



LIVING AS A FEMALE TRANSGENDERED SEX WORKER IN CAPE TOWN:

*MOVING TOWARDS NEW DIRECTIONS IN SEX WORK RESEARCH AND BETTER
UNDERSTANDINGS OF AND STRATEGIES FOR COPING AND SUPPORT*

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the greatest concern when it comes to researching the lives of female transgendered persons, and in particular female transgendered sex workers, is the responsibility that comes with attempting to represent voices which are often silenced. It is no strange a concept to us how sex work tends to be viewed in South Africa, and no stranger a concept of how gender-related issues tend to play out and be received in this country. Sex work remains criminalised, and therefore continues to often see *all* forms of sex workers exploited, discriminated against, and stigmatised repeatedly by varying social actors and structures. While organisations such as Sisonke and the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) have made strides in beginning to improve the quality of life and protecting the rights of many sex workers there is still much more to be achieved. As activists supporting freedoms of labour choice, expression, and dignity we are still fighting for the decriminalisation of sex work. Moreover, as feminists supporting the ever-persisting agendas of realising gender equality, we still tend to find ourselves largely and continuously challenging binary, heteronormative, and hegemonic systems and thinking on a daily basis.

Bearing this contextualisation in mind, it is the aim of this research paper to engage with and fairly represent some of the voices of female transgendered sex workers in Cape Town. It is further the aim of this research paper to offer SWEAT a greater lens of understanding into the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers in Cape Town, so that the organisation can continue to better serve their needs. Although the organisation requested an investigation into female transgendered sex work and issues of support, this proved difficult to come by during the interview process, with the accounts of participants steering the research in a broad array of different, but equally important directions. In order to ensure that their voices continued to be effectively captured and represented this research paper focuses on the *lived realities* and *experiences* of female transgendered sex workers and the possible meanings and implications these may have for support going forward and in discussion. In this way the central purpose of this research is *not* to explicitly engage with experiences of support structures and mechanisms. It is rather to explore how some of the relationships and interactions female transgendered sex workers have with personal and social actors alike, other female transgendered sex workers, and SWEAT can manifest, and subsequently how this information could be used going forward to inform and better our understandings of support.

Finally, this decision to focus on the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers emerged after engaging with the previous literature, or instead, a lack thereof. The literature review which ensues documents how female transgendered sex workers have often remained invisible on the sex work research agenda. Furthermore, the review identifies how previous literature which *does* focus attention towards female transgendered sex workers tends to do so in problematic ways. Hence, it has been this literary landscape that has in part informed the shape and form of *this* research paper. We cannot hope to achieve the provision of adequate and effective support if we do not have access to an ever-growing and nuanced body of knowledge about the daily lives and challenges faced by female transgendered sex workers – the development of new trajectories in sex work research needs to begin here.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Investigating and Interrogating the Literature Landscape

With the aims and intentions of this research paper having been presented in the introductory chapter, it is the subsequent purpose of this review to fulfil three tasks. These tasks include a detailed assessment and concise presentation of the current shape and form of previous literature in the field concerning sex work and female transgendered sex workers, a concise but well formulated presentation of existing commentary on female transgendered sex workers and support, and a discussion on some of the literature that currently looks at some of the daily lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers. Although this might seem like a series of fairly typical and standard areas to explore in response to the overarching research question, there is one significant challenge that impacts this process. There exists a fairly significant literature gap and niche around theories and thinking, issues, and narratives of female transgendered sex work. It tends to be more frequently the case that research on (female) transgendered persons and sex workers is written separately from each other, and with rather different areas of focus. However, when female transgendered sex workers *are* mentioned in the previous literature this is often done within research pieces concerned with cisgender female and at times cisgender male sex workers. Therefore, more often than not it is the case that data and information on female transgendered sex workers is used *in relation* to exploration into and discussion around cisgender female sex work. The data and information tends to be collected to give accounts of the realities and experiences of cisgender female sex workers, with female transgendered sex workers used as a reference point to say something about the nature of cisgender female sex work (Gould & Fick, 2008; SANAC Sex Workers Report, 2013).

This aforementioned literature gap and niche also manifests in other and possibly even more pervasive ways. As possibly an even greater occurrence across previous literature pertaining to issues of sex work, there is a near silence and absence of female transgendered sex worker voices and life stories. With specific attention to the South African and Cape Town contexts, there is even a dearth of literature on the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers by persons and organisations at the forefront of challenges to the continued criminalisation, discrimination, and stigma of sex work. Often the most frequent mention of female transgendered sex workers is in a series of graphs and/or tables documenting population size and/or other sex industry-related statistics. Although this is

important, it is not enough. If female transgendered sex workers are mentioned in the body of a research text, this tends to involve only a few sentences or paragraphs. At times this can even alarmingly take the shape of a single sentence. In almost all cases these in-text documentations are in reference to a broader and cisgender female-related sex work topic. Additionally, it tends often to be the case that references to female transgendered sex work are not comprehensive enough to begin to think about and/or answer the questions asked and answered of cisgender female sex work (Fick, 2005; Gould & Fick, 2008; SANAC Sex Workers Report, 2013). This being said, in current times there appear to be certain steps being taken towards beginning to address and rectify this; something that is evident in the request by SWEAT of the researcher to use this research paper to focus explicitly on female transgendered sex work(ers), and something which needs to be ongoing.

Still focusing on the literature niche and gap in research on female transgendered sex work, it is noteworthy to mention that the need to address this stretches beyond silences and absences. It also concerns the very structure of gendered and feminist research around sex work and its workers at the level of the 'general-sphere'. While the documentation of meanings and lived realities and experiences of sex work and being a sex worker is important in each and every research capacity it *cannot* continue to be so largely and solely orientated towards cisgender female women. Taking nothing away from the value such research bears towards improving the quality of life for cisgender female sex workers and greater moves towards achieving gender equality, it also needs to be recognised that gendered bodies are, and consequently who needs and gets to be encompassed into the category 'woman' is, diverse and in need of specific attention to context-particular narratives and life stories. We cannot hope to achieve effective gender equality if we do not exhaust the possible realities of who we may be talking about. Moreover, we can hope even less to achieve sufficient and effective social justice for *all* sex workers located within the current South African context, and beyond, if we do not actively seek to include female transgendered sex workers and their many lived realities, experiences, and voices into the existing literature.

Beyond the gap(s) there are also issues with *how* female transgendered sex workers tend to be represented in research comprising the previous literature. When female transgendered sex workers *are* represented this tends to occur in considerably limiting and problematic ways. These ways have tended to shape a very particular landscape of restrictive and repetitive thinking, ideas, and discourses about female transgendered sex workers being 'high risk' and extremely vulnerable populations. The most persistent themes which arise include heightened

STI and HIV/AIDS risk and steps towards prevention and reduction of this risk, issues of and accessibility to sexual health and healthcare along with the evaluation of the effectiveness of current healthcare interventions, and possible factors implicated in the increased vulnerability faced by female transgendered sex workers (Crosby & Pitts, 2007; Harcourt et al., 2001; Hwahng & Nuttbrock, 2007; Infante, Sosa-Rubi & Cuadra, 2009; Nadal, Davidoff & Fujii-Doe, 2014; Sausa, Keatley & Operario, 2007). Although these all constitute pivotal aspects for consideration in improving the quality of life for female transgendered sex workers, it is the continued and narrow focus on *mostly only* these aspects that proves problematic. The narrow focus stunts the potential for identifying and exploring more diverse, nuanced, and complex features of and factors concerning the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers. Subsequently, this can result in the (re)creation, maintenance, circulation, and perpetuation of constructions of female transgendered sex workers which *do not* sufficiently challenge the discrimination, stigmatisation, and marginalisation they tend to face.

