same rights offered to those employed in other fields. These groups, as well as others, such as PEERS (Prostitutes' Empowerment, Education, and Resource Society) in Vancouver, and Victoria, British Columbia, attempt to link the struggle of sex trade worker rights with the struggle for women's rights in general (Bell, 1994; Rabinovitch, 2004; Stewart & McNeece, 2000).

The political stance most free-choice supporters espouse is post modern feminism, with a core belief that reality is rooted in the subjective experience of the individual or group in question. Moreover, truth is seen as variable, complex, and unique (Dietz, 2003). Knowledge is also thought to be constructed where the source of 'knowledge' is examined (Harding, 1991).

The controversy over prostitution is one that has been grounded in these three dominant and diverse paradigms reflecting various philosophies on the issue. Regardless of the philosophy one espouses, the sex trade is one that entices membership through various means.

Cycle of the sex trade. Though complex in nature, the trade itself can be divided into five distinct stages: entry, social adjustment, social immersion, 'caught up', and evaluation and exit (Williamson, 1999). Each stage consists of activities that consume a large portion of concentrated energies that include dealing with daily hassles, acute traumas, and chronic conditions. These burdens have been shown to have a cumulative effect on the individual over time (Dalla, 2000; Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004; Weiner, 1996).

Entering the sex trade is a complex phenomenon in which many factors are associated with *entry*. Childhood abuse, economic need, drug abuse, and a disruptive home life may lead one to enter the trade, though research shows that a woman also needs to be able to put any moral objections aside about selling her body aside to function in the trade. She needs to allow herself to be enticed by the trade, while, at the same time, shedding any moral objections to trading sex for commodities (Williamson & Folaron, 2003). While the actual event of sex-for-money marks official 'entrance' into prostitution, the social process of entrance into street work begins with a period of enticement (Farley, 2004; Scambler & Scambler, 1997). Once the first transaction is complete, research has shown that many women feel the need to justify their actions in order to balance the incongruence they may feel between their beliefs and actions (Dalla, 2001). Any moral objections are rationalized by the belief that the sex trade is a way to make money and beat poverty (Williamson, 1999).

Social adjustment is the time when women are adapting to their new environment. Key elements of this stage include intense street learning that focuses on problem solving and the prevention of negative events through the use of protective strategies

(Williamson, 1999). The sex trade is a fast-paced lifestyle, one in which the woman with the most knowledge will make the most money (Dalla, 2002). Interestingly, research done with sex trade workers has consistently shown a desire to distinguish between the 'old style' and the 'new ho'. The participants state the distinction is clear, where the 'new hos' are in the trade because of an addiction, where they are willing to offer sexual services for a substantially lower price than are the 'old style' workers (Maher, 1996). This clearly shows that delineation can be seen between the workers themselves based on general street-wise knowledge. During this second stage, it is also important to note that the lifestyle can be socially fulfilling and psychologically addicting. Women report sharing their money with friends and family and feeling empowered at the ability to be able to purchase things for themselves (Flowers, 1998; Maher, 1996). The financial freedom, though, comes at a cost. Women employed in the sex trade have stated that they feel that they lead double lives (Williamson, 1999). Upon closer examination, it is possible that the double life may be the result of the stigma attached to the sex trade. Women are forced to keep their involvement in the sex trade a secret, though it may be a large part of their self-identity.

Furthermore, as a part of the social acculturation that takes place; a sex trade worker must learn strategies to protect herself (Dalla, 2000). Codes of conduct must be learned in order to remain safe on the 'stroll' (Maher, 1996). A sex trade worker must also learn how to engage with the customer, which requires that she set a price and receive the money, provide the service, assess for police, and use strategies to evaluate both customer intent and keep herself safe (Williamson, 1999). Adjusting to the demands

of the sex trade is a taxing enterprise, one which may eventually exceed the resources of the individual.

In the stage of *social immersion*, intense involvement in the lifestyle of street prostitution is engaged, in which the sex trade worker assumes the full persona of a professionalized street worker (Williamson, 1999). In the third stage, the sex worker views herself as a full-time prostitute and establishes congruency with the community of street workers. Moreover, sex trade workers report being addicted to the lifestyle at this stage, as they feel empowered by their earning potential (Dalla, 2000; Flowers, 1998). At this stage, it becomes increasingly difficult to be simultaneously immersed in both conventional societal roles and the role of 'sex trade worker.' As a result, the discord is resolved by cutting ties with the conventional (Williamson & Folaron, 2001). Women also report that, as they become more immersed in the sex trade community, their drug use increases in both frequency and duration (Sterk, Elifson, & German, 2000). Another development that occurs during this stage is an increased incidence of violence from customers. Since women are typically spending more time in 'the game' in this stage, they are also more vulnerable to being assaulted (Williamson, 1999). A sex trade worker is usually living life at a fast pace, where there are usually many customers and extensive drug use, at this stage, all of which will catch up to her.

In the fourth stage of the cycle, although not intentional, many women eventually find themselves *caught up* in a wave of chronic depression, drug abuse, and learned helplessness (Williamson, 1999). In both the social immersion and the caught up stages, the individual is heavily involved in the life of a sex trade worker. The distinction is that the woman feels that she is in control in the immersion stage, whereas in the caught up

stage, she has lost that sense of control. In addition, life in the caught up stage is comprised of drug taking and drug seeking activities, in which friends and family often become targets of manipulation and deceit (Maher, 1996). Physical deterioration also accompanies depression and drug abuse, and as with excessive use, substantial weight loss is common (Maher, 1996). Furthermore, by this stage, family members are emotionally drained from worry and have usually grown leery of allowing the drug-addicted sex trade worker into the house (Williamson, 1999).

The final stage in the cycle of the sex trade is *evaluation and exit*. In this stage, intense re-evaluation of the sex trade worker's life and what she has become is the central focus (Williamson, 1999). The sex trade worker has become disillusioned with the lifestyle at this stage and is left with a life that is segregated from mainstream society. Moreover, the sex trade worker makes a decision to get out and strives to accomplish that goal. While the final stage in the cycle asks for evaluation, a woman involved in the sex trade may find it difficult to assess the situation clearly if she has been employing coping strategies on a daily basis.

Though the sex trade can be divided into clear stages, it is imperative to note that the process of entry and exit in the trade is cyclical. Many times, as in all cycles, there is a regression to an earlier stage. For instance, if a sex trade worker is in the social immersion stage where she has adopted the role of a sex trade worker completely, it is not impossible that she may revert back to the social adjustment stage where she feels she still needs to learn the rules of the street instead of proceeding to the 'caught up' stage. It is also important to note that not all women involved in the sex trade proceed to the evaluation and exit stage. The last stage is accomplished by few successfully; in fact,

research shows that, on average, a woman attempts to exit the trade six times before she is successful (Benoit & Millar, 2001).

Factors related to entry. Many social and economic factors are associated with whether a woman will enter the sex trade, though precipitating factors include childhood abuse, economic necessity, and drug abuse (Farley, 2004). Research has also shown that other prevalent factors include a disruptive home environment and unformed attachment bonds (Dalla, 2003; Farley, 2004; John Howard Society of Alberta, 2001; Williamson & Folaron, 2001).

In a qualitative study done by Williamson and Folaron (2003), the motivations, risks, and protective strategies employed by sex trade workers was examined. The researchers conducted in-depth face to face interviews that lasted approximately two hours with 21 women, 13 of whom were Appalachian, 7 African-American, and 1 Hispanic-American, varying in age from 18 to 35 years. The aim of the study was to gain insight into the factors that motivate women to participate in the sex trade. The researchers used a phenomenological approach and conducted data analysis through thematic coding. The findings indicate that in order to become involved in the sex trade, women must allow themselves to be enticed by the prospect of financial gain, and must be able to shed any moral objections of being employed in the sex trade. Williamson and Folaron also found that 46% of the women in the sample had also come from a burdensome home life. The participants indicated that sexual and physical abuse was a common occurrence in their homes and that alcoholism was rampant among parents as well. The researchers concluded that the main reason women enter the sex trade is to have financial security and to have a sense of control in their lives. They go from

growing up in an environment in which one is afraid is a negative precursor to finding ways to gain back the control lost in earlier years.

In another study, conducted by Dalla, Xia, and Kennedy (2003), the reasons for entry into the sex trade were examined. The researchers used a mixed-methods research design and collected data from 43 participants, with a mean age of 33.3 years of age ($M = 33.3$). The participants identified themselves as White ($N = 20$) or Black ($N = 18$), with 5 declining to list an ethnicity. The results indicate that the main precursor to becoming involved in the sex trade is childhood victimization. A detailed analysis of the interviews shows that 32 participants (74%) reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse. Though experiencing sexual abuse at a young age is not necessarily an indicator of later involvement in the sex trade, salient factors such as the perpetrator's relationship with the victim, how long the abuse continues, the age when the abuse began, the severity of the abuse, and whether someone intervened on behalf of the victim, all influence whether or not the experience of being abused will cause long-term psychological damage. In addition, the researchers found that of the participants, 6 reported being victims of physical abuse during childhood by parents and 9 reported witnessing severe and sustained domestic violence as a child. Furthermore, verbal and emotional abuse by the parents was experienced by several participants. The results would lead one to believe that being victimized as a child is a commonality that exists among many sex trade workers. The results obtained by Dalla et al. (2003) are confirmed by Farley et al. (2004), as they also found that 55% to 90% of the sex trade workers they interviewed in nine countries reported a history of childhood abuse.

In a separate qualitative analysis of the same data-set, Dalla (2003) examined the perceptions of early familial contexts with an emphasis on the relationship between the child and adult caregiver. The researcher used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to collect data from 43 participants, aged 19 to 56 ($M = 33.3$ years). Most participants ($n = 40$) were no longer actively involved in sex work, although the length of time since the last incident of prostitution varied considerably, as did the total time spent working in the trade ($M = 11.5$ years). The results showed that participants reported common childhood experiences of sexual victimization, emotional abuse, domestic violence, and neglect. A detailed look at the results shows that 74% of the participants had experienced repeated childhood sexual abuse, 25% had been victimized by more than one individual, and 16% reported that in addition to their own abuse, their siblings were also victims of sexual abuse. In addition, the participants indicated that the sexual victimization ranged from 2 years or less ($n = 5$), to 3 to 5 years ($n = 4$), to 6 to 8 years ($n = 4$), to 10 or more years ($n = 6$). Furthermore, in relation to being abused as a child, the participants also indicated they experienced physical and emotional abuse at the hands of the caregivers. Six participants reported being victims of severe physical abuse and several participants indicated experiencing verbal degradation and emotional abuse from parental figures.

The precipitating factor of childhood abuse was also examined by Widom and Kuhns (1996). The objective of their study was to examine the extent to which being abused in childhood increased a person's risk for promiscuity, prostitution, and teenage pregnancy. The researchers matched abused and neglected children with non-abused and non-neglected children on a number of demographic variables such as age, race, sex, and social class, and followed them prospectively into young adulthood. Interviews were

completed with 1196 individuals. The results showed that female participants who were abused in childhood were more likely to be engaged in the sex trade compared to non-abused controls. Overall, 9% of the abused and neglected females reported having engaged in the sex trade, compared to 3% of the non-abused females. Moreover, physically abused female participants had the highest rates (12.8%) of involvement in the sex trade, followed by sexually abused (10.5%) and neglected (9.0%) female participants. Early childhood victimization has been shown to be linked to increased risk for involvement in the sex trade.

Research indicates that another reason women enter the trade is economic necessity. Economic necessity may force women onto the streets in numbers larger than one might assume (Dalla, 2000). Many women who enter the sex trade are from families in a lower income bracket and due to a lack of education, cannot obtain other employment (John Howard Society of Alberta, 2001). Moreover, a study conducted by Freed (2004) clearly demonstrates the lengths to which families go in order to try to meet their economic needs. Freed collected qualitative data on two trips to Cambodia in April and July 1996. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with women who varied in age from 14 to 23 years ($M = 17.5$). Ten of the 12 women interviewed were sold to brothel owners; four of which were sold by relatives, two by boyfriends, and four by people who offered them false jobs. The results indicate that the women who were sold to brothels out of economic necessity experienced feelings of deep betrayal, where their basic trust in people was damaged. Moreover, the women who were sold like a commodity felt a heightened sense of shame and self-blame, where they indicated that it was their fault for trusting someone who betrayed them. Furthermore, the results showed

that, in order to cope with the incongruence of Cambodian societal values and working in a brothel, many of the women interpreted their experiences as a sex trade worker as part of their duty to their mothers to alleviate the family's economic plight.

