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The Balancing Act of Disclosure: Experiences of Stigma and Resistance Among Men Who Sell Sex to Men

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Abstract

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Key words: Disclosure, MSW (male sex work), stigma, and resistance

Little attention has been given in previous research to disclosure about sex work and even less to men's experience of disclosure about selling sex. There is a lack of understanding of the choices behind disclosure and how men who have experiences of selling sex use disclosure. For that reason, the main purpose of this thesis is to study the strategies that men who sell sex to other men use for disclosure or nondisclosure of these experiences. A second goal is to identify factors and circumstances that enable or limit men's disclosure. Further, it is central to explore the meaning and implications of the different strategies for these men.

The study is based on seven semi-structured interviews with men aged 21 to 35 years, currently living in Sweden. The men's experiences of sex work range from selling sex a few times to experiences that extend over several years.

The theoretical framework is a combination of Goffman's (1963) stigma theory and the (stigma) management techniques, the power structures around sex are uncovered with the sex hierarchy (Rubin, 1984) and narrative theory deepens the understanding of the men's stories. Stigma is in this thesis used as an analytical concept using Goffman's terminology.

The main barrier for disclosure was stigma, either gay stigma or whore stigma. In addition, the men chose to protect those close to them by not disclosing their experiences of selling sex. The men did not share details about their work or uncomfortable experiences with others, suggesting that self-reliance is important for these men. At the same time, six out of seven men reported that when they disclosed some, but not all, of their experiences, sometimes to more than one person, they did so to get support and to not have to keep a secret. Additionally, a few disclosed their experiences of selling sex in an effort to challenge the customary views of sex work.

Consequently, disclosure is a balancing act; they carefully choose whom to tell, and exactly what to tell. Many have told their close friends, some of them to at least one family member while only one disclosed to health care professionals. In making choices about who they will share their sex work experiences with, the men manage the consequences of stigma and they do so, for instance, by employing the attributes of the accepted, normal and good sexual (male) behavior to describe their experiences.

The disadvantage for men who resist whore stigma by carefully managing their disclosure about their work is that it makes it harder to express their needs and to ask for help when necessary. In addition, the experiences of the men in this study of disclosure and nondisclosure highlights the position of the listener; it tells us how the listeners' perception, their reactions and their choice of words determine what will be said or omitted. In conclusion, as social work professionals and fellow human beings we have a responsibility to include and really listen to sex workers voices. We are gatekeepers for these stories to be told and listened to so it is critical that we do not allow our own biases interfere with our ability to listen to these important disclosures.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION	2
DISCUSSION ABOUT THE TERMS SEX WORK AND PROSTITUTION	2
BACKGROUND	3
PREVIOUS RESEARCH.....	5
SUMMARY	10
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	11
THE STORIES	11
STIGMA	12
THE SEX HIERARCHY.....	13
SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	14
METHODOLOGY	16
IMPLEMENTATION	16
<i>Data collection and limitations</i>	16
<i>Informants</i>	18
<i>Interview guide</i>	18
<i>Transcription</i>	19
<i>Methods of analysis</i>	19
LANGUAGE BARRIERS.....	20
TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	20
REFLEXIVITY	21
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	22
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	24
NONDISCLOSURE	24
<i>Gay Stigma</i>	24
<i>Whore Stigma</i>	25
<i>As Protection for Others</i>	27
<i>What not to tell</i>	27
Avoiding victimization	28
<i>Passing</i>	29
DISCLOSURE.....	30
<i>For Their Own Sake</i>	30
<i>To Inform</i>	31
<i>Challenging The Views</i>	32
<i>Choosing whom to tell</i>	32
Friends.....	33
Family and partners.....	34
To health and social care	35
<i>Choosing what to tell</i>	35
<i>Reflections on when to tell</i>	37
THE MEANING OF DISCLOSURE	38
<i>Important to Me and Good for Others</i>	39
<i>Disclosure as Justification</i>	40
SUMMARY	42

CONCLUSION	44
REFERENCES	47
APPENDIX 1.....	50
APPENDIX 2.....	52

INTRODUCTION

My previous experience of working with sex workers in Canada opened my eyes to one thing in particular, and that is the importance of being able to have a safe space to tell your story, to be listened to – to *have a voice*. Research has also shown interest in the importance of being able to disclose experiences of sex work. For example, in the Swedish overview and mapping of LGBT people in the sex trade (Larsdotter et al., 2011) it is noted that some of the participants in the study did not tell anyone about their experiences, regardless of gender, sexuality and age. However, several of the participants stated it would be nice to have someone to talk to throughout the conducted interviews. Notably, it seems that disclosure is surrounded with some sort of complexity. Beneath the surface, there is an existential need to be listened to, to be heard, and to have a voice.

At the same time, it is pointed out in Koford et al. (2011) that the male escorts in the study were less likely to have told anyone else about their involvement in the sex trade compared to female sex trade workers. Despite these differences the fear of and the consequences of disclosure were the same for both genders. Several studies (Koford et al., 2011; Koken, 2009) discuss the negative impacts of nondisclosure that are common for both men and women; their silence leads to secrecy about their sex working experiences and they lead a double life, all of which increases the risk of loneliness and alienation.