It may be necessary to clarify and deepen what is being suggested by the above arguments. The problematic aspects of the previous literature do not necessarily lie in *what* is being researched; the literature that has been compiled and accumulated to date offers important insight into many of the challenges female transgendered sex workers can face and some of the possible reasons having motivated their entrance into the industry (Crosby & Pitts, 2007; Harcourt et al., 2001; Hwahng & Nuttbrock, 2007; Infante, Sosa-Rubi & Cuadra, 2009; Nadal, Davidoff & Fujii-Doe, 2014; Sausa, Keatley & Operario, 2007). Furthermore, the importance of data and information that could aid in developing better understandings of and reduce sexual health risks, as well as contribute to the improvement of current healthcare strategies and facilities, cannot be overlooked. However, there *is* something problematic in many previous research orientations primarily focusing on and framing female transgendered sex workers as ‘high risk’, HIV/AIDS-prone, and troubled populations, often cornered into sex work due to a lack of alternative opportunities (Crosby & Pitts, 2007; Harcourt et al., 2001; Hwahng & Nuttbrock, 2007; Infante, Sosa-Rubi & Cuadra, 2009; Nadal, Davidoff & Fujii-Doe, 2014; Sausa, Keatley & Operario, 2007). While this is not to say that such aspects are not features of *some* female transgendered sex worker realities, it needs to be noted that it limits the possibilities of beginning to hear and see lived realities and experiences that speak of agency, sex work as a viable and flexible source of work, the deep intersectionalities and intricacies of relationships with others and broader society, and the nature and navigation of

politics and challenges. If we hope to achieve deeper and more nuanced understandings into how to realise greater gender equality and offer better suited and impacting support structures and mechanisms, we *need* to begin exploring more diverse aspects and meanings of female transgendered sex work; something this very research paper aims to achieve.

1.2) Emerging Literature on Support

Given the shape and form of the available literature as it currently stands, and in terms of the aims formulated and expressed in the introductory chapter, even though this research paper does not explicitly explore types and meanings of support as they are experienced by female transgendered sex workers, it does need to consider what we *do* know about support and female transgendered sex work from the previous literature. However, having established the focus of this research paper to be a detailed documentation of some of the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers, this review will consider support from the point of what we know about a) documented relationships between female transgendered sex workers and informal and more formal networks of support, and b) documented accounts of the types of support tending to be experienced and needed by female transgendered persons. The latter of these two emerges out of previous literature surrounding transgendered persons and issues as a broader whole, and so may not necessarily always consider meanings, realities, and experiences with context specificity to *female* transgendered persons. Despite this, the literature drawn upon here still bears considerable relevance to what this section of the review hopes to achieve. In beginning to look at the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers relative to support we can begin to think about how these realities and experiences might inform and (re)shape support structures and mechanisms as they currently exist, and hence, begin to create a growing literature on female transgendered sex work and support.

In looking for previous literature that explores some of the possible relationships between female transgendered sex workers and informal networks of support, there was one study that appeared to offer some degree of relevance. Yet again this seems to support the arguments formulated within the preceding section around the current shape and form of the available literature. This being said, Collumbien et al. (2009) provide innovative and interesting research that begins to explore and engage with some of the possible relationships which can exist *between* female transgendered sex workers. Using varying ethnographic techniques the authors attempt to offer insight into some of the dynamics of social and power relations

between and amongst male sex workers and female transgendered sex workers in Pakistan. They show how *khusras* (female transgendered sex workers in the context of Pakistan) form key social networks of emotional and material support among themselves; possibly as a type of coping response to discrimination and stigma from personal and other social actors in their lives. The *khusras* comprise two hierarchically ordered sub-groups of female transgendered sex workers called *gurus* and *chailas*. *Gurus* are typically older female transgendered sex workers who ‘mentor’ and afford support to *chailas* in the way of accommodation, skills of the trade, customers, and safer places to conduct business. In exchange, *chailas*, usually younger transgendered sex workers who are new to or entering sex work, provide the *gurus* a monetary contribution.

What Collumbien et al. (2009) do well to demonstrate is how the relationships between the *gurus* and the *chailas* can be a simultaneous site of solidarity and oppression. The *chailas* only have access to the provisions and protections offered by the *gurus* if they adhere to the requirements and demands of the *gurus*. Consequently, the *chailas* can only rely on the emotional and material support of the *gurus*, and obtain the greater protection the *gurus* provide against the vulnerabilities and violence perpetrated by clients, the police, and broader communities, if they perform more ‘feminine behaviours’ in their sexual practices and do not get married and/or have children. Failure to uphold these requirements can result in penalties, punishment, and isolation from the *khusras* as a social group on the whole. Firstly, this shows how sites of belonging can also become sites of (re)constructed and reconstituted forms of discrimination and stigma, resulting in multiple levels of isolation. Secondly, it foregrounds how relationships with others may not always achieve effective support. Instead relationships and interactions with others tend to be shaped by relations of power, and this is a factor that will need to be considered when exploring and engaging with the lived realities and experiences of the participants informing this research paper. Moreover, other strategies for coping may present themselves due to dynamics such as those aforementioned, and would need to be looked out for and documented.

A study by Hines (2007) looks at more formal networks of support *and* the types of support that may be experienced and/or needed by (female) transgendered persons. While the study does not see the participation of female transgendered sex workers, there is still relevance and value to be taken from the perspectives and ideas shared by (female) transgendered persons, as the transgendered aspect of one’s social identity is likely to always play a big role in how any life situation is experienced. Some of the findings explore how support and self-help

groups are experienced by (female) transgendered persons in the UK, and evaluate the value such groups contributed to their quality of living and feelings around coping and care. What these findings suggest is that support and self-help groups can be instrumental in providing considerable and necessary support at different stages of a (female) transgendered person's life, particularly at the commencement of their participation in a group. This was, in part, attributed to the presence of a group ethos of shared experiences that built solidarity, comfort, and reassurance. Subsequently, this holds particular relevance to exploring the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers in this research paper, because some of these realities and experiences will be linked to the role of SWEAT in the participants' lives. This study will offer a useful system of evaluation to compare how relationships of formal support may be similar and/or different from previous literature.

1.3) The Challenges We Know

In terms of nature and prevalence, stigma, discrimination, and violence are social phenomena that are well documented across the available literature concerning female transgendered sex workers (Brooks-Gordon, 2008; Infante, Sosa-Rubi & Cuadra, 2009). Therefore, it could possibly be identified as the primary recurring theme across most, if not all, of the studies reviewed thus far. Having conducted a study specifically orientated towards engaging with some of the vulnerabilities faced by male and *travesti*, transgendered, and transsexual sex workers in Mexico, Infante, Sosa-Rubi & Cuadra (2009) offer formidable insight into this nature and prevalence of stigma, discrimination, and violence as it tends to be experienced by female transgendered sex workers in this particular context. The authors illustrate how *travesti*, trans-gendered, and transsexual sex workers (TTT) are the most affected by stigma, discrimination and violence. They show TTT to be the most vulnerable to physical, emotional, and psychological violence and abuse at the hands of both their families and broader communities, high-lighting scenarios of TTT being socially rejected by and isolated from their communities and families, sexually abused by family members, refused access to public facilities and amenities and verbally insulted, beaten up, and even at times incarcerated and sexually abused by police and prison staff. To aggravate this, TTT tend to be discriminated against by members of the gay communities within this context.

Brooks-Gordon (2008) draws on the empirical work of others to provide a concise account of the nature of police violence mentioned above. Although she looks at police violence largely within a European context, through a study conducted in Serbia, that is likely to differ some-

what from experiences of police violence in Mexico, she draws attention to a very important consideration; police violence appears to be a social reality and pressing problem facing sex workers across many contexts. She shows this to be particularly the case for female transgendered sex workers, who tend constantly to be faced with violence, manipulation, bullying, public humiliation, sexual coercion, monetary extortion, and even murder in certain instances. Possible reasons suggested for the prevalence of such acts towards transvestite and transgender sex workers tend to centre on their 'locus of challenge' as particularly gendered and sexual bodies that disrupt heteronormative framings and assumptions surrounding gender and sexuality.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological chapter of any research endeavour proves to be an important component in the understanding and systematic flow of the intended research (Punch, 2005). Resultantly, it is of equal importance that this chapter serves to equip the reader with a clear and concise breakdown of how the research has been framed and is to be conceptualised going forward. Further aims of this chapter include introducing the reader to the processes and experiences of data collection, ethics, and reflexivity, as well as some of the limitations that shaped the research journey and that now shape the final research product. These are the factors which see discussion around the various methodologies employed during conducting this research organised into five sub-sections; under the headings methodological framework, research methods, data collection, ethics and reflexivity, and limitations.