In another study conducted by Manopaiboon, Bunnell, Kilmark, Chaikummao, Limpakarnjanarat, and Supawitkul (2003) the barriers to leaving the sex trade for female sex workers in Thailand were examined. The researchers hypothesized that economic hardship may be a deterrent to exiting. Manopaiboon and colleagues conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 42 participants. The participants varied in age (from 21 to 46 years, $M = 31.0$ years), HIV status (60% negative, 40% positive), and the number of children the women had (62% had at least one child). The data obtained from the interviews were analysed using thematic coding. Results indicated that of the 42 participants, 25 (60%) had quit and re-entered sex work at least once, 16 (38%) had quit and never returned, and 1 (2%) had never attempted to quit the sex trade. In addition, the participants who had quit but returned to the trade indicated that life circumstances made it impossible for them to leave. Almost all of the participants cited economic necessity as the main reason for initiating, remaining in, or returning to the sex trade. Furthermore, the participants stated that familial debt was also a motivator to work in the sex trade, as the participants felt that it was their responsibility to care for the well-being of the family unit.

Stewart and McNeece (2000) examined the psychosocial treatment needs of streetwalking sex trade workers in the United States. The researchers employed qualitative methodology and conducted in-depth interviews with 23 sex trade workers, program staff, and community professionals. The program from which the sex trade

workers ($n = 10$) were recruited was a case management program in Florida. Of the participants interviewed, the time in the program varied from 3 weeks to 13 months ($M = 5.9$ months) and age of participant varied from 23 to 38 years ($M = 32$ years). Results showed that entry into the sex trade was precipitated by economic need and that upon leaving the trade, the participants needed a viable way to be financially stable. Several of the women also stated that it was important that they learned a particular skill or furthered their education so that they would not return to the sex trade to earn money.

Research shows that another reason women enter the trade is drug addiction. Approximately 20% of women who enter the sex trade have a drug habit they need to support, while the number substantially increases in direct relation to the experiences while being involved in the sex trade (Farley, 2004). The drugs of choice for women involved include both depressants and stimulants, such as marijuana, crack-cocaine, cocaine, heroin, LSD, and crystal methamphetamine, though crack has been found to be the most commonly used illegal substance. Sterk, Elifson, and German (2000) examined the prevalence of crack use amongst sex trade workers in the United States. Moreover, the researchers sought to differentiate between sex trade workers who used crack (non-exchangers) and sex trade workers who directly bartered sexual services for crack (exchangers). The researchers conducted qualitative interviews with 150 female active crack users in Atlanta, Georgia, with a mean age of 35.5 ($SD = 7.8$, range = 17-22) and a mean level of educational attainment of 11.4 years ($SD = 2.1$, range = 6-17). The results indicated that sex-for-crack exchanges, involving either vaginal or oral sex, were reported by 65 women (43.3 %).

In another study done by Maher (1996), the occupational norms for streetwalking sex trade workers were explored. The researcher employed a qualitative methodology in which interviews were conducted with 45 participants, 20 of whom were Latinas, 16 African-Americans, and 9 European-Americans. In relation to drug use, it was found that 29% of the sample reported engaging in one or more straight sex-for-drugs exchange involving no cash. Maher also found that almost half of the participants in the study reported having bartered sex-for-drugs on at least one occasion during their drug-use careers. Moreover, the study found that 73% of the participants ($n = 33$) were using both heroin and crack cocaine.

Drug addiction in the population of sex trade workers is high. Researchers have also found that an estimated 70% of women involved in street prostitution are or quickly become addicted to drugs (Maher, 1996). Crack-cocaine, in particular, is popular among sex trade workers (Maher, 1996; Miller, 1993; Monto, 2004; Sterk, Elifson, & German, 2000). Crack cocaine is also believed to produce a euphoric high that lasts approximately two to three minutes. Urges for crack cocaine can repeat every five minutes for those strongly addicted (Maher, 1996). If an individual is addicted to crack cocaine, working in the sex trade may be the only viable way to support a destructive habit. Indeed, research has shown that many women who are addicted to crack cocaine perform sexual services for one dose of the drug, offering services, such as oral sex for as little as five dollars (Maher, 1996; Sterk, Elifson, & German, 2000). Addiction is a deterrent to leaving the sex trade, as it may be the only viable option for those women involved to support their habit.

Another factor related to entry into the sex trade is an unformed attachment bond and a disruptive home life. Attachment is the strong tie of affection that humans feel towards caregivers (Berk, 2002). Bowlby's ethological theory of attachment views the infant's emotional tie to the caregiver as an evolved response that promotes survival (as cited in Berk, 2002). His theory was largely influenced by the work done by Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Ainsworth began observing mother-infant relationships and concluded that there were five phases of attachment, namely, indiscriminating, differential responsiveness, separation anxiety, active initiation, and stranger anxiety (Levy & Orlans, 1998). Based on the work done by Ainsworth, Bowlby surmised four main styles of attachment: (a) secure attachment, where the infant is distressed by parental separation and easily comforted by the parent upon return, (b) avoidant attachment, where infants usually aren't distressed by parental separation and who avoid the parent upon return, (c) resistant attachment, in which infants remain close to the parent before departure and display angry, resistive behaviour when the parent returns, and (d) disorganized/disoriented attachment, where the infant responds in a confused, contradictory manner when the parent returns. For sex trade workers, research has consistently shown a home life that is disruptive, in which mental illness and drug addiction is a commonality among caregivers (Dalla, 2003; John Howard Society of Alberta, 2001; Widom & Kuhns, 1996; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). In Dalla's study of 43 streetwalking prostitutes, participants frequently reported that either their parents or primary caregivers were addicted to alcohol ($n = 13$), addicted to drugs ($n = 7$), or afflicted by mental illness ($n = 5$). She also found that 95% of the participants felt abandoned by the parent. Secure attachment cannot be formed in an environment where

the infant does not feel that his or her needs will be met with sensitive caregiving (Berk, 2002). Individuals who grow up in an environment of chaos either tolerate it or leave, and if the choice is to leave, many find themselves on the street.

Criminalization. Research has amply shown that sex trade workers also experience many barriers to social services, including discrimination, alienation, and stigmatization (Farley, 2004; Hotaling, Burris, Johnson, Bird, & Melbye, 2004; Weiner, 1996). Anderson (2004) examined rape law in the United States in relation to sex trade workers and made some interesting discoveries. Firstly, sex trade workers fear the criminal justice system because of possible incarceration for engaging in the sex trade. Though sex trade workers are at an extremely high risk for experiencing sexual abuse, the majority will not report an assault unless the probability for conviction is high. One can assume that the reporting rate is low among sex trade workers because of distrust of law enforcement. Secondly, results indicate that in relation to receiving a conviction against a perpetrator, judges are more distrustful of women who are sex trade workers than women who are not. Finally, though it is possible to rape a sex trade worker, a common myth that perpetuates itself in society is that it is impossible to rape someone who sells sexual favours as a means of income.

The criminality of sex trade work also becomes apparent when women attempt to exit. Many of the women attempting to exit the sex trade experience the same limitations as other marginalized populations such as finding affordable housing, coping with mental illness, and building healthy relationships. However, the additional stigma associated with being a woman of the street infiltrates all aspects of life (Hotaling et al., 2004). Sex trade workers face discrimination when attempting to gain employment, seek financial

assistance, or utilize health care services, while being constantly reminded that they are 'whores' and 'hookers'.

Another added complexity to the aforementioned difficulties regarding the criminality of the sex trade is increased for women who are of African-American descent. In a study done by Carter (2004), the dynamics of African-American women in the sex trade was explored. She found that racist stereotyping of African-American women as sex-crazed perpetuates all forms of violence against them without consequences for the perpetrators. In addition, law enforcement practices disproportionately target African-American women for harassment, arrest, imprisonment, and fines. Moreover, African-American sex trade workers are also more likely to be targeted for abuse, stereotypically seen as sexually insatiable, and more likely to be trapped in a pattern on arrest, incarceration, and probation (Carter, 2004).

Furthermore, in relation to the criminality of the sex trade, a debate ensues about whether or not legalization would make a difference. Proponents for decriminalization and legalization argue that if the sex trade was viewed as a vocational choice and services were applied to the women as they are for those employed in other fields, the sex trade worker would be safer in the work environment. These groups also suggest that decriminalization will result in benefits to society as a whole that include reduced work for law enforcement, an improved self image of sex trade workers, a reduced need for pimps, and an increase in tax revenue (John Howard Society of Alberta, 2001). On the other side of this debate, many argue that legalization of the sex trade will not be helpful, but instead, will be more harmful for those involved. For example, Raymond (2004) suggests several reasons why the sex trade should not be legalized. One persuasive

argument is that by legalizing the sex trade and viewing it as work, individuals fail to see the sex trade as exploitation. Another strong argument Raymond makes is that by legalizing sex trade work, there may be an increase in clandestine sex trade work because those women who do not want to be subjected to regular health checks will conduct business in potentially dangerous environments. Finally, in relation to health, it is erroneous to suggest that better health for sex trade workers will exist if the trade is legalized since the system would mandate regular checks for the women but not for the male buyers. This could, in fact, have a paradoxical result if women felt they were safe because of regular checks and, consequently, did not use adequate protection against diseases their unchecked buyers may be carrying.

Violence and victimization. Violence and victimization is the norm for those who are employed by the sex trade. Miller (1993) found a significant proportion of participants had experienced sexual assault (93%), had been forced or coerced into having sex with self-identified police officers (44%), had been raped (75%), and robbed (56%), while physical assault without a weapon was also commonly reported. Similarly, Dalla et al. (2003) found that 72% of their participants relayed incidents of severe abuse suffered at the hands of their partners, clients, pimps or a combination of the aforementioned offenders. They also found that, though violence is prevalent in their lives, the crimes of victimization were rarely reported to authorities. The lack of reporting may be the result of feelings of distrust for those in authority positions. Furthermore, in this study, the researchers found that participants reported experiencing greater and more severe violence from intimate partners than from clients or strangers.

In a study conducted by Farley et al. (2004), factors that influence both entry and exit of the sex trade were examined in nine countries. The researchers conducted 854 interviews with women who are currently or were recently in the sex trade in Canada, Cambodia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, United States, and Zambia. The ages of participants ranged from 12 to 68 ($M = 28.0$, $SD = 8.0$), while the average age of entry into the sex trade was 19 years, with 47% indicating they entered the trade before the age of 18 years. The methodology used was semi-structured qualitative interviewing and thematic analysis. The participants were also asked to complete Weathers, Litz, Huska, and Keane's (1994) PTSD Checklist (PCL), to assess if they met any diagnostic criteria. The type of violence experienced by women involved in the sex trade was subdivided into four categories: (a) childhood sexual abuse, (b) childhood physical abuse, (c) rape in prostitution as an adult and, (d) physical assault in prostitution as an adult. Participants from nine countries were asked to indicate how many types of violence they had experienced. Results revealed that 51% of the interviewees had experienced three or four different types of lifetime violence, 36% reported one to two types of lifetime violence, and only 13% had not experienced any of these types of violence.

Farley and Barkan (1998) also conducted a study in which the prevalence of violence experienced by sex trade workers was examined. The results they attained are comparable to the aforementioned studies, with 88% of participants reporting being physically assaulted since entering the sex trade, 83% reporting being physically threatened with a weapon, and 68% reporting being raped since entry into the sex trade.

Though most existing research tends to focus specifically on physical violence experienced by those involved in the sex trade, a few studies have attempted to explore the sexual and psychological violence experienced by these women. Farley (2004) proposes that sex trade workers are unrecognized victims of intimate partner violence by pimps and customers. Moreover, she accounts that violence is the norm for women in prostitution and many believe that it is not possible for a sex trade worker to be raped. Common myths of prostitution abound and the researcher suggested that unless policy makers look at the facts without bias, nothing will change in the sex trade.

Psychological violence can be defined as malicious acts meant to harm one's sense of self, worth, and being (Farley et al., 2004). In a study done by Kramer (2004), the emotional experiences of women while performing sex acts, referred to as turning tricks by the researcher, were examined. She conducted survey research and data was obtained from 119 participants, aged 18 to 56, ($M = 33$), who were prostituting in escort agencies and on the street in Phoenix, Arizona. The survey items were developed from a review of prostitution literature and through information gained from 15 pilot interviews conducted with women working in the street and escort agencies. The survey included 103 items and took approximately 40 minutes to complete. The participants were asked demographic variables that included age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, marital status, educational background, age of entry into the sex trade, length of time in the sex trade, and types of sex trade work in which they were employed. They were also asked to indicate across several items the extent to which they used drugs or alcohol to cope with fear while turning tricks and the extent to which they used substances to detach emotionally while engaged in the sex act. Moreover, participants were asked to indicate if

their feelings toward themselves had changed since entering the sex trade, if their enjoyment of sex with partners outside of the sex trade had changed, and to describe their emotional experiences of turning tricks. Results indicate that individuals are incapable of selling sexual services without experiencing emotional pain and psychological harm. Seventy-seven percent of respondents indicated that their self-esteem had decreased since entering the sex trade, 73% indicated that turning tricks involved pushing away their true emotions, and 75% of respondents indicated that turning tricks involved acting. Moreover, 52% of the respondents reported that turning a trick was physically painful and 76% reported that turning tricks was emotionally painful.