Stigma is recognized as a huge barrier to disclosing involvement in the sex trade, whether it is in a help-seeking situation or just to be able to talk about the experiences with someone else (Larsdotter et al., 2011; Koken, 2009; Smith et al., 2015). Similarly, helping professionals testified about their insecurities of asking the right questions or how to ask about people's experiences of selling sex due to the stigma (Larsdotter et al., 2011). They were afraid of reinforcing the stigma through their questions, or even worse, afraid they would not be able to handle the answers. It is clear, as Amber Dawn says it “... *to listen to and include sex workers' voice in dialogue is a skill that we have not yet developed...*” (Dawn, 2013, p.13).

Previous research has primarily focused on women and perceived heterosexual sex work and the consequences thereof, and while there is an increase in studies on other forms of sex work, with other perspectives on it, more research is needed in this area. Only a few studies have focused on the specific experiences of male sex workers, and even fewer have studied disclosure and nondisclosure for sex workers. While the consequences of nondisclosure for the individual have been slightly more explored, little attention has been given to the ones that do disclose and share their stories about selling sex.

This thesis will try to shed some light over the meaning of disclosure for male sex workers, and to get a better understanding of why they choose not to disclose. This is an important thesis to be done in the field of social work, because only when we choose to listen we will be able to truly meet the people we are here to reach out to, and offer the right kind of support and services to those in need. This skill is central to social work as well as to health care professionals.

Aim and Research question

The main purpose of this thesis is to study the strategies that men who sell sex to other men use for disclosure or nondisclosure of these experiences. The aim is also to identify factors and circumstances that enable or limit men's disclosure. Further, it is central to explore the meaning and implications of the different strategies for these men.

The research questions are as follow:

1. Which are the strategies involved in disclosure/nondisclosure for men who sell sex to men?
 - a. How, what, when and to whom do the men disclose?
2. Which factors on an individual and societal level enable or limit the disclosure for men who sell sex to men?
3. What is the meaning and the implications of disclosing or nondisclosing for these men, both as group and individually?

Discussion about the terms sex work and prostitution

Since there are several different terms related to this subject, I found it necessary to clarify the terms that will be used and referred to in this thesis. I will start with these: *sex work* and *prostitution*. They refer to the same act, namely "engaging in sexual activity with someone for payment" as defined by the Oxford English dictionary¹. These words, on the other hand, have different contextual understandings and different historical and contemporary use, both in Sweden and in international contexts (Jeffreys, 2015), which I will not be discussing. Rather, I will simply provide a brief understanding for the terms used in this thesis, and why I have chosen to include them.

The term *prostitution* has for some time been the prevailing term to describe the act of selling sexual services to someone (Larsdotter et al., 2011; Östergren, 2006). The term is criticized for having negative connotations, which often are associated with shameful activities of women (Leigh, 1997); a word that describes the person and not the act itself (Edlund & Jakobsson, 2014; Östergren, 2006). Consequently, the use of the term *sex work* is a way to discuss and describe the issue in a manner that is less derogatory. On the other hand, in Sweden the term *sex work* has had the connotation of being understood as a term strongly connected to sex workers' struggle for legal rights (Larsdotter et al., 2011) and is therefore not commonly used or accepted. Admittedly, the term has been and is used in sex workers' rights struggles (Jeffreys, 2015), but the term is also used as an umbrella phrase, inclusive to all kinds of "work" related to sex, like striptease, pornography, escorting and others (Leigh, 1997). In response to the terms *prostitution* and/or *sex work* a more natural middle way has in Sweden lead to the more commonly used term *selling sex* (Edlund & Jakobsson, 2014).

In brief, I will use all of these terms in this thesis: prostitution, sex work and selling sex. When referring to other's writings I will most often use their choice of word. In respect of my own writing, also my spoken language, I most often use the term sex work and otherwise selling sex. In those cases where I use prostitution I do so to indicate the public view of sex

¹ "prostitution, n.". OED Online. December 2015. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/Entry/153086?redirectedFrom=prostitution> (accessed January 05, 2016).

work. Similarly, the term whore is used to refer to the pejorative and stigmatizing image of sex workers, understood as an expression of stigma using Goffman's stigma theory (1963) (see further explanation on stigma in the Theoretical Framework). Finally, in relation to my informants who all have different ways of referring to their experiences, I have mostly used selling sex, and occasionally sex work.

Background

I will begin the background with a short presentation of how male prostitution has been regarded in two important inquiries concerning the legal status of prostitution in Sweden. These are chosen because of their reflection of the normative view, meaning the moral, legal and social status that sex work has in Sweden. In addition, these will demonstrate how, in the past, men in the sex trade have been discussed and referred to. I will continue with some figures on current Swedish research of men's experiences of having sold sex. Together, these might give some insights in the context of this thesis.