Methodological framework

The methodological framework used throughout this research project can possibly be thought of and conceptualised in terms of a four point frame. Firstly, it is qualitative, and while this does not automatically make the research feminist, it does foreground how the research aims to deeply unpack, engage with, and understand the data collected. In the context of this paper, what is immersed in deep unpacking, engagement, and understandings are the stories of lived realities shared by the female transgendered sex workers interviewed. It is the purpose of qualitative research to specialise in meanings, and the deep exploration of meanings, in the hopes of identifying and developing particular understandings around specific issues which are affecting particularly located social actors and/or groups. This can also aid in the creation of aims and efforts to address such issues. Moreover, qualitative research seeks to document and engage with the highly particular lived realities and experiences of persons in order to formulate key, necessary, and better developed systems of knowledge(s) around social actors and/or groups that might otherwise continue to be misunderstood, marginalised, and subject to continuous stigma and discrimination (Flick, Von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

At the second point on the methodological frame, the research is also informed by thinking and ideas rooted in queer theories. Queer theories tend to refer to any thinking and theorising that attempts to disrupt or destabilise assumed ‘coherencies’ within social relationships between persons, structures, and/or social phenomena. Therefore, thinking and theorising in a ‘queer’ manner involves both considering and engaging with social constructs such as race,

gender, and class (to name but the typical three) in ways that challenge or invert assumed and/or typical meanings and patterns of understanding around such constructs (Jagose, 1996). With a focus on the context of this paper, the research is 'queer' in its efforts to further destabilise the assumed relationship between sex, gender, and sexualities; offering female transgendered sex workers a platform from which to share some of their lived realities and experiences, and have these realities and experiences considered seriously. The destabilising of assumed relationships and meanings is realised through the aims of the research, which seek to make female transgendered sex workers visible in ways that avoid presenting them solely as an HIV/AIDS and 'risk population'. By formulating a research project that is not shaped by HIV/AIDS and healthcare discourses, but rather the meanings and experiences of being a female transgendered sex worker (in Cape Town), past and current approaches to issues around female transgendered sex work become challenged or 'queered'.

Lastly, the research is shaped and informed by feminist and constructivist trajectories. The research is feminist because it takes seriously the impact of binary and hegemonic thinking, relations, and structures on particularly sexed, gendered, and sexual bodies. Furthermore, it is feminist because it seeks to engage with issues around being a female transgendered person and sex work in ways that are critical of how the relationship(s) between sex, gender, and sexualities tend to be constructed at macro *and* micro levels of society. It also aims to grapple with and understand, as well as challenge, the stigma tending to surround and marginalisation of female transgendered sex workers. The research is constructivist in how it identifies, acknowledges, and emphasises fluidity and the absence of a singular or core 'truth' in the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers. Thus, it acknowledges the meanings and experiences of female transgendered sex work and the subsequent analyses performed by the researcher to be subjectively shaped and documented. This final methodological framing approach sees the research seeking to be sensitive to the varying and innumerable ways in which sex, gender, and sexualities can and may interact and be shaped by highly context-specific sociopolitical, sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociohistorical processes. It also prioritises the acknowledgement and awareness of the multiplicity of social identities female transgendered sex workers have, and how these intersect with each other to position female transgendered sex workers in very particular ways (Flick, Von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Research Methods

This sub-section discusses the research strategies used to collect the required data and analyse it afterwards. As such, these research strategies included purposive sampling, semi-structured interviewing, and thematic analysis. Due to the qualitative nature of the research it was not possible for sampling to be achieved through a probability method. Instead non-probability sampling was needed and utilised. This stems from the focus of the research centring on the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers rather than the accuracy, representivity, generalisability, or any such statistical measure of female transgendered sex workers as a population (Marshall, 1996; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Moreover, because the selected sampling method would need to result in specific access to information around the lived realities, experiences, and meanings of female transgendered sex work, it was necessary to use purposive sampling. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) show purposive sampling to be a method of selecting participants on the grounds of a particular criterion or set of criteria that will enable a specific research question to be sufficiently and effectively answered, resulting from the criterion or criteria being directly related to the research focus. Additionally, purposive sampling directly targets the participation of a specific ‘population’ most ideally suited towards engaging deeply with a particular research focus, particularly if the focus is explicitly addressing the possible meanings of the experiences of a highly specific and/or marginalised group of persons.

Continuing with sampling, the selected sample size for this research project was eight to ten female transgendered sex workers from the Cape Town area. Although no additional factors were or needed to be controlled for, it is important to note that each participant contributed their own personal set of intersectionalities that will impact the outcomes and shape of this research project. The selected sample size effectively controlled for participant no-shows and this is an aspect of discussion that receives further attention in the following sub-section. Furthermore, qualitative research necessitates small sample sizes on account of three specific reasons; data saturation, the need for depth and detail in the data, and statements of incidence or prevalence concerned with estimates and statistics not being a qualitative priority. Data saturation refers to how if the data collected is sufficiently and effectively analysed a point will be reached whereby relatively little “new evidence” will be uncovered (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003:83). Hence, if this does prove to be a feature of the data it will also be rich and multidimensional, shaped by many complexities and conflicts, and subsequently not suitable for generalisability to a large-scale ‘population’ (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). Lastly, it is

important to note the role of SWEAT in shaping the type of sampling selected *and* the sample size, as it was the organisation itself that provided the space and ‘population’ from which to obtain and interview participants.

As mentioned above, the semi-structured individual interviewing method was utilised for data collection. Some of the decision-making informing use of the semi-structured format entailed its overall feasibility relative to other interviewing techniques and its use of an interview guide. The simultaneous structure and flexibility specific to and afforded by semi-structured interviewing seemed an appropriate means for obtaining an adequate and effective answer to the research question; more so than the rigid and restricting style of structured interviewing or the intangibility of unstructured interviewing. Therefore, the aid of an interview guide proved a far better strategy than entering the interviewing situation with either a calculated schedule of questions or a single guiding question, particularly due to the basic previous interviewing experience and developing skills of the researcher when considering the latter of these two. In this way, participants were able to engage with a particular set of ideas and themes in any which way they saw fit, while still being encouraged to stay on topic by the interview guide if they happened to stray. Moreover, use of an interview guide allowed for the delivery of questions in a way that was mindful of the sensitivity of certain topics and the sensitivity linked with interviewing transgendered persons (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Using individual interviews instead of a focus group emerged in an attempt to gain as much depth and detail from the data as possible and avoid in-group censorship and difficulty in trying to negotiate unfamiliar in-group dynamics (Finch & Lewis, 2003).

Thematic analysis was used to analyse and engage with the data collected from interviewing the participants. The primary reason for this involves the purpose of the research question and this research project; to explore and engage with the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers in the Cape Town area. Thus, because this question and focus area centres on similarities and differences across what the participants shared with the researcher, how language and narrative structures are constituted do not form part of the factors to be deeply, critically, and extensively engaged with. Rather there is a need to “unearth the themes salient in [the] text at different levels” (Attride-Stirling, 2001:387). In the context of this paper, this means identifying and documenting recurring ideas, thinking, and stories concerning the participants’ daily realities and experiences and their relationships with other social actors and structures. This makes discourse, narrative, and content approaches less

suitable for this research project than the selected thematic analysis (Spencer, Ritchie & O' Connor, 2003).