Farley (2005) also stipulates that the psychological damage of prostitution is far worse than the physical violence, as one participant stated that prostitution “is internally damaging. You become, in your own mind, what these people do and say with you” (p. 99). She also states from her findings that the emotional trauma women in the sex trade experience leads them to often appear shell-shocked and numb. In fact, many research studies have indicated that women involved in the sex trade have many of the diagnostic symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Farley et al., 2004). The violence that is prevalent in the sex trade needs to be addressed if advancements in research on how to assist women to exit the trade successfully are to be made.

Posttraumatic stress disorder. In addition to the dangerous life style of a sex trade worker, studies indicate that long-term psychological effects of selling oneself also exist. In a study done by Farley and Barkan (1998), the degree of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms present in sex trade workers was examined. The diagnosis of PTSD is described as symptoms developing following exposure to:

an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 463).

Exposure to such events may lead to the formation of various symptoms, including but not limited to, (a) re-experiencing the trauma in various forms, (b) intense psychological distress at exposure to cues that symbolize the traumatic event, (c) persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, (d) numbing of general responsiveness, and (e) increased arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 463).

Farley and Barkan (1998) hypothesized that the likelihood of PTSD among sex trade workers would be relatively high compared to the general population due to the large number of women in the sex trade who also experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse. The researchers recruited 130 participants from San Francisco and asked them to complete a demographics questionnaire and the PCL. Seventy-five percent of the participants were women, 13% were men, and 12% were transgender. Results indicated that 82% of participants had been physically assaulted, 83% had been threatened with a weapon, 68% had been raped while working, and 84% reported current or past homelessness. Of the 130 participants, 92% also met some criteria for PTSD. Of those meeting the criteria, 68% of participants met the criteria for full PTSD and 24% met the criteria for partial PTSD. In another study conducted by Farley et al. (2003), it was found that in nine countries, 66% of the 854 women interviewed had symptoms of PTSD at a

severity that was comparable to treatment-seeking combat veterans. The complexities of the sex trade seem unending, as research indicates that even if a woman is successful in exiting, there are many barriers, including possible PTSD, that stand in her way of reintegrating into society.

Factors related to exit. The factors related to entry into the sex trade have received attention in the research community, while the factors that are related to a successful exit have been explored in less depth. Research indicates that motivators for successful exit include the desire to re-connect with family, gain custody of children, become clean, and/or rebuild a relationship with a higher power (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2001; Plumridge, 2001; Stewart & McNeece, 2000; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Research has also shown that the most successful and long-lasting exits are associated with multiple system interventions in succession, where relational aspects, such as family, friends, and health service workers, are emphasized (Williamson, 1999). Moreover, the coping strategies a woman uses while engaged in the sex trade also appears to influence her tenure and her ability to successfully exit.

Coping Strategies

Coping is the process of managing taxing circumstances, expending effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to reduce or tolerate stress or conflict (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004). Traditional stress theory suggests when an individual is confronted with a situation that may cause harm or distress, the individual is motivated to attempt to reduce the perceived threat through various coping techniques (Baron, Byrne & Watson, 2001). A coping technique can be defined as any measure

taken that reduces the perceived threat, including internal methods (e.g. dissociation) and external methods (e.g. leaving the situation that is stressful).

Individuals have been found to respond differently to similar stressful situations. Theorists have posited that this may be because of personality differences, available social support networks, and the willingness to share concerns about the stress-inducing event (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2001).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed the theory of stress, in which they state that individuals presented with a potentially stressful event react first by making a primary cognitive appraisal of the event as irrelevant, benign/positive, or stressful. Secondary cognitive appraisal occurs as they evaluate internal and external resources, and their options for managing the event. The conclusion drawn from the theory is that an event is perceived as stressful if the individual perceives his or her coping resources to be exceeded by the requirement to deal with the event effectively. Moreover, it has also been argued that there are two types of coping: (a) problem-focused, where direct actions to solve a problem are taken, and (b) emotion-focused, where efforts to reduce the negative emotional reactions to stress are achieved through a means of distracting oneself from the problem (Davison, Neale, Blankstein & Flett, 2002). If a woman involved in the sex trade chooses to employ emotion-focused coping, dissociation is the likely means to achieve the end, as dissociation allows the individual to distract effectively.

Dissociation. Dissociation is the psyche's normal reaction to a traumatic experience, where if physical withdrawal is not possible, then a part of the self is withdrawn. Further, in order for a part to withdraw, an otherwise integrated ego must split into fragments to dissociate, which allows life to go on by dividing up the

unbearable experience and distributing it to different compartments of the mind and body (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004; Williamson, 1999). This means that the normally unified elements of consciousness (i.e. cognitive awareness, affect, sensation, imagery) are not allowed to integrate. Experience itself becomes discontinuous. Mental image may be split from affect, or both affect and image may be dissociated from conscious knowledge (Kalsched, 1996). Some researchers have concluded that prostitution is extremely dangerous and causes psychological damage to those involved in it (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Farley, 2004). Protective strategies are employed by sex trade workers when conventional protection from society is not forthcoming (Williamson, 1999). Indeed, it has been established that those involved in the sex trade use various strategies to cope with the negative emotions they experience while performing a sex act (Kramer, 2004). Coping strategies can be adaptive or maladaptive. Sex trade workers become especially adept at using strategies to protect themselves emotionally. The most common emotion-focused responses are denial and dissociation (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004). When denial is used, the dangers of the sex trade are minimized, and the women believe that they are able to control an event, and are in command of their own destiny. However, women often find out much later that what they believed was only an illusion of control (Williamson, 1999).

In a study conducted by Williamson and Folaron (2003), the authors concluded that, in order to cope with the stressful existence that is life in the sex trade, many employ protective strategies to meet the demands of their environment. These include ritualistic behaviour, intuitive assessment of the customer, carrying a small weapon while working, and dissociation. Additionally, a study conducted by Farley et al. (2004) indicated that

women increase recreational drug use to the point of addiction after entry into prostitution. This is a very important finding, as it seems to indicate that although some women enter the sex trade to support a drug addiction, others may become addicted from using drugs as a means of coping. The researchers also found that the women involved in the sex trade use drugs and alcohol to deal with the overwhelming emotions experienced while turning tricks. Kramer (2004) also found that while some women may enter the sex trade to support an existing drug or alcohol habit, they also use these substances while in the trade to detach emotionally and cope with fears of being hurt in prostitution. Fifty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they used drugs while turning tricks to numb out, 28% reported using alcohol to numb out, 70% of respondents reported using substances to detach emotionally while turning tricks, 44% indicated that they use substances to cope with fear while turning tricks, and 54% indicated that it was necessary to be high to go through with turning a trick. Young, Boyd, and Hubbell (2000) found that prostituting women were more likely to use drugs than a control group, and used drugs specifically to increase feelings of confidence, control, and closeness to others, and to decrease feelings of guilt and sexual distress. These researchers concluded that, while women may enter the sex trade to support substance use, they also increase their drug use to deal with negative emotions caused by performing sex acts. Stark and Hodgson (2004) further support the aforementioned findings by stating that addiction to drugs or alcohol function both as a way to survive the violence the sex trade worker is subjected to and assists the women in detaching emotionally from the experience of sexual exploitation.

During the act of prostitution, dissociation is believed to assume a functional purpose as it maintains emotional distance between the customer and the sex worker. Sex

trade workers may also use dissociation, among other methods of coping, in the service of their psychological survival. Specifically, Foa and Rothbaum (1998) have shown in their research that emotional strategies used to protect the psyche during and after a violent acute trauma, such as rape and other physical assaults, are necessary for survival of a vicious attack, but work against healthy emotional functioning. Similarly, an emotional response such as dissociation may protect the sex trade worker during traumatic tricks, but it may be counterproductive for their long-term coping and health, such as recurring dissociation, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, and relationship or intimacy difficulties.

This Research Study

Research question. The objective of this exploratory phenomenological research study is to investigate a strategy sex trade workers use to protect themselves emotionally, specifically, the strategy of dissociation. Dissociation is defined as a psychological state or condition in which certain thoughts, emotions, sensations, or memories are separated from the rest of the psyche (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004). During the sex act, dissociation is thought to assume a functional purpose as women learn to dissociate where they are far, mentally, from the sexual act they are performing. This allows life to continue by dividing up the unbearable experience and distributing it to different compartments of the mind and body. In this way, dissociation serves as a protective coping strategy that maintains emotional distancing between the customer and the sex trade worker. However, what may work as an adaptive, protective coping strategy within the sex trade may also hinder women who wish to transition out of the sex trade. Dissociation may become a hindrance if it is employed frequently to remove oneself from

the situation mentally since the woman, then, limits the trauma she experiences. Limiting experiences of trauma may increase her feelings of being in control of her lifestyle and postpone the need to engage in intensive re-evaluation of her life. Consequently, it may serve to impede women's progress through Williamson's (1999) sex trade cycle.

Although dissociation has been studied as a coping mechanism while involved in the sex trade, its effects on exiting have not been studied. The present study strives to explore this issue in detail.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Suitability of the Design

Phenomenology, as a philosophy, was initiated by Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century. The central aim of phenomenology was to study foundations of knowledge. It was subsequently developed into a method for conducting research in the social sciences. As a research method, phenomenology strives to provide researchers with the opportunity to ask ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions and inquire about phenomena. It also aims to clarify situations lived through by persons in everyday life (Greene, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1988; Kvale, 1996; Robinson & Reed, 1998). Moreover, phenomenology is a science whose purpose is to bring language to human experiences. Psychology is intrinsically linked to the human experience, and as such, it makes clear sense why many researchers are turning to the qualitative method of phenomenology to conduct social research (Wertz, 2005).

Phenomenological research is designed to study phenomena in their subjective aspect, and seeks to clarify situations lived through by persons in everyday life (Hein & Austin, 2001). The method of study assumes a social constructivist knowledge claim in which individuals are viewed as seeking understanding of their world by developing subjective meanings of their experiences. This, in turn, means that the goal of research is to rely as much as possible on participants’ own views of the situation being studied. The constructivist approach also makes several assumptions about the nature of knowledge, specifically, that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting; humans engage with their world and make sense of it based

on their historical and social perspectives; and the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising from interaction with a human community (Creswell, 2003).

Phenomenology is particularly useful when the researcher seeks to understand the essence of a human experience, where the aim is to provide a full description of the nature of that experience as it occurs across a number of different individuals. Moreover, phenomenological research is well-suited when the goal is to describe, rather than explain, the specific phenomena. The research method is effective when the meaning of a phenomenon is being sought, as it utilizes a person who has actually experienced the phenomenon in question. Phenomenological research is useful when the researcher does not seek to predict or determine causal relationships. Furthermore, Wertz (2005) suggests that essential knowledge in psychology does not imply freedom from context, abstraction, or universality, but instead, it qualitatively characterizes the context-bound structures of phenomena.

My research question explored the effects of dissociation on women who are attempting to exit the sex trade. As such, phenomenology was a useful methodology as it sought to clarify situations lived through by persons in everyday life. This method was also useful because I sought to understand the *essence* of the human experience of the women who are in transition, as so little is known.

Reflexivity. In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is paramount. He or she is the primary data analysis instrument, and as such, good research necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study (Lester, 1999). In traditional phenomenological research, bracketing is an important aspect of the research process. Bracketing refers to the practice where the researcher

'brackets' or removes his or her biases from the research process in an effort to have the research remain pure (Creswell, 2003). The present study was influenced by feminist epistemology which entails that the voice of the research is a combination of researcher and participants. Reflexivity is appropriate to employ in phenomenology because its' constructivist assumptions oppose the stance of objectivity that is present in the traditional paradigm of science (Allen & Baber, 1992; Anderson, 1991). Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Reflexivity, then, urges the researcher to explore the ways his or her involvement with a particular experience influences, acts upon, and informs the study (Anderson, 1991). In fact, Olesen (2000) suggests that the concept of distance between the researcher and the subject is absurd, since knowledge is constructed in the context of the research itself.