Prostitution has historically been an activity that has been regulated in Sweden in various ways throughout time. A limiting factor of the law has been the view of prostitution as a social problem where the actual *prostitutes* have been the objects of the law – meaning they were considered *the problem* (SOU, 1995:15). However, with the commission of the prostitution inquiry in 1993 this perspective changed. The inquiry concluded that prostitution is an expression of men's violence against women, as a sign of patriarchy and men's superiority over women. The purchase of sex is seen as a legitimization of the access to women's bodies, and therefore, a victimization of women that makes them objects (or victims to be saved) (SOU, 1995:15). Thus, prostitution is viewed as a gender equality issue, and therefore the solution to the present *social problem* had to be the buyer.

In January 1999 Sweden introduced the law *the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services*, (which is found in Chapter 6, Section 11 of the Penal Code) (SOU, 2010:49). The law was unique in that it criminalized the buyer instead of the person selling sex. The intention of the law was to affect the demand for people selling sex; without the demand for sexual services there would be no need for people providing them. However, it would not be the only law regulating the sex trade, although it is the most significant (e.g. in contrast to other countries); supplementing laws also prohibit procuring and brothels (SOU, 1995:15).

Ten years after the introduction of *the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services* law the government requested an evaluation of its effects, which is presented in a governmental report (SOU, 2010:49). Throughout the evaluation prostitution is discussed in a customary view: men buy sex and women sell sex. The evaluation describes the interventions that have been implemented and the changes that followed. The improvements of the social problem of *prostitution* focus only on heterosexual prostitution. While other forms of prostitution are mentioned, like young people and men who sell sex, there are no figures of how many it concerns (SOU, 2010:49). Men who are *used* (their choice of word) in prostitution are specifically discussed in a half-page long chapter, with the emphasis on the limited knowledge about men who sell sex.

Although the law is gender neutral the main focus is on women selling sex, both in the prostitution inquiry of 1993 and yet again in the ten-year evaluation (SOU, 1995:15; SOU, 2010:49). What they have in common is the perspective on homosexual prostitution. It is not

only viewed as less of a social problem since there are fewer men than women selling sex or because it is more hidden; the act of selling and buying sex could possibly be understood in terms of attraction, fellowship and cohesiveness (SOU, 1995:15). Moreover, the power imbalance between the buyer and the seller is not viewed in the same way either compared to heterosexual prostitution. Ultimately, it appears that the stigma connected to heterosexual prostitution is not equivalent to homosexual prostitution; instead it is suggested that the buyer could be the one stigmatized (SOU, 1995:15). As a result, homosexual prostitution is discussed partly as something different from (heterosexual) prostitution, which does not correlate with the social problem of prostitution.

Certainly, the evaluation has been criticized by, among others, RFSL (2010). The criticism focuses on the heteronormative interpretations of prostitution that leave out all other types of selling and buying sex, and for reproducing the heteronormativity in the prostitution inquiry of 1993 into the ten-year evaluation (RFSL, 2010). The evaluation maintains this reasoning because of what is expressed as limited knowledge about homosexual prostitution (SOU, 2010:49).

In 2009 the government appointed RFSL, as a step in *the action plan against prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes*, to examine the situation of LGBT people in the sex trade in Sweden (Larsdotter et al., 2011). It was the first of its kind, an attempt to do an extensive report on the subject. It includes several studies, such as research reviews, an Internet survey and interview studies with LGBT people with experience of the sex trade and professionals working with sex workers. The study conducted 50 interviews with LGBT people that had experiences of the sex trade, and of these, 27 were male sex workers (Female to Male transpeople included) (Larsdotter et al., 2011).

Larsdotter et al. (2011) put the issue of LGBT people in the sex trade on the agenda simply by showing that these people exist and demonstrating that prostitution is not only a heterosexual phenomenon. Priebe & Svedin (2012) found, in the population survey about selling and buying sex in Sweden, that the incidence of *at some point has sold sex* were 0,8 percent for men and 0,6 percent for women. This is consistent with other studies in which more men than women indicate that they have sold sex (Månsson, 1998; Kuusmanen, 2008; Svedin & Priebe, 2009).

In brief, these are examples of how male sex work has been described and how it has been recognized over the last 30 years in Sweden. On one hand, there are examples drawn from the preparatory work of *the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services law* (SOU, 1995:15) and, of course, in the ten years evaluation of the same (SOU, 2010:49). What these inquiries show is not only a lack of knowledge, but the phenomena of male prostitution is simply considered less of a concern since it does not embody the (power) imbalance of the two genders. On the other hand, the perspective on men selling sex is established in the report by RFSL (Larsdotter et al., 2011) along with several other studies – the existence and the incidence of men selling sex. However, what is evident is that these examples provide insufficient evidence about male sex workers and their specific experiences in Sweden. This thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of male sex work in Sweden.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

My goal for this study has been to only use literature that focuses on male sex workers and their disclosure. This proved to be quite difficult since it's still a quite unexplored field. For that reason, I have chosen to include research on sex work, disclosure and stigma, irrespective of gender, to find more relevant research for this study.