Data Collection

During the process of collecting data it can occur that the originally proposed research methods may deviate slightly from actual fieldwork events. In the case of this research project, the final sample saw participation from eight female transgendered sex workers, all of whom attend and are regulars at *Sistahood*; the female transgendered sex workers' "creative space" SWEAT offers on a fortnightly basis. There could have been a ninth participant had her scheduled interview not become subject to constant rescheduling and no-shows. Resultantly, this final interview fell through. In terms of interviewing the participants, some proved more willing to engage and share information than others, leading to a variation of longer and shorter interview sessions. Although touched on in more depth in the following sub-section, it is important to mention here that each participant signed an informed consent form and agreed to the recording of their interviews before they commenced.

Ethics and Reflexivity

Research concerning female transgendered persons and/or transgender issues will always be considerably sensitive in nature. The same can be said for issues surrounding sex work within the South African context, particularly due to the continued criminalisation and stigmatisation of the industry. This stems from both female transgendered persons and persons involved in sex work being among possibly some of the most marginalised within and across varying contexts. Furthermore, it makes marginalisation all the more emphasised a factor for female transgendered sex workers. With a focus on female transgendered persons (and sex workers), they can often find themselves marginalised across *various* social identities, such as race and class, and not only just in terms of gender and gender identity politics. This seems particularly likely within the South African context given the particular nature of diversities which are specific to the country. Female transgendered persons (and sex workers) may also tend to find themselves feeling rather '*spectacle-ised*', or being part of a continuous social experiment (Green, 2006). Even with a considerably narrow literature base addressing their lived realities and experiences they can still be at the receiving end of a lot of social curiosity as others attempt to make sense of their sexed and gendered identities, often from within binary, patriarchal, heteronormative, and hegemonic ways of thinking, interacting, and behaving. Hence, while social curiosity can be experienced on an everyday, interactional

basis, it can also be felt and experienced at a professional, academic, and/or institutional level. Consequently, this has been an ethically-related factor considered throughout the compiling of this research project.

Beyond sensitivity, other ethical concerns having received attention pertain to the integrity of the participants. This entailed and continues to entail maintaining confidentiality and privacy at all times; an aspect that has been accounted for primarily through informed consent. Each participant was informed verbally and in writing about the intentions of the research, the sole academic purposes of the research, the interview proceedings and requirements, benefits and reciprocity, and protection from harm in so far as is possible (Lewis, 2003). Moreover, the participants were assured that the stories they shared during their interviews would not be seen, heard, or engaged with by any other person besides the researcher. They were assured that they and their identities would be protected at all stages of the research project and beyond, and that no-one would be able to identify them in writing or by any other means. This objective has been aided by the use of participant codes. Finally, each participant received a copy of the informed consent form that was signed by researcher and participant alike.

England (1994) creates a rather innovative and insightful discussion around reflexivity for the researcher, particularly regarding its value to and throughout the research process. One of the leading ideas she presents is a need to conceptualise reflexivity as an integral part of the ethical considerations and processes tending to shape and inform research endeavours. She emphasises the importance of reflexivity in beginning to think about the possible impact the researcher can have on the research process and shaping of interactions with participants. Without active consideration of this impact, particular power relations between the researcher and participants, “colonising” voices that misrepresent or are heard over those of participants, and failure by researchers to position themselves and/or their impact on the shape and form of the final research product, may be overlooked and insufficiently grappled with (England, 1994:81). Hence, she frames reflexivity as both a necessary and inescapable process which is self-reflective over and accountable to the biography and positionality of the researcher. She goes on to show reflexivity as crucial to effective feminist research practice, due to its focus on whose voices are getting to be heard, when, and how, issues of context-specificities, and issues concerning the representation of persons from the locus of their social locations.

When considering my very own positionality and biography, it becomes possible to identify a complex network of somewhat advantageous and disadvantageous social identities, as well as their respective politics that can both facilitate and hinder processes of research. Among some of the more ‘advantageous’ of these could be my gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, and educational background. Those more ‘disadvantageous’ likely include my race, class, certain cultural, belief, and value systems, geographical positioning, and status as a researcher and academic scholar. In sum, I am a female-bodied, gender queer individual (although socially classified woman), who is white, middle-class, lesbian, South African and an honours student at the University of Cape Town. Thus, certain factors such as occupying a female body, being socially perceived as a woman and identifying as lesbian may have contributed to my participants feeling more comfortable with the idea of sharing more intimate aspects of their lives with me. They may have perhaps felt some level of resonance with features of my own experiences and realities of marginalisation. However, having white privilege and fair economic security, being perceived as a cisgender woman, and being a degree-holding scholar and researcher have likely created particular politics and power dynamics that I have had to do my best to be aware of, negotiate, and adapt to the needs, knowledge(s), positionalities, and biographies of my participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explores and engages with the findings, attempting to make sense of and understand what they may and do mean for the participants involved, and what this may possibly and subsequently mean in terms of the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers within the Cape Town context. The primary role of analysis, and thematic analysis in terms of this paper, is to develop a network of systematic and recurrent themes that offer the reader a means of beginning to understand the voices of those interviewed. This is important for beginning to formulate greater understanding around the daily lives and challenges of female transgendered sex work, beginning to establish what it may mean to be a female transgendered sex worker, and for obtaining the specific nuances and stories that appear to have been missed up until this point in time with regards to previous literature on female transgendered sex work.

Resultantly, when we consider broadly the responses of the eight participants having agreed to participate in this research project, we can identify and discuss six key topical areas. Each of these topical areas can be found to be deeply complex and nuanced in and of themselves, and as expected no less of the voices and accounts of female transgendered sex workers each area deals with a vast range of concepts and ideas. However, one key thread running across the various points of discussion is the pivoted focus on relationships with others. Consequently, this exists as possibly the key factor of concern with regards to the investigation within this research project; what are the various relationships female transgendered sex workers have with themselves, other female transgendered sex workers and even cisgender sex workers, their families, intimate partners, social actors within and members of society, and last but not least SWEAT?

1) “Self-dependency, self-knowing, self-isolation and being alone”

Of all the themes that arose across the responses of the participants this appeared by far the most prevalent. Each of the eight participants in some capacity or another highlighted the importance of the self; the importance of being able to rely upon oneself as a site of support and the importance of having a sense of self, even if this meant committing oneself to a near lifelong journey of self-discovery and self-learning. Many of the eight participants recognised the importance of self-acceptance irrespective of what the broader society and other social actors might have to say or think about them. There were often sentiments that in order to survive, both as a sex worker *and* a female transgendered person, there needed to exist a first

and internal port of call. This means that many of the participants felt that in order to achieve any means of sustainable survival they should and would need to look to themselves and their own resilience first before even thinking about attempting to seek the help and support of others, regardless of whether this be sought through more personal or public routes. In fact, in certain cases a few participants identified help and support-seeking behaviour as detrimental to effective survival. These participants thought that not relying on their own resilience and personal capacities, and instead relying on the help and support of others, might see them detract and deviate from what they identified as being positive aspects and pathways within their lives. Therefore, these participants expressed that they felt including intimate partners and other people into their lives might distract them from following and achieving their goals and working on strengthening themselves and instead see them turning to unsatisfactory strategies of coping such as engaging in drug and alcohol use.

“For me, if you want to offload something, go to the library, go to the internet, go sit somewhere for you. It must start by you.” – Participant II

“Support? I’m support!” – Participant IV

“... they want to break me down, but I ignore it, I keep everything inside. I just walk away...”