Two types of reflexivity have been identified in the qualitative research literature: personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity (Anderson, 1991). Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, and social identities may have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers. In contrast, epistemological reflexivity requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found?' How have the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been

investigated differently? In short, epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions about knowledge that we have made in the course of the research and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings (Willig, 2001).

In relation to the present study, my perceptions of sex trade workers and their attempts to exit the trade are shaped by my personal experiences. I was raised in an environment where I was not exposed to the world of sex trade workers before the commencement of this research. I am an East Indian female who comes from a very close family. I have lived in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia my entire life and have been instilled with the value of an education and an open-mind. I realize that though I am not accustomed to conversing with sex trade workers, I bring my curiosity to the research environment. Moreover, though I readily admit to having scant knowledge about the world of these women, I have shown respect in being given the privilege to hear their stories.

In conducting the present study, I feel it is important to reflect on my pre-collection assumptions and biases. The entry into the sex trade is a complex process that may be entered through a myriad of situations and circumstances. Prior to interviewing the women, I believed that women entered the sex trade because they had developed a drug habit that they could not support by any other means. I also believed that sexual abuse was a pre-cursor to entry, where a majority of the women in the sex trade had experienced this form of abuse prior to entry into the trade. In relation to the research question in this present study, I believed that dissociation played a protective role for the women during the sex act. I assumed that dissociation occurred during the sex act, where

a woman made a concentrated effort to remove herself mentally from her current situation. In addition, I believed that if a woman became skilled in dissociating, she would find it immensely difficult to exit the trade because she had blocked many difficult experiences out and as such, doesn't fully experience them.

I attempted to reduce the influence of the self by recognizing where the interpretation was coming from. During the research process, I took thorough field notes so that I would have something to refer to when thinking about my experiences with the participants. By employing the process of writing field notes, I hoped to be more aware and reflective of my biases in this study.

Participants

The present study required that the participants be female, involved (or formerly involved during the previous 3 years) in the streetwalking prostitution form of the sex trade, have attended at least one faith-based intervention program sponsored by The Salvation Army (SA) and Linwood House, and be at least 19 years of age. These specific inclusion criteria were chosen because previous research indicates that there are many forms of prostitution and as such, narrowing the research would be beneficial (Farley, 2004). The attending a faith-based intervention program criterion reflected the fact that the larger study from which the data were drawn focused on the question of whether faith-based initiatives helped or hindered a woman's attempts to exit the sex trade. The sampling procedure used was purposive, since the goal of the larger study was to understand the experiences of women involved in the sex trade who were attempting to exit.

Recruitment was conducted through collaboration with The SA and Linwood House, where both organizations were provided scripts to recruit participants. While recruiting, both organizations made it clear to the women that they were being invited to participate in the present study and that it was their decision as to whether or not to contact the researchers in order to participate. The participants who were located through a faith-based intervention program that supports women exit the trade through the influence of spirituality, in Roberts' Creek, British Columbia, were given a description of the study, and were also given a fifty dollar grocery voucher as a way to show appreciation for participating.

The participants consisted of 8 women, varying in age from 25 to 45 years ($M = 35.7$ years). There were three individuals of Aboriginal descent (38%), four Caucasians (50%), and one African-Canadian (12%). All participants also acknowledged being either past or present drug users, with usage including marijuana, cocaine, crack-cocaine, heroin, and crystal methamphetamine. All participants had made at least one attempt to exit the sex trade. In addition, all participants were also given the option to use an alias of their choice if they wanted. See Table 1 for demographic descriptions of each participant.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

	Marie	Suzanne	Laurie	Skyla	Anne	Toni	Jen	Ronnie
Age	45	37	36	25	37	42	29	35
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Aboriginal	Caucasian	Aboriginal	African-Canadian	Caucasian	Aboriginal	Caucasian
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual
Education Level	Some college and technical school	Some technical school	Some university	High School diploma	Some college	Some college	Some university	Some college
Relationship Status	Separated	Widowed	Casual	Common law	Married	Divorced	Single	Separated
Number of children	2	2	0	1	3	2	0	1
Age at Entry	12	16	17	12	34	18	18	30

Measures for the Present Study

The present study employed three measures in the process of data collection, namely, a demographics questionnaire, an interview with guiding questions, and the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) (Carlson, 1994). In conducting the interview, phenomenological tenets of how to conduct a successful interview were kept in mind (Wertz, 2005). According to Hein and Austin (2001), a phenomenological interview should be an informal, interactive process that utilizes open ended questions and comments. I was able to conduct the interviews in a way that was consistent with these principles.

In the present study, data was collected from December, 2005 through March, 2006. After a description of the study was given to the participants and an informed consent had been obtained (Appendix A), an in-depth guided interview was conducted (Appendix B). Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, and was audio-recorded for subsequent transcription. The interview location varied, depending on the availability of the participant, with a large portion of the interviews occurring at Hope Renfrew, a half-way house in Vancouver, and at the home of one of the Salvation Army workers. Two of the interviews took place in a private area in a local restaurant.

In addition to the interview, participants were also asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire (Appendix C) and the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) (Appendix D). The DES is a quantitative instrument used in this qualitative study in order to increase the profundity of the information obtained. I used the DES as an in-depth method to collect further descriptive information that specifically focuses on dissociation. Moreover, the DES was used as an adjunct to the interview questions, in order to gain a

greater understanding of dissociative experiences than could be obtained using the interview questions alone.

The DES was developed by Eve Bernstein Carlson and Frank Putnam and is a 28-item self-report instrument that is easy to understand. The questions on the scale are framed in a normative way that does not stigmatize the respondent for positive responses. The respondent is asked to circle a percentage ranging from 0% to 100% at 10% intervals, representing how often he or she has experienced what the question is asking, while not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The scale is derived from extensive clinical experience with an understanding of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). In interpreting the results from the scale, the higher the DES score, the more likely is it that the person has DID. Studies show that the test has good reliability and validity, with test-retest and internal consistency reliabilities at .85 and .93, respectively. It is, however, imperative to note that the DES is not a diagnostic instrument, but is, instead, a screening instrument, where a high score on the DES does not prove that a person has a dissociative disorder, but instead, suggests that formal clinical assessment for dissociation is warranted.

All information obtained for the study was stored in a locked filing cabinet at one of the research labs at Trinity Western University. Confidentiality was preserved by giving a participant a number and an alias, if desired. The participants were also debriefed upon completion of data collection and efforts were made to ensure that no harm was done during the study.

Analytical Process

Verbatim transcripts were created by a transcriptionist from audio recorded interviews. The transcription strategy for the present study was to be as accurate to the audio recorded interview as possible. The transcriptionist was instructed to include pauses and non-utterances such as “um” in the transcripts. She was also told to leave the grammar and word-usage of the participants as it sounded on the recording. In addition, I reviewed all of the transcripts for accuracy by listening to the recordings and following along with the created transcript. I made changes to the transcripts when my interpretation of what was said differed from the transcriptionist’s. I chose to use a verbatim transcription because I felt that it was important for the stories of the participants to be represented in the way they were told. The voices of the participants are silenced in many aspects of their lives and I certainly did not want to add to this experience.

The data from the present study was analyzed using phenomenological descriptive methodology (Colaizzi, 1978). A life-text of the experience was created from the information gathered in the interview. After examining the verbatim transcripts, I thoroughly read all text-based data and extracted significant statements or phrases. Significant statements included all those referring to the research question of interest. The next step of the analysis entailed reducing parts of the interview into meaning units. Meaning units were determined by seeing if the expression in question contained a portion that was sufficient in understanding the experience and if the same expression could be conceptualized. I then identified emergent themes or patterns across each

significant statement or phrase. Themes were clustered and results were integrated into an exhaustive description of the topic.

Rigor

In qualitative research, the terms validity, reliability, and generalizability do not carry the same connotations that they do in quantitative work. Researchers assume that in conducting qualitative studies, reliability is questionable, since the basis of reliability is the consistency of responses among participants. When working with a qualitative method, it may be beneficial to adopt alternative, more accurate language. Creswell (2003) suggests that instead of using the term generalizability, it may be useful to use transferability instead. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Phenomenological researchers can enhance transferability by thoroughly describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. The person who wishes to "transfer" the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

The validity, or trustworthiness, of a qualitative research study also plays an important role in the research context. Trustworthiness is assessed by determining whether the findings are accurate from the vantage point of the researcher, the participant, and the readers of an account. In the present study, internal validity or trustworthiness was promoted through the following strategies:

1. Rich descriptions- I used my extensive field notes as a reference tool for when I compiled the final report, as the notes ensured that I was true to what the interview experience was like for both the participant and me.

2. Reflexivity- I included my biases and perceptions in the study, as my self-reflection hopefully created an open and honest narrative for readers.
3. Prolonged time in the field- In spending an extended period of time conducting interviews, I attempted to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study, thus, hopefully, lending creditability to my narrative account.
4. Peer debriefing- I employed the method of discussing each interview after it's completion with the principal investigator of the larger research study, in the hopes of articulating my thoughts accurately to another person.

It is also important to note that, although I would have preferred having the opportunity to review the conclusions I drew from the study with the participants, this was not possible given the difficulty in locating and meeting with the participants after the data had been analyzed.

The primary strategy in this study to ensure external validity was the provision of rich, detailed descriptions of both the experiences of the participants as well as myself, so that anyone interested in transferability would have a strong framework for comparison (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, the data collection and analysis techniques have been reported in detail in order to provide a comprehensive idea of the methods used in this study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is paramount, since he or she is the primary instrument of analysis, and as such, needs to identify personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study (Lester, 1999). Along the same theme, reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research (Allen & Baber, 1992; Anderson, 1991; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Olesen, 2000). At the beginning of the present study, I had biases and judgments about women in the sex trade that slowly shifted during the course of the research process. I was raised in a sheltered family home where I was not exposed to the world of the sex trade. I knew that the trade existed but it was always out there, since it had no direct effect on my life. I feel that when this research study began, my thoughts and beliefs put me into the legal-moral paradigm of thought. Though not explicitly stated, I believed that the sex trade was immoral and that the women involved in the sale of sex were living maladaptive lifestyles, feelings that are supported by research (Kramer, 2004; Miller, 1993; Weiner, 1996). I also believed that the way to 'fix' the problem of the sex trade was to use deterrence theory, where punishment for being in the sex trade was the primary means of stopping the trade itself. During the data collection process, I struggled with the emotions that I was feeling. In my field notes, I wrote that I was scared for my safety and was shaken by the physical appearance of some of the participants. I also felt immense amounts of guilt for being in the position I was in. After interviews, I would reflect on how fortunate I am and remember a specific interview where the participant was my age that was particularly

difficult for me. I wrote that I did not understand how two women from the same place could grow up to be so vastly different; I, a student in a Master's program with no real complaints about life and her, a sex trade worker with a variety of illnesses and difficult life experiences. I also felt very guilty for the paradigmatic view that I adhered to which essentially blamed the women for creating the sex trade. Through collecting data and reading copious amounts of literature on the sex trade, I feel that my views of the sex trade and those involved in it shifted. I believe that I now adhere to the sexual equality paradigm that suggests sex trade workers are victims of society. Contrary to the evidence that is readily available, many individuals in society still believe that sex trade workers cannot be raped, do not suffer physical attack, deserve the violence inflicted upon them, or that no harm is done when prostitutes are hurt or killed (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2001; Dalla, Xia, & Kennedy, 2003; Farley, 2004; Farley, 2005; Kramer, 2004; Maher, 1996; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Sterks, 2000; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). I feel that creating social programs and providing services that provide an escape to the trade are beneficial to sex trade workers, where law enforcement only forces the trade underground, which can make it more dangerous for the women than it already is. In reflecting on the research process, I feel that I have grown as an individual. In reading my field notes, I can see where I was judging the women without even realizing I was doing so. It is also rewarding to see that towards the end of the data collection process, my notes to myself shifted. I feel that this change process is imperative to mention because I had thought that my biases were put aside when I started this study and my notes revealed that, subconsciously, the biases were still there. I coped with my own shifting reality

through much reflection and feel that it has allowed me to better hear the emerging themes found within the stories of the women who participated in this study.

Emergent Themes

The sex trade is one that can be both an alluring escape from one's existence and a complicated trap that is difficult to escape. The present study sought to explore the role of dissociation in women's attempts at transitioning out of the sex trade. The emergent themes that are paramount in the stories of the women that participated in the study include having to cope with abuse in childhood experiences, coping with low self-esteem, struggling with shifting realities, coping through addiction to a lifestyle, coping through chemical dissociation, and coping through mental dissociation. I believe that it is critical to the integrity of the study to include themes that I feel are directly relevant to the powerful influence coping strategies can have on ones' life. The themes that have emerged illustrate that strategies to cope with life can become engrained to the point where a departure from the familiar is an extremely painful process. It is also important to note that I have chosen to retain the original form of the women's quotations, rather than alter them for clarity. In keeping with the importance of giving a voice to these vulnerable and marginalized women in our society, it would be a form of silencing to alter their own words, simply to satisfy my standards of grammar or fit my assumptions of what they really meant.