While stigma is a commonly used term in both research on sex workers and prostitution and also used in the practice field of social work with sex workers, I have chosen to refer to stigma in this study as a theoretical concept (see Theoretical Framework). I included stigma as one of the key concepts in my literature search because I found that research that would discuss and touch upon the issues relevant for this thesis would be found in studies that raised the issue of stigma. Most often this research relates to Goffman's theory of stigma and the management techniques (described in the Theoretical Framework p. 12), which are highly relevant for this thesis and therefore been of particular interest to include in this chapter.

For the literature search I primarily used Summon, Gothenburg University Library's search engine. In addition, ProQuest Social Sciences database and Google Scholar have been useful for the same purpose. I have used a number of keywords, for example: male sex-work, MSW (male sex-work), disclosure, nondisclosure, sex-work, coping, stigma, narratives, LGBT, LGBTQ, and prostitution. I have used them separately or combined two or three keywords together. Because there are few studies on this topic, I have used the references of relevant articles found to be able to broaden my search and to find more research suitable for this thesis. My search produced eight studies related to this subject, mostly from international sources. They are presented as follows: first, research on male sex workers, then studies on female sex workers and finally studies that include both female and male sex workers.

Koken et al. (2004) have conducted research on male Internet escorts in New York City, U.S.A. that focuses on their experiences of stigma. The research is based on 46 semi-structured interviews with male escorts, with an average of 2 years working as escorts. They worked independently as escorts using Internet to reach clients and identified as gay or bisexual. Topics such as entry into sex work, and the ways in which sex work had impacted their life and their feelings about sex work in general were explored during the interviews. Additionally, the participants were asked about their level of disclosure about their work in relation to friends, lovers and family. The findings were compared to Goffman's theory of stigma and the information management techniques he describes, as well as explored to find new emerging themes.

The results reported in the study (Koken et al., 2004) show that the escorts experienced work-related stigma, and described a wide spectra of experiences and perceptions of it. They expressed high level of awareness of society's condemnation of sex work, for example as expressed in the term prostitute. In response, many of the escorts reframed their work as escort, to evade the stigma connected to prostitution. Furthermore, thirty out of the forty-six participants answered a follow-up question about their feelings regarding sex work; of these, twelve responded that they had positive about their feelings of escorting, nine expressed negative feelings and another nine had neutral or ambivalent feelings about their work.

The information management techniques, passing and covering, outlined by Goffman were more or less used by all informants. The ones who told no one about their work, which

accounted for eleven out of forty-six participants, used passing. Some of them were in what the authors called a “double closet” (Koken et al., 2004, p. 24) – they were not only hiding their sex work but also their sexual identity from others. In addition, the majority of the ones passing described emotional stress because of it. However, the rest of the escorts interviewed told at least one person of their work, engaging in covering which means the process of deciding how much to reveal, whom to tell and when; many of them told other male sex workers about their work. The authors found that some men only disclosed to other male sex workers, framing it as “group” passing “because the information sharing is limited to similarly stigmatized peers” (Koken et al., 2004, p. 24). Others disclosed to some or all their friends and a few were extremely open about their work. Many even told their partners if they were in a serious relationship. Furthermore, eight of the participants disclosed to either some or all of their family members that they were escorting. A few disclosed because of safety reasons, which means they wanted someone to know they were doing sex work so that the other person could make sure they come back from a date.

Many of the male escorts who did disclose to other sex workers, partners, friends or family members described them as supportive. The authors (Koken et al., 2004) mean that having support helps the escorts to protect themselves from the ‘virtual identity’ held by the larger society, just by being respected and loved for their ‘actual identity’.

Other emerging strategies Koken et al. (2004) found were that the escorts protected themselves against the ‘virtual identity’ of male sex work through reframing it in terms of altruism, entrepreneurial framework, ‘The money makes it worth it’ or ‘Sex work as normative within the Gay Community’. What these strategies all have in common is that they move away from the stereotypical way of framing sex work as a social problem.

Closson et al. (2015) conducted a study in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in response to the emerging HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men (MSM). Since male sex workers (MSWs) are a group at higher risk, this study focused on this group, and 23 men who have experiences of selling sex to other men participated in the study. It focused on experiences of social stigma, sex work disclosure and motivation to do sex work. Economic needs were the incentive for these men’s choice to do sex work; several of the men sent home money to their families who still lived in the rural areas of Vietnam (Closson et al., 2015).

The men experienced high levels of stigma connected to both same-sex behavior and sex work related stigma (Closson et al., 2015). To minimize social stigma several of the men used the stigma management technique of nondisclosure. This meant nondisclosure to other non-paying sex partners, which meant that the chances of social support from family and friends were reduced. While nondisclosure was successful for the men to reduce stigma it acted as a barrier to sexual communication with non-paying sex partners, as well as their primary partner. Connected to the high rate of unprotected sex among the men, nondisclosure meant that the non-paying sexual partners were unable to make informed decisions about their sexual safety. For many of the men, not being able to be honest about their involvement in the sex trade was the origin of guilt and anxiety. Ultimately, Closson et al. (2015) argues that being able to be open about one’s involvement in the sex trade increases the social support for male sex workers, enables better sexual communication and makes it possible for the men to care for their own and other’s sexual health.