“You must tell yourself you’re a survivor, through anything happening to you, you must just pull through, because this is a swimming game. You must be strong and say look here, nothing will happen, because this is a surviving game.” – Participant I

“... you have to support on your own.” – Participant VI

“I need to look after myself” – Participant VIII

Some participants expressed how it appeared better to invest in “being alone”. Thus, and possibly contrary to what one might expect from members of a marginalised group who might very well be thought to need and/or want to actively seek and benefit from support structures and mechanisms, these participants yet again expressed how engaging with others and needing or wanting physical, social, and/or emotional entities from others might be to their detriment. Participants who expressed a need or a will to be alone suggested that this was a better path to self-growth and self-discovery because no-one could get in the way of discovering and informing who they were and/or who they thought they wanted to be. Moreover, they could be in charge of deciding what they wanted and needed without feeling

like they had to consult or check in with anybody else. A few participants suggested that the only way in which a female transgendered person could learn to accept themselves and to grow into the person they felt they needed to be was to engage in this process alone, as others were likely to hinder and impact on this process by creating additional “baggage” and constraints rather than facilitating a space for the person in question to develop and strengthen as self-sufficient actors. In the same breath, however, many of the participants *including* those who had previously indicated the imperative and necessity in “being alone”, highlighted how they could tend to feel alone and lonely. This contrasted rather starkly to notions of “being alone” in the sense that where they felt they would have liked and could have benefited from having supportive actors and structures in their lives they were instead isolated from this on the grounds of stigma and discrimination from members of their family, clients, the police, and other members of society. A number of participants deeply emphasised how they would appreciate having such actors, in particular members of their families who had rejected them, simply take the time and effort to understand them and their identities as female transgendered individuals. What was interesting in such responses was how their requests and wishes for greater understanding and acceptance were *only* spoken about in terms of their female transgendered identities and *not* in terms of their line of work, regardless of whether or not their families and personal contacts were aware of their engagement in sex work or not.

“... alone for me is better, better than anything on earth. Alone is the, conditionally alone, is the only survival you’ll need. You’ll only grow when you’re alone, because if you participate in groups, partnerships, parties, whatever, you’ll forget what you must do and that is dangerous.” – Participant II

However, despite these findings and the strength of the participants’ convictions around self-reliance and self-sufficiency, many of the participants also expressed a deep desire to be understood and accepted by social actors in both their personal lives and the broader society. This displays a sense of conflict and contradiction of wills and needs for female transgender sex workers when it comes to coping with the many challenges and difficulties they tend to need to face on a daily basis regarding both their gendered identities and their line of work.

A prominent line of tendency across all the responses from participants entailed a strong attitude of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Tying in with the discussion above, each of the eight participants identified that when it came to a first and a last port of call they felt that

they could and should only rely on themselves to effectively manoeuvre their way through trying situations and difficult circumstances. Hence, the participants expressed this feeling as they experienced and had it, identifying it to be “the only way to fully and effectively approach life situations and difficulties” and shared how they would draw on and utilise self-devised strategies to deal with such situations and difficulties. Often these strategies would entail the participants standing their ground in conflict with other social actors, irrespective of whether this was overt violence or more covert discrimination. The participants would enact their agency through refusing to engage with those who were discriminatory towards them, verbally abusing them and calling them derogatory names such as “*moffie*” and indicating how they were “not real women”. Ignoring such acts and actively seeking to not care what others thought or said about them was seen as a marker of self-respect. Other times, if and when a particular situation demanded it of them such as during a physical encounter and/or violence, they would fight back. The agency in fighting back lay in their ability to decide when and where it would be an appropriate response for them to fight back. This was illustrated to be decided mostly relative to the other actor in question and the nature of the situation within which fighting back would occur. However, more often than not the participants indicated how they would mostly attempt to create and use strategies that would see them avoid a difficult situation and continue to hold them in the best possible light; unto themselves and others. Across most of the eight participants the leading coping strategy emerged within having a strong sense of knowing who they were and where they might be going in life, and how nobody, irrespective of what they could and would say could take that away from them.

“...first I was very rude, when people is like saying that, and then I was very rude and then I said ugly words, but when the time goes on I learned to, umm, leave them alone, if they say something I just walk past them and, I don't even make remarks or something. I just walk, yes.” – Participant VII

“They can just say whatever they want to say as long as nothing harms me. If a person doesn't touch my body physically, you can say whatever you say about me as long as you are not touching me, and you saying what you doing as long as you're not touching me. I'm living my life and doing my work.” – Participant V

2) “Being a transgender”: Relationships with clients, police, and other social actors

2.1) Clients

This section possibly encompasses some of the most intricate and important responses that were given by the eight participants contributing to this research. Of all eight series of stories and information shared there was a rather deep telling of their relationships and experiences with difficult clients, the police, and the broader society at large. All eight participants spoke of encountering difficulties with clients. Their accounts revealed most of their client base to be cisgender men and often cisgender men who sought after the sexual services of a transgendered woman. However, participants shared how it would frequently be the case that after providing clients with sexual services they would either refuse to pay them for their work or demand to get their money back due to the fact that they were “not real women” in the eyes of these clients or because the client had thought “she would be a real woman or would be somebody else”. Irrespective of the relative ‘success’ of female transgendered sex workers in passing as ‘women’ when we consider how their bodies are often, if not always, contextualised through the lens of binary, heteronormative, and hegemonic thinking, it seems clear that these clients are seeking to discriminate against female transgendered sex workers not only on the grounds of the work they do, but also on the grounds of their gendered identities and how transgendered bodies tend to be received on a broader scope of focus. Whether this is to actively escape paying and exploit the female transgendered sex worker in question, or as a reaction of discrimination towards them due to wanting and fulfilling a desire morally and socially condemned by broader society, the arguments forwarded by these difficult clients are clearly unfounded. Either way, this is a difficulty that consistently and continuously impacts the eight participants of this research and seemingly many other female transgendered sex workers in Cape Town and likely beyond.

The eight participants also spoke of how they could and would encounter both threats of and actual physical violence from clients. One participant recounted how she had been threatened and taken by one of her clients one evening to be thrown into a nearby river. Had it not been for intervention by the police she indicates that she may likely have been killed. Another participant recounted how upon being paid R1000 to perform a ‘full house’ service for a client the one evening he demanded to borrow R200 back the following morning in order to travel to work. When she refused and said she could not do this as he was not a regular client

and she could not trust him to pay the money back to her, he threatened to take the fully paid amount back from her, physically fought with her, and attempted to throw her out of the window on the fourth floor as she was attempting to leave. This account represents how the participants interviewed in this research and likely other female transgendered sex workers may have to engage in physically fighting back to defend and/or protect themselves. It also highlights how pervasive the threat and incidence of physical violence is for these participants and other female transgendered sex workers; so much so that all eight participants spoke of a having a constant reality and fear of having to deal with verbally and physically abusive clients, being hurt and/or injured and facing severe harm and possibly even death. Moreover, it is important to note that while varying forms of discrimination and violence perpetrated against sex workers is quite well-documented across previous literature, research, and a number of other sources, the discrimination and violence that tends to occur against female transgendered sex workers happens on grounds specific to their gender identities and this can often exacerbate the severity of discrimination and violence committed and experienced.

“Clients, whoa, you know what about clients, when they discover you are like, you don’t have a vagina, some of them will kill you, some of them hit you. They even one night, one of the clients even take me here to the river and he wants to throw me in the river because I’m a transgender sex worker.” – Participant VII

“Some clients are like, oh, I thought you’re a woman.”- Participant IV

“It is difficult, there are guys, who know that you’re not a woman, take advantage...” – Participant I

Despite the pervasive nature of having to continuously deal with difficult clients, many of the participants shared strategies they used to challenge difficulties, discrimination, and physical violence. Some of the most widely used strategies included avoiding clients who were known to be problematic and cause issues and/or to refuse to do business with a client with whom there had previously been issues experienced with regards to payment. Moreover, in certain cases they would let other co-workers know of problem clients and warn them to avoid doing business with them. The second participant referred to above also indicated that she has forged a mutually beneficial relationship with another male sex worker who operates as her pimp. Here, rather than seeing the often posited and clichéd relationship whereby the pimp is seen as being the exploiter and the sex worker the exploited, her relationship with the male

sex worker sees him offering her protection and help if a client refuses to pay. With his support she is able to fight for her money because the clients often appear less willing to argue with her male sex worker pimp. She also highlights that the agreement held between her and the male sex worker have been forged due to identifying similar work constraints and issues. Her pimp is willing to help her out not only because it functions as another form of business arrangement, but because they have identified similar challenges in dealing with clients. Other ways in which many of the participants handled difficult clients was by being selective as to who they would enter business with. They would always talk to the client first before entering the client's car, always assess the nature and manner of the client, and if they did not necessarily feel comfortable about the way the client appeared to them and their safety with the client they would not go with the client.