Coping with childhood abuse. The majority of the women described their home life while growing up as chaotic and lacking in affection. They described varied childhood abuse experiences that were endured which set the stage for finding adaptive coping strategies that allowed for an escape, where physical escape was impossible.

Parental alcoholism and other substance use were commonly reported. For instance, one woman described both her parents as drug users and reported, “My mom was an ex-sex trade worker, my dad was a druggie. When I was ten, my mom let a date rape me for money and I started doing drugs when I was twelve” (*Skyla*). Homes characterized by substance abuse were also the sites of domestic and interpersonal violence.

Jen recalled that “domestic violence and drugs were going on in my own home...and my Aunt and Uncle, they both have bad tempers.” She continued by describing a disturbing memory in which her uncle “comes out of the shower and he wraps his underwear around my Aunt’s neck and practically strangled her cause she did not buy the right kind of underwear.” In addition to witnessing violence in the home, seven of the eight women indicated being abused as children, whether it was through emotional, physical, or sexual means, or a combination. The abuse endured were usually severe forms, where *Marie* reported that her family “stripped me and were beating me” when she was a child, while *Jen* indicated that “running and hiding in the closet and standing there” was a method she used to avoid being caught in the violent rages of her caregivers.

Childhood sexual abuse was a theme that was reported by three of the women. Perpetrators included cousins, uncles, family friends, and clergy. The women spoke of the sexual abuse they experienced as children in a matter-of-fact manner, with none of them spending extensive time explaining how it made her feel. *Ronnie* stated that “I had sexual abuse in my family from the time I was four up until the time I was sixteen by my cousin.” She continued by stating that “my minister molested me and I was raped by a Mormon missionary.”

Jen also explained her abuse in a sparse manner by stating that she “was sexually abused as a child by a family friend” and that “there was sexual assault by a family member at the age of thirteen as well”.

Sklya commented that she “was molested through most of my childhood” and continued to state that “being raped when I was ten affected me a lot because my mom let it happen”. When asked how this made her feel, she stated that it was “pretty degrading” and felt that “my own mom pimped me out.” Though not stated explicitly by the women themselves, I would consider two other women as having been sexually abused as children as well since they were sexually exploited by family members. *Marie* left home at the age of twelve due to severe physical abuse that she experienced but she may also have been inclined to leave because she had her first sexual experience at that young age. *Suzanne* was also exploited since her father had arranged a marriage to a much older man when she was just fourteen years of age. In order to avoid the impending marriage, she got pregnant at fourteen with a local boy. All of these experiences affected the women’s sense of self.

Coping with low self-esteem. The emergent theme that was apparent in relation to self-esteem was that the women experienced the words and actions of caregivers giving a strong message to them that they were “worthless.” Once internalized, the message of worthlessness can supercede all others and one can behave in ways that display this lack of confidence. *Anne* mentioned that “I didn’t think that I deserved anything,” while *Laurie* stated that being involved in the sex trade “had to do with feeding my self-esteem.” *Jen* stated that “in the beginning, you’re ready to eat it all up because it makes

you like, it's filling a void." When asked how being involved in the sex trade affected her sense of self, she replied:

Yeah, like it did because the whole self-esteem is based on the sex trade, so if I'm in regular life and a guy like rejects me because I'm not pretty enough or whatever the issue is. Well, than that night I go and get ready and stand on the street corner and then a guy would pick me up and I'd be like, 'Well, I am pretty, this guy is paying me 100 bucks for sex. Men don't pay \$100 to have sex with ugly women.' And so then you'd buy into that crap...you bullshit your mind, like basically convincing yourself that this is fine, you like it, it's, you know, whatever. I just remember bullshitting my mind so I like it. And then you buy into it. And you buy so far into it that it becomes a way of life.

Ronnie stated:

Umm, as you continue to trade your most precious part of yourself for money, there is less and less that's left of you at the end of the night. And the way I saw it was they were, my ex and his friend, were injecting my soul into their veins. And how can you hold onto yourself and who you are and your pride when you keep giving it away with sex?

Marie succinctly stated that her experiences as a child and those in the sex trade have left her feeling "dirty."

In addition, the views of society have long since been found to be negative when it comes to sex trade workers. The findings of the present study show that the negative views of others are internalized, where the woman begins to believe that she is worthless. Research has shown that members of society feel that sex trade workers cannot be raped,

do not suffer physical attack, deserve the violence inflicted upon them, or that no harm is done when prostitutes are hurt or killed (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2001; Dalla, Xia, & Kennedy, 2003; Farley, 2004; Farley, 2005; Kramer, 2004; Maher, 1996; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Sterks, 2000; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). In addition, since prostitution is thought to be deviant behaviour and is viewed by many as morally wrong, sex trade workers are forced to be hidden from view (Weiner, 1996). The women shared accounts that support the aforementioned research. Many of the women stated that they felt that others saw them as sex objects and not “as human beings.”

Laurie stated that she hated herself and saw herself as “nothing but a slut.” Continuing on the same theme, she said that she felt badly about herself and saw how other people in society looked at her. She felt that other women, especially, “turn their noses down” at sex trade workers and think that sex trade workers give all women “a bad name.” This sentiment was shared by four other women in the present study as well. The women also shared the belief that one who has not lived through the experiences that they have lived through cannot possibly understand what being a sex trade worker is like. In relation to this shared sentiment among the women, *Toni* said:

I don't know, I think, generally speaking, women couldn't possibly understand it. It would baffle them. They'd have judgment about it, whatever that judgment might be. I'm sure some women would feel pity and compassion and 'Oh, the poor street worker.' Other women with either a broader mind or a broader education or more information...I think they'd be embarrassed by it more than anything else cause they like, I mean, it's the oldest profession in the book and it's well accepted, but jus kind of, 'Ahh, I don't want to know.' And they try to,

I'm sure that most women wouldn't see it as anything more than sad and dangerous.

The negativity that society expressed in relation to the sex trade was internalized for many of the women in the present study. The stigmatized social status of being a "whore" continuously undermines the sense of self, where lack of understanding or compassion shown by others is interpreted as a sign of lack of importance. The results support findings by others that suggest that the negative views of society have a detrimental effect on the esteem and sense of worth for those involved in the sex trade (Dalla, 2001; Flowers, 1998). When asked what others thought about the sex trade, *Jen* said:

They kinda had the same attitude, like, the sex trade is a bad thing, you know, like, women like you are making women look bad. Like, why would you wanna do such a think like this. Not understanding where you're coming from. Like, in a way, by this point, this has become normal to you.

She stated that this lack of understanding leads to feeling "a hatred and an anger towards the work and towards society because some people in society look down on you...they don't get it." This explicit frustration was evident in the stories of three other women as well, where the desire to be understood was continually trampled by preconceived notions of what a sex trade worker was.

Jen stated that when she was asked questions by others in society and by those in organizations that attempt to help women exit the trade, the question was always the same. She said:

I remember being asked so many times from so many women, ‘Don’t you feel like disrespectful to your body, like don’t you feel like you’re disrespecting your body?’ And I said to one lady, I said, ‘You know, at ten o’clock at night when my stomach is grumbling I don’t care whether my body wants self respect. My body needs survival, it needs to eat.’ But they don’t get that because they go home and open their fridge and eat.

This statement about the need for survival is an interesting finding from the present study. *Jen* explicitly stated that she “had no time for the higher philosophical, theological, spiritual” thought processes because she was occupied by “survival mode.” Moreover, she continues by stating that she didn’t have the privilege to think in any way other than survival mode because if she did, she “would have had to have felt bad about what I was doing and I had no room for feeling bad in my life.” The internal stress that would come from feeling misunderstood by society could also influence the various mechanisms used by the women to cope.

Ronnie stated that she felt others looked at sex trade workers as if “they’re filthy, that they’re a drain on society, that they’re stealing their husbands away, that they’re vile, vile people, drug addicted people.” She continued by stating that though sex trade workers may do vile things, that isn’t necessarily who they are as people. She wisely pointed out that “you always have to remember what kind of past- it all stems from something, these women don’t just wake up one day and decide that they want to be a sex trade worker. Things have happened to them.”

Jen also stated that she wishes that those who have negative views about sex trade workers would:

Understand that at that time that was my way of life, to be accepting of it, to be understanding, to help me with it. And not lecture, not yell at me, like to understand that ‘Yeah, the people on the street, that is my family. Like the other sex workers, those are family.’

This acknowledgment by others of the struggle that she has gone through would be a form of acceptance that is absent. The harmful combination of abuse, internalized negative views of self, and the negative views of others toward them make exiting difficult.

Another experience affecting their sense of self and their resultant way of coping with it was the experience of betrayal. The majority of women interviewed mentioned feelings of despair in relation to feeling betrayed by a loved one. The women made it clear that they felt betrayed in one form or another by family members. For instance, *Ronnie* described a situation where her boyfriend “looked at me, ‘that’s a pretty girl so that’s money for drugs.’” She felt that her boyfriend looked at her and saw the earning potential she had with her body. She continued by stating that only after she exited the trade and left her boyfriend did she realize that he had used her. *Laurie* also mentioned that her parents “left me alone a lot and they were always drunk so they had no time for me and I spent a lot of time alone.” She felt neglected by her family and was lonely, which is the sole emotion she attributes to her entering the trade. *Sklya* was betrayed by her mom when she clearly remembers an experience she had, as “when I was ten my mom let a date rape me for money.” *Marie* mentioned an experience that led her to feel

copious amounts of despair where she married a man she thought was honest and trustworthy and later discovered that “he was a hard core pedophile, but he pretended to be Christian and he was a pedophile.” A few of the women also mentioned situations where they had a pimp who would abuse them and the only way to survive the situation was to “run away” (*Marie*). *Skyla* mentioned that she “started dating a dealer when I was twelve and by the time I was fourteen he got tired of supporting me and so I said I better start making money because I’m not getting it here anymore.” Her dealer was her pimp and for her own safety, *Skyla* realized that she needed to be on her own. *Laurie* also articulated that she had a pimp but the “beatings and have to do this and have to do that” was hard to deal with and she ran away. The abuse and experience of betrayal, intertwined with feelings of worthlessness seemed to have an influence on their decision to live in “shifting realities.” *Marie* mentioned one such difficulty when she disclosed that her deceased husband “was a hardcore pedophile” and that she had no idea of this side of him. After being abused for so long, it is clear why it may be easy to believe the words that society prescribes to women in the sex trade, words that tell them that they are “worthless” and “whores.”

Struggling with shifting realities. Seven of the women mentioned living in shifting realities and how taxing this was. *Jen* stated that:

It’s kinda like living a double lifestyle where you don’t want other people to realize what you’re doing...I’d go out like once a week and make money, but when I left the place where I was living, I’d dress with a pair of pants on and like a shirt, and like a leather jacket and sneakers...but you always had to be careful to make sure that people didn’t see you, make sure no one put two and two

together.

Ronnie also mentioned a dichotomy she felt in what she was doing and how she was raised. She said:

I tried to get out several times. I don't want to be I'm not that person. I was raised in a ...my mom loved me, my mom adored me and she was an excellent parent. Although she passed away when I was very young- I was only 13 when she passed away. She still instilled in me really amazing values that I was worth something and she always places such a huge high value on me that I knew that this wasn't the life for me, that I didn't belong here.

She said that although she was in the sex trade, she felt like she was "a fish out of water" and this took a toll on her sense of self. *Laurie* stated that she had internal conflict about what she was doing in the sex trade and how she had been raised. She said that she thought:

It's like every day, I don't belong here, I wasn't raised like this. I've got values, morals, what am I doing selling myself like this? If my mother could see me and she knew I was doing she'd slap me. Of course, I thought that every day and I still think about it every day and it's twenty years later.

The reality of her life and the disparity it showed in how she was raised was a taxing experience that she felt. The double-life was also experienced by *Suzanne*, who mentioned that she would wear "high boot and mini-skirts and make-up and big hair and (laughs)...I would change before I got back to my house". She changed before she went in to her husband and daughter in an effort to keep her street life and home life separate. *Toni* explained how she lived a double-life and was quite comfortable with it. She

mentioned that she was able to function in society without much difficulty and only did tricks when she needed money for her addictions. Moreover, she said that most of her family and friends did not even know she was a sex trade worker until the very end of her stay in the trade when her drug use became unmanageable. She said that the ability to keep her two lives separate gave her a sense of control and that she felt no guilt about her involvement in the sex trade.