The third article examines the issues related to the context of Internet based male sex work in Melbourne, Australia (MeLean, 2012). The study is based on interviews with 23 male sex

workers. The participants in the study raised two main themes. First, the negative impact of sex work, described as, for instance, coping with stigma connected to the work. These experiences led several of the men to hide their involvement in sex work by choosing not to disclose it to anyone. Others were open about their involvement, though not truly open. Even the few who were (truly open) sometimes felt the need to protect others from the stigma connected to sex work by telling another story of their profession. This leads to the second theme of the study, the identified lack of engagement with supportive networks (McLean, 2012). The participants expressed reluctance to seek help for the negative impacts of their efforts to avoid stigma by not disclosing their sex work and would instead describe themselves as self-sufficient and equipped to take care of whatever came their way. In addition, the men showed no or little interest in having contact with other male sex workers for the purpose of social support, which, in turn, could be another way of shielding them from the negative impacts of sex work stigma.

The next study focuses on the social-emotional aspects of male escorting. The study is conducted at one particular agency in a small mid-Atlantic city in the U.S., where 40 MSW participated in both a semi-structured interview and in two quantitative surveys about sexual behavior and mental health (Smith et al., 2015).

The results are presented in three main themes. First, customer service is not only about sex, it also includes relational services, which mean providing emotional, and social services along with sexual services. Second, the men raised stress as an issue related to sexual activity. For example, engaging in sexual activities they were not so comfortable with, or having undesirable clients. The last theme includes stigma and social challenges related to escorting. Many men experienced sex work related stigma. To shield themselves from the stigma, the men highlighted their work as not only about providing sex but also pointed to the emotional aspect of escorting – making it different from prostitution and hustling. The major social challenge was the threat of being found out as a sex worker. Another significant risk for the men was disclosing their involvement in sex work. Because of the risks involved in disclosure, as many as 62 % had not told anyone outside of the sex work business. On the other hand, the men had colleagues at the agency where they could find social support and not be completely alone with their experiences of sex work. Of the remaining 38 %, many of the men had disclosed to a close friend, and/or to a romantic partner, and a few had told a family member. For the men who disclosed their work to someone four reasons were offered for disclosure. One, they did not want to hide an important part of themselves or how they earned the money from it. In addition, disclosure was a way to create social support outside of work. Third, they did not want to “sneak around” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 1054). Finally, it was better to disclose involvement in the sex trade than to be constantly be worried that they could be found out. Smith writes: “Disclosure could provide peace of mind, even when it did not go well” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 1054).

The fifth article is based on completely different experiences as it is an examination of sex worker students’ self-disclosure in the sociology classroom (Rosenbloom & Fetner, 2001). The aim was to discuss some of the pedagogical issues raised by students' self-disclosure of sex work within the experiential teaching methods used in sociology. I will not focus on the pedagogical issues but only the issues and strategies concerning self-disclosure. The cases used in this paper are three students who chose to disclose their own experiences of sex work to at least the teacher while researching sex work in course assignments that included fieldwork. These students disclosed their involvement in sex work although they were concerned about the stigma attached to it. The decision to disclose is a consideration of

anticipated reactions from others, in this case, the fear of being stigmatized by classmates. To manage stigma the students have used different strategies, such as different levels of disclosure, (sometimes) drawn-out over time and by partnering with the teacher to avoid being outed (Rosenbloom & Fetner, 2001).

One of the strategies used by the students meant that they got help from the teachers to pursue their case study without disclosing their experiences of sex work to their classmates (Rosenbloom & Fetner, 2001). On one hand, it raised the problem of how deceiving others or hiding one's true self could cause problems as it "may encourage feelings of inadequacy, fear, shame and invisibility" (Rosenbloom & Fetner, 2001, p. 448) for these students. On the other hand, to partner with the teacher and disclose to *someone* the student felt safe with gave them the option to disclose to the classmates knowing they had support from the teacher.

In summary, these cases show that self-disclosure is a slow process where the students thoughtfully evaluate the possible stigma they could face. Due to the safe environment they (might) experience, not having to be labeled or dismissed for their involvement in sex work, some would gradually share their experiences while others would maintain it as a secret. The two main findings were self-disclosure over time and safe environments as enabling factors.

Similarly, experiences from a research conducted on female sex workers on stigma resistance, coping strategies and burnout shows that disclosure is a complex issue: navigating the emotional impact whether the informants chose openness or secrecy (Koken, 2009). The study is based on 30 interviews with Internet-based independent female sex workers carried out in New York, U.S.A. Since this paper primarily focuses on other issues than disclosure I will only mention some of the findings here.

Common for all strategies of the informants was the associated stigma of sex work, either it was non-disclosure, full disclosure or the "middle road" (Koken, 2009, p. 71). The perceived judgments others would have prevented some of the escorts from disclosing their work to anyone, for fear of losing status and in an attempt to protect themselves from the stigma. It would lead to social isolation, loneliness and loss of the possibility of social support. Most of the escorts chose the "middle road" meaning they carefully navigated through potential stigmatization by being completely open or conversely, chose loneliness by being completely closeted. They practiced the information management technique by controlling how much, when and who gets the information. Another commonly used information management technique was "coming out" as a sex worker only to go "back into the closet" because of all the negative consequences of being open (Koken, 2009).