"The other day I saw him and refused to do business."

"So I just use this guy and he was working as a MSW a male sex worker and I was working as a transgender. He asked me about the challenges I was getting as I work on the toad so I tell him, then he told me we are facing same challenges the difference is he's working as a MSW and I'm working as a transgender so he just asked me do you mind if I become your pimp I said no I don't mind because at the end I need a pimp. So we just like business partners so we want work like that." – Participant V

"I don't just jump into any car." – Participant VIII

2.2) Police

Many of the participants also discussed encounters and their relationships with members of the police. At least half of the participants indicated that their relationships with the police were and/or had at some point or the other been negative in nature. The fear and act of condom confiscation by the police was talked about by some of the participants at length. In such situations the police could search them, and then even if not necessarily arrest them, take away any condoms they might have with them and/or on their person. These participants foregrounded how this could present them with problems in negotiating safer sexual practices with clients. In situations where clients were already reluctant to use condoms, this could become exacerbated by needing to go and purchase more condoms from a shop or fetch condoms from public amenities or venues offering them for free. Clients could become impatient and unwilling to agree to wait for condoms to be acquired, and this could result in

the participants either possibly losing clients or being forced into or agreeing to participate in unprotected sex. One participant also spoke at length about the act of confiscating condoms being related to “*condom confirmation*”, whereby the police would take the finding of condoms on a person in question as a marker of them being a sex worker. Some police subsequently tended to use this as a means to justify abusive behaviour such as using pepper spray on female transgendered sex workers. In sum total, this was raised to be an issue of particular concern that impedes on the ability of female transgendered sex workers to effectively conduct their business, exercise their human rights, and be protected from public humiliation.

“Well we have condom confirmation where police believe if they find you with condoms you're a sex worker. It's wrong, our paralegals have been working against taking condoms, it is illegal because they avoiding rights of sex workers to have safe sex. Because people there believe all sex workers are HIV positive and the police say that. Not knowing that they are making them to get infected.” – Participant V

Another topic that the participants raised was the physical abuse and discrimination they could face at the hands of police upon arrest and placement in cells back at the station. One participant described how during an arrest and lock up she had been placed with male inmates irrespective of her attempts to inform police that she should not be placed with men, as she herself was not a man. Instead the police responded with verbal abuse and encouraging the men she was locked up with to rape her. Moreover, to her, regardless of knowing her rights and the steps she could take to lay charges against such behaviour she felt that she would not be taken seriously by either the police or police bodies in her efforts to hold them accountable for their actions. Her views on this extended to the possibility of seeking help from the police for discrimination, abuse, and violence from other social actors. Another participant shared that while initially the police had been rude to her she had had more positive experiences with them over time. She expressed that while they initially had called her derogatory names and placed her in cells with men they no longer did this, but rather placed her in a cell by herself and ensured she was searched by female police officers. She noted an active effort on the part of the police to change the ways in which they treated her.

“I was a joke.” – Participant VI on attempting to report misconduct

“In the first place, the police was very rude, you know and when they see me on the road they say ‘come here’ and ‘you must go home’, ‘you’re a moffie’ and they say ugly words and they

even take the condoms. But now, the police they calmed down and even when they take me to the cells they don't put me with men anymore, they put me alone in the cell where I'm happy..."

3) "Families"

Almost all of the eight participants spoke about the kinds of relationships they had with members of their families. At times the focus would be on closer family relationships, such as those with mothers, fathers, and siblings, and other times discussion would occur around extended family such as aunts and uncles. It becomes important to note that each and every participant that spoke of their family had a different story to tell; this indicates that across each and every female transgendered sex worker there is likely to be very different family dynamics at play. The trend of deep variation across the participants' telling of their relationships with family members also suggests that it would likely be problematic to attempt identifying and understanding families and family members as either being "supportive" or "non-supportive"; each family and their responses to living a) with a female transgendered person, and b) a female transgendered sex worker, regardless as to whether or not the latter of these two is known, will be very different from the next and deeply context-specific. This is an important aspect to consider if we are to begin to engage with and understand the lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers in any capacity, because the relationships one holds with their family will nearly always bear some means of impact and bearing on their experiences in other areas of their lives.

Unpacking further this variation across the experiences of and relationships with family as held by the participants concerned, there were a number of trends to be observed that had either impacted on them with regards to their female transgendered identities *or* their line of work. For certain participants there existed a nature of overlap between both. On one end of the spectrum, a few participants spoke of being openly rejected by members of their families. One participant shared her experiences of being shunned, verbally abused, and badly spoken of by her mother's extended family after her mother passed away because of her female transgendered identity. This had led her to seek refuge on the streets rather than putting up with the discrimination she faced from her mother's siblings and their families. Another participant spoke of how she had chosen to actively leave her family in order to find herself and develop a clear and continuously forming sense of self on the streets of Cape Town, even though she had received a fair degree of support and experienced a good relationship with her cousin in her the place where her family resided just outside Cape Town. A third participant

spoke of how her relationship was good with her mother, who accepted her female transgendered identity and offered emotional and financial, and social support wherever she could, while her relationship with her father was not so good as he had used religion in efforts to prevent her obtaining an education and to condemn her female transgendered identity. She explained that part of her decision to enter sex work was informed by her father's continuous shutting down of opportunities for her to learn. A fourth participant expressed having a mixed relationship with her mother, whereby her mother provided for her in certain instances, often materially, but then discriminated against her on the grounds of both her gendered identity and engagement in sex work. Some of the remaining participants shared that they either no longer were in contact with their families due to the nature of their gendered identities or that one or more of their parents were deceased. On the topic of relationships with siblings, some of these were marked by an absence in the participants' lives and/or openly disapproving attitudes towards their gendered identity. On the other end of the spectrum some participants experienced highly supportive relationships with some of their siblings and the children of their siblings. What functions as an interesting commentary on some of the possible impacts and effects of sex and gender, as it tends to operate in society through binary, heteronormative, and hegemonic thinking, is that in all of the participants' accounts it was often the female siblings who were more accepting of the participants' gender identities as opposed to their male siblings. This bears interesting food for thought in terms of our understanding and thinking around the construction of masculinities and possible future research endeavours.

With all these stories in mind it becomes important to identify and recognise how family relationships for female transgendered sex workers and how their lived realities and experiences of family are shaped are deeply impacted and informed by *both* their identities as female transgendered persons and sex workers. This undoubtedly creates a particular series of social realities and experiences which are very specific to the family dynamics and available support structures for female transgendered sex workers.

4) "Intimate Partners"

Half of the participants made reference to an intimate partner and either described the nature of their relationship with them or talked about how having an intimate partner might not be the most ideal in terms of self-growth and/or survival as a female transgendered sex worker. For those participants who had intimate partners there were sentiments expressed where they

were considered to be a fair and good site of support. These participants expressed that their intimate partner was someone in which they could often confide, seek counsel, and talk to about almost anything occurring in their lives. Some of these participants also indicated that their intimate partner was somebody they could rely on for material and financial needs. This being said, they were often not really forthcoming to disclose too much detail around the nature and dynamics of their relationships with their partners. As such, this is a section that will not receive extended discussion and attention within this research project, but that has been included with mention as an important aspect to consider when exploring the possible lived realities and experiences of female transgendered sex workers. Moreover, this is an area of research that demands further exploration into the deeper workings, dynamics, and aspects of power and politics of intimate relationships as they are shaped by the simultaneous identities of being female transgendered person and sex worker. It is also important to note that while no cases of domestic violence were recorded by this research, this is not to say that they do not exist or occur for female transgendered sex workers. This is noted as it was an area of concern documented in previous literature on female sex work, and therefore shapes the nature of what needs to be explored further still in relation to female transgendered sex workers, particularly when we consider how they already exist as an extensively marginalised and stigmatised group (Fick, 2005).