A few of the women also mentioned the difficulty they had in keeping the two lives separate, especially when clients came to their home for services. *Toni* said she was “busy having this double life” and keeping her “normal” life separate from the life that she had as a sex trade worker was “tricky.” *Jen* also mentioned that it was important to her that people in her life did not connect the dots and figure out that she was in the sex trade. The air of normalcy that the women strived for in a portion of their lives was further compromised by feelings of worthlessness that accompany trading sex for money.

The experiences of these women seem to indicate that having to cope with abuse in childhood, coping with low self-esteem, and struggling with shifting realities, encouraged the use of coping strategies that would be efficient at providing routes to escape and coping through addiction to a fast paced lifestyle was one of them.

Coping through addiction to a lifestyle. Drug use was a common experience of every woman who was interviewed in this study, with the most frequent substances including alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, crack, heroin, and crystal methamphetamine. Four of the women indicated that the reason they entered the sex trade was out of economic necessity to support a pre-existing drug habit, while the other four women indicated that they started using substances very soon after entry into the sex trade for a multitude of

reasons. This is a higher percentage than that found by Farley (2004), whose research indicates that on average, 20% of sex trade workers entering the sex trade have a drug habit they need to support. *Anne* states that the reason she entered the sex trade “was mostly drug addiction” and continues:

Umm, like, there was a time where I jus completely lost my mind and made like a conscious choice to just to everything that I knew was wrong in my life. You know, like my whole life I grew up and it was like I had a lot of sets of rules and you had to be a good person and had to be a good girl and all of this. And I remember making a conscious choice, being like, you know what? Screw it.

Like, I’ve done this, and I’m not free and I’m not happy, and my family sucks and my life sucks and I hate it. So I think I’ll just do everything that I just feel like I want to do. And that kinda like spiralled my drug addiction. And at the end of it, umm, like the sex trade started to come out in it.

She articulated that the drugs led her into the sex trade because there was no other means to support the costly habit.

Toni had a similar experience and shared that she was “probably close to 30 years old before I used the sex trade to finance my drug addiction.” When she was asked to expand on her drug addiction and the sex trade, *Toni* replied:

My drug use progressed from ‘recreational’ (laughs), because it probably never was. And that’s the hard drugs. I mean, my alcoholism was well identified by the time I was 15. I started drinking heavily in my early teens. Had my first ‘quit drinking’ experience at 15, substituted marijuana, and gradually over time various other substances entered into my life and then the substances totally ran my life.

But the progression took a long time. It wasn't until, I was probably, well, it didn't happen until the inability to finance my drug use without taking household money, or keeping a job, spending the tips, manipulating men in non-sexual ways.

Two other women who disclosed that they entered the sex trade in order to support a pre-existing habit made it clear that the money accumulated through the trade was quickly spent on drugs that helped them not feel "dope sick." *Ronnie*, specifically, explained what the cycle of heroin addiction was like for her and said:

It's very much like a trap that you enter into that's really a sort of cage, an invisible cage that you're in. And it's really difficult to get out once you're in the cycle of trying to get well, trying to get well, trying to get well. Cause it's no longer about feeling good, it's just about feeling okay again.

The women who entered the trade for reasons other than drugs emphasized that entry was due to either seeing other sex trade workers and thinking that the life seemed glamorous or to escape an existing reality that was painful. *Laurie* said she thought the "hookers in Toronto have diamond rings and long fur coats" and she figured if she wanted those things as well, she "should go and do that and try it." *Jen* shared that she feels the reason people enter the sex trade is to escape from a harmful living situation and enter due to lack of choice. She continued to say that leaving home and entering the sex trade or staying where one is in a dangerous place is a decision that is akin to being between a rock and a hard place. She said that:

A lot of kids who move out onto the street when they're young is that, yeah, either you go home and get beat up by mommy and daddy or whatever it is, or you go stand on the street corner.

She chose to leave home and stand on the street corner to escape her home environment and said that the reason she left home was because "standing on the street corner looks pretty good because you haven't done it before. And getting beat up by mommy and daddy has happened quite a bit."

The results from the present study clearly show that an addiction to the lifestyle of a sex trade worker also makes exiting an arduous process. A few women mentioned that an idolized version of what a sex trade worker was initially existed in their minds and that even if one has successfully exited, the memories of the highs achieved strolling the street are strong. *Laurie* mentioned that though she had exited the trade:

"I still have my little place downtown. And it's like, I need to give it up real soon, like this week or next week. Just the fact is, when I'm downtown all I have to do is go there and my crack's there too kind of thing."

The memories of the binge weekends and the tricks she used to turn urge her to hang onto that part of her life that is now over. An addiction to the thrill of the sex trade is a difficult one to break, one that impedes a successful exit.

Coping through chemical dissociation. The women in this study also described the use of chemical substances to achieve a dissociative state. All of them stated that the drugs provided a means to dissociate or disconnect from the situation that they were in. Prior research has shown that drug use is a common coping mechanism that is employed by women in the sex trade (Young, Boyd, & Hubbell, 2000) and this was the case for the

women in the present study as well. Coping is defined as the process of managing taxing circumstances, expending effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to reduce or tolerate stress or conflict (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004). The tool of dissociation or disconnection was used by the women in this study on a regular basis. Of the eight women interviewed, seven explicitly mention using chemical dissociation as a means to continue functioning in the sex trade. Young and colleagues found that sex trade workers who were women were more likely to use drugs to deal with negative emotions caused by performing prostitution, and the current study supports this result. When asked what method of coping she used, *Jen* stated that:

Drinking made me feel good cause when I drank I became this happy person and I was excitable, I was laughing and I was fun...I felt good about myself, I felt better, like I just felt happier.

When asked how drinking specifically helped her cope, she replied that it allowed her to “forget about whatever was going on.” The other women had similar experiences to share.

When *Marie* was asked whether she ever used drugs to cope, she looked at the researcher and said, “Billy would have a whole bowl full of pills and everybody was helping themselves and everybody did drugs and everybody did pills. Of course there were drugs, of course you did it, how else would you cope?” She went on to make her point more clear by stating, “Everybody did drugs. It made it easier. If you’re 12 and there’s a 64 year old man to sleep with you, you do drugs.” The women seemed to use substances as a way to detach emotionally, a result that supports findings from other researchers (Kramer, 2004; Stark and Hodgson, 2004; Williamson and Folaron, 2003).

For some of the women in the study, drug use was a habitual thing that became the normal way of functioning. *Laurie* clearly explained how her drug use allowed her to cope with the stressful situation around her. Her drug of choice was marijuana and she explained,:

You know, we'd wake up at ten in the morning, it's the first thing I see. Most people see a bathroom or a toothbrush or whatever. Well, we see a joint. And it's the last thing you think of when you go to bed, and that's 2 o'clock in the morning.

Another experience with chemical dissociation that was shared by two of the women indicates that for some, there is no need to dissociate while the sexual transaction is occurring because the women will take the precautionary steps to protect themselves emotionally by dissociating chemically before any contact with a client is even made. *Jen* stated that, for her, "the dissociation happened prior to the contract being set. I didn't have to dissociate while having sex. I was already there." This result supports studies done by other researchers who also found that women involved in the sex trade use drugs and alcohol to deal with the overwhelming emotions experienced while turning tricks (Farley, 2004; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Furthermore, when *Ronnie* was asked whether she dissociated chemically, she stated that:

The drugs helped, right. It's a numbing. I would always try to save some so before I would go out, I could use and just shut down and stuff my feelings down and continue to use drugs because that helped numb what I was doing.

This description seems to indicate that chemical dissociation is used by women in the sex trade as a way to detach themselves emotionally from the potentially harmful acts they

are performing. The dissociation becomes a recursive process, where the reinforcing nature of getting a reprieve from reality is enough of a motivation to continue using.

Ronnie said that she used substances to distance herself from her reality “because it takes you completely out of yourself.” She continues by saying that the drugs alter reality because:

It might be for like a minute or two that it does that, but that’s one minute that you weren’t living in the same place, in the same agony that you were before. So you go back and forth from working to the drug, working to the drug because even though you’ve been on the corner for ex amount of hours and you’re freezing cold in the rain, then you have to do this awful act, and all you’re really getting is a two minute reprieve from all of that. But you do it all over again because that two minute reprieve is at least a reprieve.

The women who were attempting to cope through the use of drugs also described the physically destructive effects of various drugs. The results obtained from this study support prior research that had found that crack-cocaine, in particular, is popular among street prostitutes (Maher, 1996; Miller, 1993; Monto, 2004; Sterk, Elifson, & German, 2000). All of the women mentioned using crack-cocaine, though some used a combination of crack-cocaine and heroin in order to fend off feeling dope sick. The effects of crack-cocaine were shared in detail with many women stating that “one hit is all it takes” to get addicted. *Jen* put addiction to crack-cocaine into perspective when she said:

You can be a hardcore alcoholic and still pay your rent and have a place to live...crack cocaine is more expensive. I feel it’s more addictive, physically and

mentally, and it like, I don't know how to describe it...it stirs something inside you that will drive you to the end of the world to get what you need. Like I mean, even if it's only a couple of crumbs of a rock, you will turn the whole world upside down to get it.

Anne shared the destructive quality of crystal methamphetamine. When asked about drug use, she stated that she “did crystal meth everyday...and then to party, I did heroin and cocaine.” She divulged that she only started using crystal methamphetamine after she was introduced to ecstasy by some friends. Her drug use became a combination of ecstasy and cocaine on the weekends and within two months of doing the weekend binges, she said that, “I was selling ecstasy and I was selling cocaine to support the habit and I was doing it like every couple of days.” She continued by saying:

And then soon after that, someone just came to my house and was like. ‘Yea, I got some crystal meth. I’ll give you some of this for free, you can give it a try and we’ll party together.’ And I knew after I had done it the first time, I remember crying because I was so, I knew I was addicted, that was it. I was like there was no going back. As soon as I started coming down off of it I was like wanting more and that hadn’t happened with the cocaine. Like, I could at least get a day off and not feel like ‘Ahhhh, I have to have it!’ But with this stuff it was like, no. I was gone.

The destructive nature of the drug made it impossible for *Anne* to show concern for anyone but herself. She mentioned not knowing where her kids were at the time she was using crystal methamphetamine because she “didn’t really care.” The addiction was so consuming that it took day to day concerns out of mind and replaced them with being

concerned about when and where the next hit would be. Moreover, *Ronnie* explained why a combination of drugs is a common experience the women interviewed report. In her addiction to heroin, she explained that there came a point when the heroin was no longer giving her the high that she desired and that she used the heroin because it was “making her well,” since she was coping with physical withdrawal symptoms of the drug, while at the same time, using cocaine because it would actually make her high and was “taking away the emotional heat from working” in the sex trade. The need to cope with this emotional heat in some way was common throughout the conversations with the women in this study.

The powerful hold addiction has on women in the sex trade controls aspects of their day to day interactions with others. When someone is addicted to a substance, but the substance allows functionality in a chaotic environment, the need for the substance is reinforced in a multitude of ways. Chemical dissociation is also an adaptive way to continue functioning in the sex trade, even though one may want to exit the trade. Though an addiction to a substance may have initially brought the women into the sex trade, the functional use of the chemical to dissociate becomes a powerful trap that makes it very difficult to exit the sex trade. In addition, these women also differentiated between chemical and mental dissociation.

Mental dissociation. Many research articles have concluded that prostitution is extremely dangerous and causes psychological damage to those involved in it (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Farley, 2004). Sex trade workers become skilled at employing strategies that protect themselves emotionally, with one such technique being dissociation (Kramer, 2004). The women in the study delineated dissociation into two categories, namely,

chemical and mental dissociation. When discussing mental dissociation, the women had a multitude of experiences to share which they often spoke about under the rubric of “spacing out.”

All of the women in the present study seemed to use mental dissociation as a way of functioning. They would use this adaptive coping strategy to block thought processes that made it hard to continue. For instance, *Marie* said that the only way she could function while performing the sex act was to “just go away.” When asked for details, she explained that she got very good at “going away” in her mind as a child while she was being abused and, so, as a sex trade worker, “it’s easy to go away” because that mental process had become ingrained for her.