Another study is the ethnography on female indoor sex workers in Birmingham, UK, *Sex Work: A Risky Business* (Sanders, 2012). The study focuses on everyday activities related to the women's work, and how they perceive and respond to risks (connected to sex work) as well as how they manage occupational hazards. 55 women have taken part in this study through interviews, and hours and hours of observations of the indoor sex industry.

I will highlight one aspect in specific in response to Sanders (2012) study and it is how the women manage the consequences of stigma. Most of the participants in the study had experienced "whore stigma", to a greater or lesser degree (Sanders, 2012). Consequences ranging from hate mail, women being outed in local media to attacks on them not being taken seriously by the police.

Sanders (2012) argues that it is not necessary to become a subject labeled by the public to experience self-stigmatization; it is a process that occurs when the subject understands that she would be stigmatized if she was found out. The gaze of others is central to shame, and shame was the most important issue identified by the women in this study as something to avoid. The women identify the shame they experience related to their sex work as well as the stigma that might be felt by family and friends who experience shame connected to them doing sex work. To avoid both these types of stigma, the women employ a number of stigma management techniques such as living in secrecy, using pseudonyms or job aliases, working and living in different cities, and sharing variations and parts of the truth about their work.

These women evaluate the costs of disclosure carefully. It means they are constantly preoccupied with decisions on whom to disclose to, how much and when. As Sanders explains, “disclosure depends on the person, their values and the strength of the relationship” (Sanders, 2012, p. 122).

In contrast, only three women reported not being really affected by whore stigma (Sanders, 2012). Their families and friends were more accepting, and all of them had friends in the sex trade. These women did not hide their profession. As a result they did not use pseudonyms or job aliases.

Prostitution in Denmark (Koford et al., 2011) is a report done on the current situation of prostitution in Denmark. The main objectives were to study the extent of prostitution in Denmark at a specific time and to explore the living conditions of sex workers. The report includes a survey of 290 sex workers where 67 were male, and an interview study with 119 prostitutes, where 44 were men. All the men participating in the study, regardless of whether they participated in the interview study or the survey, defined themselves as escorts.

In the survey they asked if the sex workers had someone to talk to about personal and intimate subjects related to them selling sex (Koford et al., 2011). As many as 35 percent of the men answered no, they did not have anyone to talk to about these kinds of issues. Moreover, approximately 26 percent of the men had answered yes, they did have someone but they did not use the opportunity to actually talk. Of the remaining participants, approximately 39 percent answered yes, they did have someone to talk to. Experiences of being afraid of disclosing to close friends, family members or partners were reported. Two main reasons were mentioned, either they wished to protect the wellbeing of their close ones so they would not be affected by stigma, or because their close ones did not even accept them being homo- or bisexual. Double-stigma is apparent, both being homo- or bisexual and being a prostitute means a double exposure.

The last research to be included in this chapter is Larsdotter et al.’s (2011) study on LGBTQ people in the sex trade in Sweden. As mentioned in the background, the study conducted 50 interviews, of which 27 were with men. The study examines a range of issues concerning selling sex, as to the situation for LGBTQ people in the sex trade with a focus on extent, sexual practices, safer sex, and the need for professional support, to exiting strategies, buyers’ perspectives, and finally, young LGBTQ people’s experiences of selling sex. Although the study did not specifically focus on disclosure, there are a few findings concerning it. For example, in one sub study (Olsson, 2010) one third of the respondents had not told anyone about their experiences of selling sex, and several did not dare to disclose their involvement in the sex trade to health care professionals. Furthermore, for the majority of the ones who

actually did disclose to someone, they only did so to one other person. Social stigma was raised as the main barrier for disclosure (Olsson, 2010).

Summary

The choice to include research on both female and male sex workers can of course be discussed. Although there are differences in their experiences the similarities are too important to overlook in this study.

To begin with, sex work related stigma is common for all the studies included. Stereotypes and stigma most often refer to women but it is evident that it does not protect men from being subjected to whore stigma. Some of the strategies used by sex workers to protect themselves from whore stigma include reframing their work in less derogatory terms, and most commonly they used their disclosure as protection. Another strategy was to choose not to disclose to avoid stigma, but this meant the loss of potential social support and subsequent loneliness. Instead, many choose the “middle road” of deciding who knows what when – this way they could both get social support and evade the burden of carrying the secret of sex work alone.

Several of the studies that included male sex workers raised double stigma as a barrier for disclosure. Meaning being both subjugated gay stigma and whore stigma. Another specific experience of male sex workers are their feelings toward the gay community where some felt the gay community to be more supportive than the greater society, while others felt the total opposite.