An interesting aspect to consider from the stories shared by two of the participants is the disclosure of being engaged in sex work to one's partner. While both participants briefly discussed their experiences of this, both arrived at very different ideas around whether or not to tell their partner about the nature of their work. The first participant indicated that she had not told her partner about the work she did and that she did not think she would because she did not think good things would come of it or know what might become of their relationship. The second participant had disclosed to her partner that she was a sex worker, although initially she had tried to conceal this information from him out of fear about what his reaction might have been. When she finally told him she was surprised how he reacted so calmly and emphasised the importance in both of them being upfront with each other. The knowledge of her line of work did not change the standing of their relationship. In light of this the participant expressed how not telling him upfront actually made her feel worse in the long run, and she subsequently emphasised the importance of being honest and open with an intimate partner about being a sex worker. However, when considering the nature of intimate relationships and how this participant and her partner have been together for a considerable

number of years, it is also important to remember that each relationship bears a different context and intimate partner, and that this could result in very different scenarios and varying reasons for either disclosing being a sex worker or not. Through this we can begin to understand the complexities and conflicts involved in the act of telling or not telling. Further research into such experiences could prove valuable in beginning to unpack, understand, and construct intimate relationships as a site of support for female transgendered sex workers.

5) “Relationships with ‘Sistas’”

Of all the connecting threads across the voices of the participants, it is those which shape this section that possibly prove to be among some of the most interesting and informative in this research. Almost all the participants spoke about *Sistahood* in some capacity or another, and the nature of the relationships they held with other female transgendered sex workers who attended the group. Views expressed were often mixed concerning the value and dynamics of the group. However, despite some of the more pressing and negative concerns that were raised a few participants registered these mixed concerns as a marker of the group functioning as a ‘work-in-progress’. Some of these more negative concerns centred on what some of the participants identified to be the display of different attitudes towards each other inside and outside of the group. Thus, while “*creative spaces*” were in session it was suggested that there was a considerable sense of solidarity and the sharing of similar and/or relatable experiences that members of the group could engage with and possibly take comfort, growth, and new strategies for coping with challenging situations from. In light of this quality, some participants expressed that they felt like *Sistahood* and the ‘sisters’ were “like family” to them. However, many of these very same participants suggested that this in-group and in-space ethos did not transfer itself into practice beyond the “*creative spaces*”. Outside of *Sistahood* fellow female transgendered sex workers who may have been considered a source of solidarity and support within the “*creative spaces*” seemed to not necessarily offer this outside. A few participants noted how at times the ‘sisters’ would actively seek to undermine each other, by trying to break each other’s characters down and making them look bad in front of other co-workers and clients; at times even breaking confidentiality established during the “*creative spaces*”.

At least half the participants identified a possible cause of this behaviour among members of *Sistahood* to be a result of tendencies among female transgendered sex workers to be jealous of and competitive with each other. These participants described how jealousy and competition would arise around how female transgendered sex workers might choose to

present themselves. As a theoretical marker of the fluidity in femininities and feminine display, there were different opinions held among the participants and other ‘sisters’ alike about what was necessary to present and pass as a woman and what might be considered “over the top”. Some felt that feminine behaviour and performance did not necessitate putting on excessive make up or wearing ‘excessively’ feminine items of clothing and accessories, but rather the presenting of an ‘authentic’ display of self to the outside world and embracing this as a representation of how they saw themselves as women. Others enjoyed and felt more comfortable presenting themselves in what might be described as a hyper-feminine manner, and expressed that this made them feel “smart” and presentable for the attraction of clients. It appears that it is often these variations in perspective that generate opposing and discriminatory attitudes towards each other, as female transgendered sex workers of the first spectrum may attempt to undermine the efforts and actions of those of the other spectrum. A few participants shared how this tended to manifest in ‘sisters’ talking about other ‘sisters’ behind their backs.

Closely linked to this aspect of jealousy and competition between the ‘sisters’ is the undermining of each other out of a sense of competing for clients. Yet again physical presentation of the self would tend to be a topic for concern as those considered more “smartly” (and femininely) dressed could attract greater attention from prospective clients. Therefore, these female transgendered sex workers could be at the receiving end of particular verbal abuse and threats to remove themselves from the same areas for business as other female transgendered sex workers. A few participants also identified that this jealous and competitive behaviour could come to be displayed by cisgender female sex workers who perceived female transgendered sex workers as a threat for business. Moreover, one participant identified youth and aging to be a possible source of jealousy and competition between the ‘sisters’ and other female transgendered sex workers. Younger and ‘more beautiful’ female transgendered sex workers could find themselves at the receiving end of verbal threats and abuse from both aging and competing youthful female transgendered co-workers, although she indicated that this tended to occur more so from the latter as acting in a jealous and competitive manner was suggested to diminish the older, more experienced, and more established female transgendered sex workers became. This same participant suggested that it was counter-productive for members of *Sistahood* and other female transgendered sex workers to think and behave in discriminatory ways towards each other. She felt that each had their own special features and/or ‘talents’ to offer clients which would sell their services

without needing to fear losing business to others. Furthermore, she expressed and emphasised that if each and every female transgendered sex worker recommended a co-worker to a client with certain desires that matched what she could offer, there would be more than enough business to go around for everyone. She emphasised the importance in building networks between and experiences of solidarity among *all* female transgendered sex workers, irrespective of whether they were involved at SWEAT or not.

Other concerns raised by a few participants with regards to *Sistahood* and the kinds of relationships experienced with other female transgendered sex workers included issues of confidentiality, commitment, and reluctance to be involved in group orientated and/or organised activities. One participant in particular addressed this in-depth, expressing her frustration at what she identified as a lacking recognition of the importance and value of what the “*creative spaces*” offered. She suggested that each and every ‘sister’ ought to ensure they were punctual to and respectful of the “*creative spaces*”, and that they respected what each ‘sister’ had to contribute to the spaces. She also showed how this was not always the case, where at times ‘sisters’ would get up and leave at various points throughout the duration of the “*creative spaces*” and at others would not necessarily afford everyone who wished to contribute to the space a fair turn to express themselves. The privilege afforded by SWEAT and the ‘sisters’ to the researcher to sit-in on a couple of the “*creative spaces*” seemed to confirm much of these sentiments. In terms of the teaching, guidance, and learning roles SWEAT appears to assume in the eyes of all the participants, this understanding and interpretation of the kind of behaviour that ‘ought’ to be displayed in interactions with other female transgendered sex workers is important. Not only does it indicate that there is an expectation of and motivations towards mobilising supportive networks and cooperative relationships between female transgendered sex workers, but it also offers important commentary on and implications for expectations around support.

Both the aforementioned participant and a few others made mention of ‘sisters’ not maintaining and protecting the confidentiality of the “*creative spaces*” externally. Within these spaces sensitive information and life stories can and tend to be shared. These participants talked about how some ‘sisters’ who might be in conflict with other ‘sisters’ could disclose sensitive information such as one’s HIV status and ARV use to other sex workers and/or the person in question’s clients. This typically led to further problems of discrimination, stigma, and loneliness for the ‘sister’ at the receiving end of this confidentiality breach. Consequently these participants told of how both they and certain

actors and facilitators at SWEAT were attempting to eliminate acts of breaching confidentiality through continuous conversation during the “*creative spaces*” as to the importance of leaving what is said in that space behind and to themselves. Thus, and as depicted by these participants, there appears to be concerted efforts being performed towards achieving a deeper sense of care, respect, and support between the ‘sisters’ at the level of the organisation and female transgendered sex workers on the whole.