Laurie stated that she got very good at “ignoring them and just keeping doing what you’re doing.” The way her dissociation helped her while in the trade was that she would block her inner voice that would tell her that her actions were wrong. She also said, “I think you’re always present and you’re always off. You’re always present because you’re physically there but you’re always off because you know you shouldn’t be there.” The importance of blocking thought process is intrinsically linked to emotional safety, since it would allow a person to perform an act they wouldn’t otherwise perform for an individual they may not want as a client. Prior research shows that coping strategies can be adaptive or maladaptive, and in the case of personal emotional safety, dissociation was an adaptive tool (Kramer, 2004). When asked about the coping skills she used, *Ronnie* said:

Mental, you just try to believe that you’re not you, you kind of separate your soul, your self, who you really are and tuck that person away into a safe space in

your mind while you do this job that you need to do, right? Like this is work, it has to be done, nobody else is going to do it so just get it done. And then you can be who you are back when you get home, back into the place where you're safe right?

She had a demarcation in her mind that allowed her to function in the sex trade, specifically, that her actions on the street were her job and who she was as a person was a separate identity from that. When asked if making the switch from work Ronnie to home Ronnie was difficult, she said:

It becomes easier after a while, difficult at the beginning. But, umm, no, that's not necessarily true. Difficult at the beginning, it becomes easier for a while and then for me, it became unbearable at the end. I wasn't able to make that switch anymore and I was just raw. I was on the surface all the time and I just found it excruciating.

Her description is well supported by literature that has found that once a woman is enticed into the cycle of the sex trade, she becomes socially immersed into the trade and assumes the full persona of a professionalized street worker (Williamson, 1999).

Research indicates that in the initial stages of entry, the woman feels like she is in control and only when she is "caught up" in a wave of chronic depression, drug abuse, and learned helplessness does she realize that she wants to get out (Williamson, 1999). Physical deterioration also accompanies depression and drug abuse (Maher, 1996), and *Ronnie* indicated that she found herself dissociating on a more frequent basis in her early years as a sex trade worker due to the physical reminders of her job. She stated:

For the first two years or three, I couldn't even look at my body in the shower

when I was showering. I didn't want to look at it, any of that because I just couldn't accept that looking down at it, what it had looked like before, like the sores from the addiction and the stuff that had gone on to it. It's just, I wanted to dissociate myself from the trauma that my body had once taken.

The utilitarian effect of dissociation also allowed the women to perform in their day to day lives. During the act of prostitution, dissociation is believed to assume a functional purpose as it maintains emotional distance between the customer and the sex worker (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004; Williamson, 1999). Maintaining an emotional distance from the clients was mentioned as important in four of the eight women's stories. *Jen* said that she kept her clients distant from her because "when you're on the stroll you're not allowed to show emotions because they're considered to be weak." In order to earn the income required to support her drug habit, she needed to keep herself disconnected from both, her clients and her surroundings. *Jen* stated that:

You just pretend you're somewhere's else. You just think about other things, like I mean if you're safe with the other person, right? Like you just think about other things, like you just, yah, you think about other people than you're having sex with. You think about people you want to have sex with.

She said that by having her mind be in other places, she was able to do what she needed to in order to get paid. She also expressed that "you have to take your emotions and put them in a box and close them in a drawer when you're out there," because it is considered dangerous to show emotions. Dissociation allowed *Jen* to continue earning an income as a sex trade worker because she was able to keep her emotional and cognitive selves separate. Prior research supports the findings that a separation of the psyche allows for

functionality, as researchers state that in order to function in chaos, an otherwise integrated ego must split into fragments to dissociate which allows life to go on by dividing up the unbearable experience and distributing it to different compartments of the mind and body (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2004; Williamson, 1999).

Many of the women also indicated that in order to perform the sexual service they were being paid for, they would disconnect and “put on a personality,” by dressing in clothes and behaving in a way they thought sex trade workers were allowed for shifting realities to exist. *Jen* stated that:

When you put on the clothes that a sex worker wears, like the high heeled shoes, the short skirt, you’re putting on a uniform and you’re putting on a personality...in order to make money, you gotta become what these men want...and so you became whichever personality they wanted in order to get their money.

Another comment made by a few of the women was that they tried to convince themselves that the situation they were in wasn’t real. *Anne* was asked how she coped with being a sex trade worker and she said that:

It was just an action. And it was like, being in a movie. And it was acting and it was playing and it wasn’t real. And all I cared about was getting the most money out of it. And the more they bought into the acting part of it, the better I felt too.

I’m like, ‘Haha, you’re so stupid, you think this is real.’

She also continued by saying that she wasn’t always fully present mentally during the act and would be:

Outside myself and what that would have looked like, and into areas where I was looking at my heart and seeing what need they could have met. Or you know, thinking about other things, like in my day, or planning something else. I was a big planner (laughs).

In my field notes, I wrote that I did not fully understand how one could make oneself believe it was all an act. I remember that when hearing *Anne* say that it was just an action, I felt confused. I couldn't comprehend how in the throes of the act, *Anne* was able to block out what was happening around her and focus her mind on something else. When *Jen* was interviewed, I also remember her saying that during the act "you just pretend you're somewhere's else" and I was in awe of the mental ability it would take to separate mind and body in such a distinct way.

Research has shown that dissociation is the psyche's normal reaction to a traumatic experience, where if physical withdrawal is not possible, then a part of the self is withdrawn (Kalsched, 1996). The current study supports this finding as it was apparent that all of the women in the study used the strategy of mental dissociation to keep a part of themselves separate from the acts that they performed.

The women also spoke about the function of dissociation during their attempts to transition out of the sex trade. The final stage in the cycle of the sex trade is evaluation and exit. In this stage, intense re-evaluation of the sex trade worker's life and what she has become is the central focus (Williamson, 1999). In the present study, though all participants stated they had exited the sex trade at the time of the interview, the amount of time out of the trade varied greatly, from a few years to a few weeks. In the process of exiting, dissociation was commonly seen as a hindrance by the women in exiting because

it was a functional tool used to blunt experience. The difficult day to day interactions the women dealt with were muted through the use of dissociation. *Sklya* described that while in the sex trade, “you kinda detach yourself from yourself” and that’s how you function. She, and other women, also mentioned that one becomes so adept at dissociating that it becomes second nature.

Anne mentioned that she felt that “my mind was gone and I was gone.” Though a functional tool at times, for Anne dissociation became a regular experience where all experiences were blunted. Research shows that an emotional response like dissociation protects the woman at the time trauma is occurring, but is not a useful tool for long-term coping in an occupation where long-term health problems such as recurring dissociation, depression, anxiety, panic, phobias, anger and rage, low self-esteem, shame, somatic pain, self-destructive thoughts and/or behaviour, substance abuse, eating disorders, and relationship or intimacy difficulties can occur (Foa & Rothbaum, 1998).

Moreover, an important finding of the current study shows that the process of dissociation can become habitual. The results from the administered Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) (Carlson, 1994) showed that half of the women had scores well above 30, which indicates that further assessment is warranted to determine whether the individual has a dissociative disorder. There were also interesting results for a few of the questions on the DES. One question asked the women to circle how often they were able to ignore pain and interestingly, four of the women indicated that they were able to ignore pain 100% of the time. Another question asked the women if they ever have the experience of remembering a past event so vividly that they feel as if they were reliving the event and four women reported having the above experience at least 70% of the time.

Moreover, another question from the DES that produced interesting results asked the women to circle how often they find that they have no memory for some important events in their lives, where four women indicated experiencing this at least 50% of the time, with one woman indicating that she experienced this 90% of the time. When dissociation becomes a habitual process, it can become a default to deal with painful and difficult emotions that is very hard to break. *Jen* relayed that since the process of dissociation is second nature to her:

I just don't feel. And I go through periods where I feel, and I cry or something, or feel like crying. And I go through periods where I just don't feel emotions. And then, so yah, you'd go through a lot of periods where you'd feel anger towards Johns because it's like, well you rob me my dignity, you rob me my soul, you rob me of who I am to sexually exploit me for your own self-gratification.

Though she has exited from the trade, she remembers all too well what the trade was like for her.

Anne also mentioned that because dissociation was ingrained in her daily interactions with others, she would find it very difficult to be herself. She said that "inside I was screaming and but on the outside, I couldn't say anything". The lack of freedom in expressing herself was a common sentiment shared by a few other women as well. When the pattern of dissociation becomes maladaptive, it can actually making exiting a very difficult process, more so than it already is. The findings show that chemical and mental dissociation are used concurrently as a coping tool and make exiting the sex trade a very difficult process.

Conclusion

The findings from the present study showed that dissociation is a coping tool that is used in both adaptive and maladaptive ways by women employed in the sex trade. The abuse history of some of the women shows that the coping strategy of dissociation can be employed early as a means to escape the painful reality to which one is privy. The findings from this study also show that although dissociation is an adaptive way of distancing the self from the traumatic situation in the short-term, when it is employed on a regular basis, the adaptive coping mechanism can become maladaptive. The women also mentioned the low self-esteem that many of them had and how the sex trade, in many cases, compounded already negative opinions of self. The results show that the negative comments from others become internalized to the point where the women can begin to believe that they are, indeed, worthless. Moreover, in order to counteract this negative view of self, many of the women used dissociation as a means to separate parts of themselves they did not like. The women also mentioned the very important theme of shifting realities, where a double-life ensued for many of them. Results indicate that in order to be able to function in the sex trade effectively, a few of the women tried to keep their street and home lives separate. It is also important to note that though prior research fails to mention it, the women in this study further subdivided the definition of dissociation to include chemical dissociation. Findings show that the women utilized many different substances to dissociate chemically. In addition, it is apparent that a combination of chemical and mental dissociation was used by the women interviewed for this study who were involved in the sex trade. Finally, dissociation can be a hindrance to exiting because it becomes so ingrained that it allows the woman to separate parts of her

psyche rapidly. The women indicated that dissociation helped them while in the sex trade, but when they wanted to get out, it took several attempts to leave since dissociation had become a default setting. The voices of these eight women powerfully tell us that even if a woman is successfully able to exit the trade, she is still susceptible to relapse, as the factors that have often helped her to cope within the trade, are often the same factors that prevent her from leaving, and also are most likely to draw her back into the trade.

Strengths

The findings from this study are important for several reasons. While doing research for my literature review, I found countless articles that indicated factors that make a woman more susceptible to enter into the sex trade, but found relatively few articles that speak directly to the act of exiting the sex trade. Moreover, as I became interested in the aspect of dissociation specifically, I found only a handful of articles that have studied this coping method within this vulnerable population. A strength of this study is that it adds to the body of existing literature, thus expanding the lacking resources on dissociation and the sex trade. Another strength of the present study is that the methodology used allowed the women to speak their stories the way they chose to tell them, thus, giving them a voice that is largely ignored by society. This element of the study is starkly different from most of the literature I reviewed since other studies done on the topic of sex trade work tend to use survey data. Survey data is such that the voice of the participants is not clearly heard since the data is collected through a series of uniform questions that have a limited selection of responses that are provided for the participant. The interview also used guiding questions, which allowed the women the freedom to speak. In addition, the use of the DES is a strength in this study because it was

used as a descriptive tool and allowed deeper, more focused questions to be asked about dissociation that were contained within it. The interviews were richer in detail regarding dissociation because the DES allowed further probing into this area of interest. The final strength of the study that is worth mentioning was the fact that I took extensive field notes throughout the research process. My field notes allowed me to be a fellow participant in the process because I was affected by what I heard and needed to reflect on my own biases, judgments, and assumptions. I was changed in the process because of the process of reflexivity. Through the process of conducting the research for the present study, I feel that I grew as an individual and have evolved in my thoughts and biases of the sex trade.

Limitations

There are a few limitations that I acknowledge exist in my study. I feel that using 8 women may have limited the level of saturation that was achieved in the data collected. The themes that emerged were well-supported by the stories told by all of the women but had there been more participants, there may also have been more emergent themes. I feel that though I used a research method that ensures the women's voices are heard, a greater number of participants may have led to higher convergence in what the women said. At the same time, however, it must be recognized that a sample size of 8 is well within the normal range for phenomenological research.

Moreover, I feel that since the length of time the women had been out of the sex trade varied from a few weeks to a few years, their stories about exiting may have been influenced by the length of time. When viewed from a constructivist perspective, if a woman has exited the sex trade successfully and has had many positive subsequent

experiences, it is likely that she will remember her tenure in the sex trade differently than from a woman who has just recently exited and is still feeling the allure of the trade.

Furthermore, I feel that the fact that I could not engage in member-checking due to the transient nature of the population I was studying was a limitation of the study. I would have preferred having the opportunity to show my results to the women, themselves, and have their comments and recommendations. I feel that this may have made the study stronger since the conclusions I have drawn would have been verified by the women.