In brief, these studies all indicate that the focus on disclosure is important for further research. Disclosure is inevitably important for the individual since it, as its best, is a way to for sex workers to share their experiences with others, to be able to get support and to protect themselves from the stigma connected to sex work. On the other hand, disclosure means taking risks of being outed or being subjected to whore stigma. The strategies used by the sex workers to be able to find support and to be listened to shows how important this subject is for social work, and health care, since it *shows* what obstacles there are for disclosure and ultimately what is needed for services that could benefit sex workers.

Finally, since I was not able to find more than these eight studies that were suitable for this thesis, it demonstrates the need for more research on disclosure and sex work irrespective of gender. This thesis is my contribution in the field.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As with several of the studies included in the previous chapter, the stigma managing techniques (Goffman, 1963) were central in the understanding of men's disclosure of and their stories of selling sex. Therefore, one of the main theories I have chosen for this study is the stigma theory (Goffman, 1963), which means the term stigma is used exclusively as a theoretical and analytical concept throughout this thesis. However, for the purpose of this thesis, this theory would not be enough. To deepen the understanding of disclosure and with a particular focus on stories told, narrative theory came into place, specifically the existential level of storytelling and a power analysis of stories told from different positions. In addition, the sex hierarchy (Rubin, 1984) is helpful to uncover the moral and power structures around sex. All these theories are combined in the theoretical framework.

The stories

To be able to discuss the stories the informants have given me, we need to unfold the different functions a story can have. In brief, I will discuss the existential meaning of narratives, then go on to describe dominant versions of narratives and narratives of resistance.

While people's willingness to share their experiences is important for the knowledge of sex workers' lives, the stories also play an important role for the sex workers themselves. It is when we try to put our experiences into words, and these words become stories, that we learn to understand them. A narrative can be distinguished from a chronologic account of events; a narrative is a construction of a meaningful order to random events and situations (Johansson, 2007). In other words, it is our way to make sense of our experiences and to understand them within a context. To tell stories is also a way to connect to others—to friends, family, colleagues, and society. Stories can be described as having a social character since they are shared with, and co-created with others (Johansson, 2007). Thus, narratives have an existential meaning ranging from personal to societal (Johansson, 2007). In addition, stories have a practical benefit as they help people to communicate and thus be able to get support and help if needed.

Another aspect of narratives is the political, the one of power and resistance. Some narratives have a stronger claim for power through their representation and embodiment of certain rights and values, corresponding to the claims of dominant social and political groups in society. Mishler (1997) calls these "dominant versions of narratives" (Mishler, 1997, p. 105). They tell us how something "is" and how it ought to be. Therefore, it could be said that they have a moral nature, guiding us through the right and wrongs (Johansson, 2007). These (dominant versions of) narratives are selective; they include some narratives and exclude others, all in accordance to the structures and values they are upholding (Mishler, 1997). Consequently, some narratives will be silenced, consciously or not. It is because of the fear that the alternative stories could challenge the validity of the dominant versions of narratives. Alternative stories are the ones told from otherness, from marginal social positions (Johansson, 2007; Mishler, 2005). In other words, they can be understood as 'narratives of resistance' (Mishler, 2005) as they offer an alternative perspective to the 'dominant versions of narratives'.

Stigma

The term stigma originates from the Greek society where they cut or branded the skin of the unwanted, giving them a bodily sign that would mark their bad moral status (Goffman, 1963). Even though we have left the bodily signs behind, the meaning of the word has hardly changed. Unfortunately, in most cases it still means that individuals are marked for discrimination and reduced life chances for the exposed.

Goffman (1963) describes stigma as a process involving relationships and not necessarily the attribute itself, even though it is the (deviating) attribute that defines the stigma. The stigma becomes apparent to us when a person does not correspond to our expectations of how that person should be. The expectations can be explained as normative expectations, closely connected to categories and stereotypes, also called the *virtual social identity*. On the other hand, the attributes a person does have, are called the *actual social identity*. It is when a discrepancy between the *virtual* and the *actual social identity* occurs, and when this discrepancy reduces the person from a normal to a deviant person that we call it stigma.

There are different types of stigma, as physical deformities, “blemishes of the individual character” (Goffman, 1963, p. 14), or belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group. As the second type refers to the shortcomings of the moral character, both homosexuals and sex workers would be categories under this. However, the important distinction is between two perspectives of stigma, namely the *discredited* and the *discreditable* (Goffman, 1963). The former can mean either the apparent or the already known and the latter means the unknown, the potentially to know. One person can move between these two distinctions in, for instance, different situations and contexts or different times.