Lastly, a few participants emphasised the need for unwillingness to and non-participation on the part of the ‘sisters’ and other female transgendered sex workers to be addressed. Particularly from the vocal accounts from the one participant referred to earlier in this section, there were concerns around the lack of consistent attendance by the ‘sisters’ at the “*creative spaces*” and possibly even more so at other events that pertained to female transgendered realities and sex work. Where ‘sisters’ would be invited to varying events and by other ‘sisters’, they did not necessarily always show up. The few participants who raised this concern suggested that effective mobilisation around female transgendered *and* female transgendered sex work issues might not be possible or as effective as they possibly could be if this was left unaddressed.

6) “SWEAT”

All of the participants shared their ideas and sentiments regarding the work and role of SWEAT in their lives. Across all the responses there was a general conceptualisation of SWEAT as performing a teaching role and offering a space within which learning, growth, and development could occur. Many participants also considered SWEAT to perform a role of facilitation and guidance, not only in terms of emotional and psychological support structures and mechanisms, but also in terms of offering them a space that they felt they could trust and seek the help and counsel of people and mechanisms they could trust to always be there regardless of what they did or did not do. In this sense, a few participants thought of SWEAT as fulfilling the role of a “mother”; always being there to hear them out in a non-judgemental manner and to offer advice without displaying disappointment regarding or contempt for certain decisions and choices they might make. Moreover, more than half of the participants made reference to at least one person based at SWEAT who they felt they could always go to specifically with any life problem, or at the very least for comfort, guidance and/or advice.

In terms of the role of SWEAT as a teaching space that facilitates learning, growth, and development, this was by far the strongest connecting thread across the voices of *all* the participants. This came to life through how coming to SWEAT and what the organisation offers was framed. A few participants spoke explicitly of SWEAT holding and fulfilling a role as a site of learning about the human rights owed to sex workers. Moreover, these participants felt that SWEAT not only informed them of the existence of their rights, but also the importance of fighting for the upholding and attainment of these rights. They also highlighted how SWEAT offered active strategies and mechanisms through which to exercise their rights, in the form of access to paralegals and information sessions during the conducting of support groups, such as Sistahood. Through the Women's Legal Centre (WLC) female transgendered sex workers, amongst all other sex workers, are offered platforms and opportunities for legal advice and action. One participant indicated how SWEAT offers guidelines and steps for dealing with police violence by approaching higher levels of the legal and justice systems such as police commissioners and the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID). Additionally, should any sex worker wish to lodge a complaint against a client or an act of discrimination and/or stigma, they were able to seek the services of paralegals to take matters further.

It seems evident that the support groups, or “*creative spaces*” as they tend to be called by the participants and members of SWEAT alike, tend to be conceived of as spaces facilitating teaching and learning. A few participants even spoke of Sistahood in terms of “attending to class”, “lessons”, and “intervention” with one participant in particular expressing her desire for the teaching structure of the space to be respected by all who attended it. This entailed being punctual and ensuring the time spent in the space was valued and respected without attendees coming and going as they saw fit. Any and all other such dynamics pertaining to this are addressed in the preceding section.

“So for me I'm getting lots of support here that at SWEAT because I'm learning about my rights and I know when my rights are being violated. Then we have paralegals assisting us. Because at the same time I'm doing sex work I'm a human being who deserves respect to be treated in a dignified manner so for me I feel SWEAT is doing a lot in helping us emotionally and physically.” – Participant V

SWEAT also came to be described as an environment that enabled for free expression and spaces within which one can “find a sense of self” by a few participants. As was identified by

these participants, and the others in terms of the importance in having a sense of self, this is crucial to developing a sense of comfort, pride, and acceptance in living as and being a female transgendered person. One participant suggested that SWEAT offered spaces and opportunities to “talk about things that you can’t talk about anywhere else”. Another participant foregrounded how SWEAT offered spaces and opportunities where a female transgendered person *and* sex worker could be completely open and how this was a particularly liberating experience.

“I love SWEAT... Oooooooh jirre, I love SWEAT. You know why, because here you can be so open ne, you can be so open you know it actually scares people, the way we can be so open.”

“... here you can just be whatever you want to, do whatever you want to, say whatever you want to... That’s, that’s nice about SWEAT, that’s what I like about SWEAT.” – Participant III

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✍ There is a deep need for the impact of gender identity and possible meanings of being a female transgendered person to be considered in conducting research into sex work and attempting to understand sex workers and the meanings and experiences of being a sex worker within a contemporary and criminalised context. This seems likely to be applicable to any particular context, regardless of whether or not sex work has been decriminalised, legalised, or criminalised. However, in saying this, in order to obtain a deeper and more nuanced representation of this somewhat sweeping statement, further research needs to be conducted into the lived realities, experiences, and meanings of female transgendered sex work that extend beyond limiting HIV/AIDS, healthcare, and/or “risk population” specific research. In the same vein, there is a deep need to identify and recognise the importance in understanding the highly specific and particularly socially located nature of female transgendered sex work and sex workers, and therefore the importance of conducting more and broader research specific to such sex worker populations and advocating for, designing, and implementing policies and social and legal frameworks and programmes that specifically cater to the needs and lived realities of female transgendered sex workers.
- ✍ Resilience as a coping strategy among female transgendered sex workers may possibly need to be further fostered in and of itself as well as in relation to other forms of support, both informal and more informal. This stems from its frequency and preference to other coping and support strategies that tend to rely more on relationships. Participants found that being able to rely on themselves was important to the development and sustainability of self-worth, self-acceptance, and psychological strength.
- ✍ Further and more specified research needs to be conducted into the types of relationships female transgendered sex workers can have with their families, intimate partners, and other female transgendered sex workers.
- ✍ There needs to be much more done in the way of attempting to deal with and educate clients around sensitivity and issues regarding the rights of sex workers *and* female transgendered sex workers in particular. Clients need to be sensitised to the specific nature and needs of female transgendered sex workers, and to be enabled to understand how sex and gender are not static categories there to be utilised to the abuse, stigma, and discrimination of female transgendered sex workers. The responsibility of clients within sexual transactions and to respect and uphold the sexual rights, health, and dignity of

female transgendered sex workers needs to be emphasised and addressed urgently. Effectively, the role of the client needs to be emphasised in and by state and organisational work and policies. A first step towards achieving this would entail the total decriminalisation of sex work in South Africa and greater mobilisation around issues concerning difficult and discriminatory clients.

- ✍ Police misconduct, abuse, and brutality remains a significant issue concerned with sex workers and the practice of sex work, and exists as a particularly pressing issue for female transgendered sex workers. This is highly likely to be relevant to other female transgendered sex workers throughout Cape Town, the rest of South Africa, and possibly broader worldly contexts. Consequently, when we consider both the previous literature and the findings of this research, it becomes possible to comment on the need for police officers to be specifically trained and sensitised to the needs of a) sex workers, b) transgendered persons, and c) female transgendered sex workers. Moreover, police officers *need* to be held accountable for their misconduct, abuses, and brutality. This ought possibly to be done in a way that considers their behaviours relative to the exercise and upholding of human rights rather than simply legal frameworks. This also needs to be captured, enforced, and monitored by policies and the aforementioned legal frameworks, as well as varying bodies and levels of accountability.
- ✍ Given the vividly described role of SWEAT as a space of teaching and facilitation it seems pertinent that this space including the “creative spaces” of the support groups be maintained and enhanced. Having recently been made aware of the effects of budget cuts on the frequency of the latter of these it seems an important recommendation that these spaces either come to be shaped or encouraged to be formed in other possibly more informal and cost-effective ways, or that something is done to ensure that such spaces continue to offer what they have offered up until this point in times in ever increasingly improved and accessible ways. This needs to be of particular concern given the role of SWEAT and what it appears to offer female transgendered sex workers in the way of emotional, psychological, and social support.
- ✍ More may need to be done to foster more supportive relationships between female transgendered sex workers, both those who seek formal support and those who do not.

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