Contributions to the field of Counselling Psychology

Since my study revealed that the women I interviewed who were involved in the sex trade dissociate on a regular basis, social agencies can use this information to try to develop innovative ways to help the women exit the trade. For example it would be beneficial if the women were taught other coping mechanisms that could replace dissociation. Since most women in the sex trade experience traumatic events on a regular basis, teaching something as simple as deep breathing exercises as a means to cope with a frenzied environment would be helpful. It is also important to note that since the women, themselves, subdivide dissociation into chemical and mental, it may be helpful to provide services that address both realms of dissociation. Social agencies that strive to assist women exit the trade successfully can use the results of the present study and develop programs that deal with the two components of dissociation separately. I would recommend having a drug-addiction program that is aimed at rehabilitation and a second component that focuses on the relational aspect of exiting. It may also be worth looking at possible mental illness that the women may suffer from as a compounded aspect of

being employed in the sex trade. Providing counselling services to the women is also something I would highly recommend.

I also hope that the findings from this study provide an opportunity for those who work with vulnerable populations to understand the complexity of dissociation and to keep in mind that leaving the sex trade is often more frightening and onerous than staying in the sex trade, since leaving requires finding brand new ways to cope with the rawness that can be life. Furthermore, I feel that the findings can be used by mental healthcare workers to consider creating policies that are supposed to be helpful to sex trade workers by always including the voices of the real women who utilize these services. I hope that by having conducted this study, I will bring attention to the complexity that exists in the lives of these often marginalized and vulnerable women.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Trinity Western University
Women in Transition
Participant Consent Form for Research Study Participation

Faith Auton-Cuff, Ph.D. - Principle Investigator
Associate Professor, School of Graduate Studies,
Counselling Psychology Program
(604) 513-2121 (ext. 3837)

Purpose and Benefits

I invite you to be part of a research study. I am curious about how receiving support from a faith-based intervention influences someone leaving the sex trade. I would like to hear from you in your own words what your experience is really like. My goal is to find out from women who have been involved in the sex trade if it helps or doesn't help and why, so that we can help sex workers who want to get out of the sex trade.

For this study, I am looking for women who are 18 years old or older and have given sex for money or other goods (e.g., clothes, cigarettes, drugs) in any place (e.g., street, escort, own home, massage parlour, etc.) during the past three years, and have completed at least one of the faith-based intervention programs at Linwood House as part of a desire to exit from the sex trade industry.

Procedures

If you want to be involved I will ask you to do three things:

1. **Background Questionnaire** – I would like to ask you to fill out an information form (Demographic Questionnaire Form) that asks basic information about your age, race, education, and time spent in the sex trade. Your name will be replaced with a number code to protect your identity. No one will see the form except me and 2 of my graduate students who are helping me with the study.
2. **Experiences Questionnaire** – I would like to ask you to answer some short questions about experiences that you may have had in your daily life, and how often you have these experiences when you are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
3. **Interview** – This interview will last from 50 – 90 minutes. I will ask you questions about receiving support through a faith-based intervention. The interview will be tape recorded.

Confidentiality

I will protect your identity and keep it private so no one can tell who you are. I will give you a number for all forms including the information form. I will give you a fake name (if you so desire) for the interview. The list that tells your real name will be kept in a fire proof, locked filing cabinet apart from the answers you give. Only I and my 2 graduate students will be able to see this list. If you say something in the interview that might let someone guess who you are, we will take it out when we transcribe (write what you say on paper) the interview. The information sheets without names, the tapes, and the written copy of the interview will be kept in a fire proof, locked cabinet. Only people who are involved in the research can see these things. We will only use what you say for research and education purposes. Data will be kept forever.

Risks, Stress or Discomfort

Being in a research study may be new, so it might make you feel a little worried because you have not done it before. Please tell me if you are feeling worried. I will try and help you feel safe and comfortable while we are together. You can ask questions at any time.

After the interviews are over and I begin to write down what you say in the interview I might use some words that you say to make a point. I will use your fake name. If you want to, I will let you look at the interview written on paper and you can erase anything you don't want others to see. Please give me your contact information at the end of this form if you want to see your written interview.

I will really try hard to not ask questions that will harm you in any way. If a question bothers you or is hard to answer, you do not have to answer it. If you feel uncomfortable, please tell me right away and I will help you relax and feel safe before we move on. You can quit at any time.

Participant's Statement

I know what this research study is about and I know what I will do if I choose to take part. I have had a chance to ask questions and I know I can ask questions at any time during or after the interview. I know I am free to not answer a question or quit at any time. I freely choose to be a part of this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Contact

If you have questions about the study or what you are doing for the study or if you feel distressed because of the interview, you are welcome to call me, Dr. Faith Auton-Cuff at (604) 513-2121, ext. 3837. If at any time you have questions about ethical issues of this study or your rights as a research participant, please call Ms. Sue Funk in the Office of Research at Trinity Western University at (604) 513-2142. If you want the study results mailed to you, please write your address at the bottom of this page.

Please circle: Transcripts Results

Name and phone number (for transcripts) or address (for results)

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide: Sex-Trade Worker

1. Do you have any questions before we begin?
2. I'd really like for you to start at the beginning. Begin to tell me about your life experiences that you feel are pertinent to your understanding of what brought you into the sex trade.
 - What was your first experience of prostitution? How did you get involved? Did you anticipate your involvement being long-term?
 - Do you think that you were more susceptible than other women to becoming involved in the sex-trade?
 - If you think back to your experiences in the sex trade industry, can you think of any examples you may want to share with me that were personally significant or vivid for you?
 - Did you use any coping strategies while being involved in the sex trade industry? If so, what strategies did you use? Why do you think this may have been?
 - What commonalities/life experiences do you think exist amongst prostitutes?
 - What was your relationship with other prostitutes? Were you friends or competitors? If you were competitors, why do you think that was so?
 - If you think back over your life up to this point, is there one specific incident you can think of that makes you think that if that had not occurred, your life may have been different?
3. How has being involved in the sex trade industry impacted and influenced your sense of who you are as a woman?
 - What gives you a sense of identity? Is identity important?
 - How do you view yourself as a person? Do you like who you are?
 - What is the role of women in society?
 - What is your view on the sex trade as an economic component in society? Is being a sex trade worker a job?
 - Do you see any benefits in working in the sex trade?
 - Who do you hold responsible for how your life turned out? Other family members, friends, a higher power?
 - From your experience, how do you think sex trade workers are viewed by society? Have you felt like a valued member?

4. Have you ever thought of leaving the sex trade industry? What has influenced your desire to leave?
 - What has been your experience of receiving support during the transition process of exiting?
 - Have you received support from people who work as part of a faith based intervention? If so, what were your experiences?
 - Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Do you have a faith you practice? Does your faith make a difference in the living of your life?
 - What, if anything, has made the biggest difference in your ability to leave the sex trade? If nothing, what do you think may have made a difference?

Appendix C: Demographics Questionnaire

Trinity Western University
Women in Transition
Demographics Questionnaire

Faith Auton-Cuff, Ph.D. – Principle Investigator
Associate Professor, School of Graduate Studies,
Counselling Psychology Program
(604) 513-2121 (ext. 3837)

Participant Name: _____
Participant Case #: _____
Alias Assigned: _____
Mentor: Y or N
Participant: Y or N
Date: _____
Start: _____
End: _____

Introduction

Thank you for choosing to participate in this research study considering how receiving support or giving support from a faith-based intervention like the “Journey” influences women leaving the sex trade. The following questionnaire is designed to collect some basic background information about you that will aid in the interpretation of results. Please complete the questions as accurately and honestly as you can. If a question is unclear to you, feel free to ask me what is meant by the question. If there is a question that makes you uncomfortable you can choose not to respond to it or any other question. If you experience an uncomfortable emotional response as a result of a question on this questionnaire, please inform me at once and measures will be taken to reduce your discomfort immediately. Take as much time as you require completing the questionnaire.

1. What year were you born? _____
2. What is your gender:
 - a) Female
 - b) Male
 - c) Transgender (Male to Female)
 - d) Transgender (Female to Male)
3. What is your ethnicity?
 - a) Caucasian Canadian
 - b) Aboriginal
 - c) African Canadian

- d) Chinese
 - e) Latin American
 - f) East or West Indian
 - g) Japanese
 - h) Other? Please specify: _____
4. What language do you speak most of the time? _____
5. Is there another language you also speak? _____
6. What is your sexual orientation?
- a) Homosexual
 - b) Heterosexual
 - c) Bisexual
 - d) Other? Please specify: _____
7. What is your present living situation? Please circle all that apply to you:
- a) Own house or town house
 - b) Rent house or apartment
 - c) Squat or tent city
 - d) Motel
 - e) Rooming House
 - f) Street
 - g) Hostel
 - h) Shelter/Transition House
 - i) Group Home
 - j) Hotel
 - k) Trick Pad
 - l) With Parent, Guardian or Sibling
 - m) With Pimp
 - n) With Partner
 - o) Other? Please specify: _____
8. What is your education level?
- a) Elementary
 - b) Some High school
 - c) High School Diploma
 - d) GED
 - e) Some College
 - f) Some University
 - g) Some Technical School
 - h) Other? Please specify: _____

9. What is your present intimate relationship status?
 - a) Single, never married
 - b) Casual romantic relationship
 - c) Married
 - d) Divorced
 - e) Common-law
 - f) Separated

10. Have you given birth to any children?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

11. If yes, how many children? _____

12. How many of your children are living in your care at present? _____

13. Approximately how long in total did you work/have you been working in the sex trade?
 - a) Months less than a year: _____
 - b) Years: _____

14. At what age did you begin involvement in the sex trade? _____

15. Have you ever attempted to exit the sex trade prior to attending “The Journey”?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

16. If yes, how many times have you attempted to exit the sex trade? _____

17. Have you ever been involved in another faith-based intervention other than “The Journey”? _____

18. If so, what was the intervention called? _____

19. If you have ever exited the sex trade prior to attending the “Journey” and have not re-entered the sex trade, how long have you been exited?
 - a) Months less that a year: _____
 - b) Years: _____

20. Why did you decide to quit the sex trade? Please list all reasons for each attempt to exit.

21. If you returned to the sex trade following a time/times of exit, why did you decide to return to the sex trade? Please list all reasons for each separate return.

22. Please check the venue(s) of sex trade work in which you have been or still are working for pay (in money or in kind – e.g. housing, food, drugs, cigarettes, etc.)

- a) Street
- b) Escort Agency
- c) Massage Parlour
- d) Own Private Home
- e) Strip Club
- f) Bar
- g) Hotel
- h) Truck Stop
- i) Other? Please specify: _____

6. Some people sometimes find that they are approached by people that they do not know who call them by another name or insist that they have met them before. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

7. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling as though they are standing next to themselves or watching themselves do something as if they were looking at another person. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

8. Some people are told that they sometimes do not recognize friends or family members. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

9. Some people find that they have no memory for some important events in their lives (for example, a wedding or graduation). Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

10. Some people have the experience of being accused of lying when they do not think that they have lied. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

11. Some people have the experience of looking in a mirror and not recognizing themselves. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

12. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling that other people, objects, and the world around them are not real. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

13. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling that their body does not belong to them. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

14. Some people have the experience of sometimes remembering a past event so vividly that they feel as if they were reliving that event. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

15. Some people have the experience of not being sure whether things that they remember happening really did happen or whether they just dreamed them. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

16. Some people have the experience of being in a familiar place but finding it strange and unfamiliar. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

17. Some people find that when they are watching television or a movie they become so absorbed in the story that they are unaware of other events happening around them. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

18. Some people sometimes find that they become so involved in a fantasy or daydream that it feels as though it were really happening to them. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

19. Some people find that they are sometimes able to ignore pain. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

20. Some people find that they sometimes sit staring off into space, thinking of nothing, and are not aware of the passage of time. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

21. Some people sometimes find that when they are alone they talk out loud to themselves. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

22. Some people find that in one situation they may act so differently compared with another situation that they feel almost as if they were different people. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

23. Some people sometimes find that in certain situations they are able to do things with amazing ease and spontaneity that would usually be difficult for them (for example, sports, work, social situations, etc.). Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

24. Some people sometimes find that they cannot remember whether they have done something or have just thought about doing that thing (for example, not knowing whether they have just mailed a letter or have just thought about mailing it). Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

25. Some people find evidence that they have done things that they do not remember doing. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

26. Some people sometimes find writings, drawings, or notes among their belongings that they must have done but cannot remember doing. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

27. Some people find that they sometimes hear voices inside their head that tell them to do things or comment on things that they are doing. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

28. Some people sometimes feel as if they are looking at the world through a fog so that people or objects appear far away or unclear. Circle a number to show what percentage of the time this happens to you.

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%