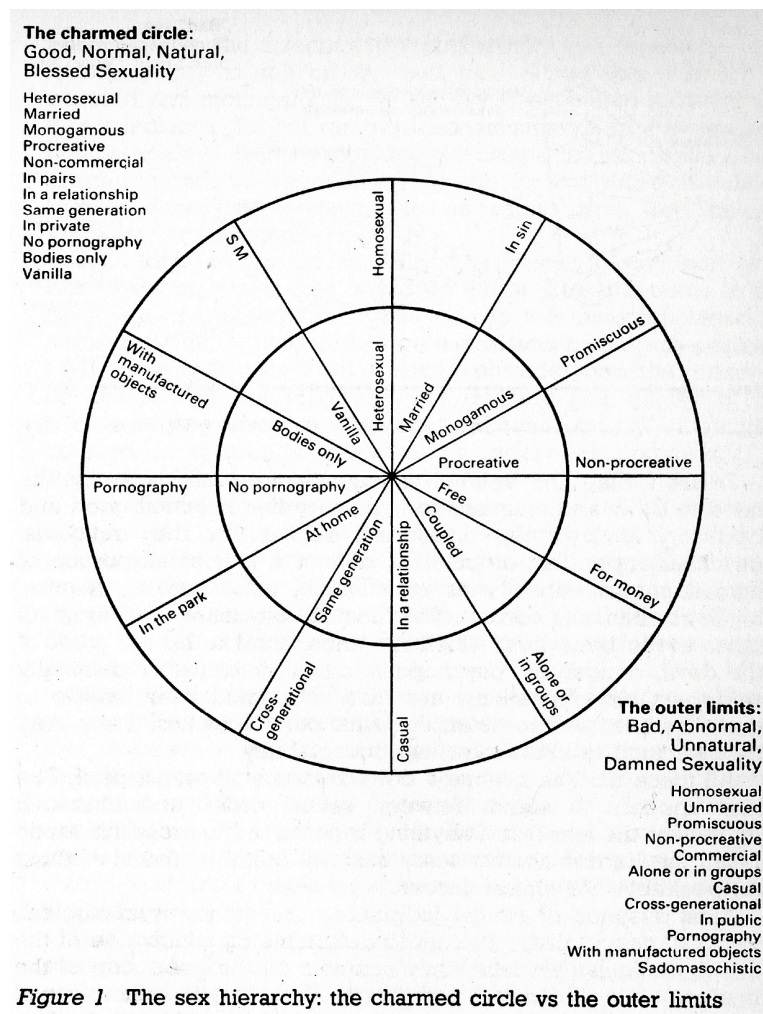
There are two main features of stigma management, and they are *passing* and *covering*. *Passing* is when no one knows about the person’s stigma, in this case, except for the clients. Many of those who will have the option of passing will try because of the harsh treatment of being known as discredited. In other words, to pass means to be considered normal. It involves a great deal of work, and can sometimes come with consequences. For instance, it can be about the fear of getting caught or that someone would recognize the passing technique and therefore be able to disclose their stigma. Another strategy is when the discreditable person elaborates his/her lie more and more over time, engaging in “in-deeper-ism” (Goffman, 1963, p. 105). Passing can give rise to guilt for not disclosing in close relationships. In addition, since the discreditable person will understand the view that the normal have of the stigmatized “group” he/she really belongs to, feelings of disloyalty can arise.

As passing, on one hand, for the *discreditable* is about managing the information about him/herself to others, *covering*, on the other hand, will for the *discredited* be an attempt to minimize the tension in the social interaction. Covering means what, when and how much the person discloses about his/her stigma, all in the effort to try to take the attention away from the stigmatized virtual identity to let the interaction flow freely (Goffman, 1963). Thus, through the control of information it becomes a strategy that tries to control the consequences of the social interaction when a stigma becomes obvious.

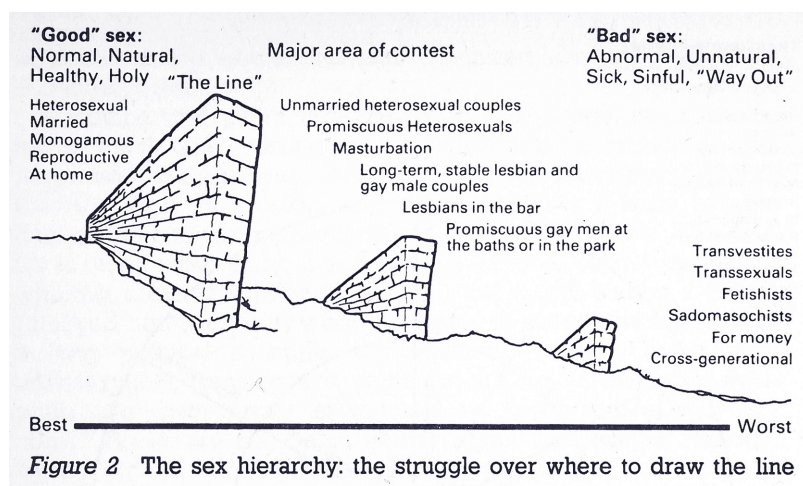
The sex hierarchy

In the essay “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” Rubin (1984) discusses how society values sexual behavior through a hierarchical system. The hierarchy is supported through a complex structure of history, politics, religion, and not to forget, the psychiatry that has labeled and diagnosed sexual deviance as diseases or mental illnesses. The core of the hierarchical system is that sexual behavior is socially valued, meaning that behavior ranked high in the hierarchy is rewarded, in contrast to behavior ranked lower, which is degraded. Rewards, for example, can be legal and bureaucratic support, economical benefits and respectability. On the other hand, degradation can be expressed in criminality, mental illness, or through economic sanctions, and further, it is reinforced with stigma. Moreover, sexual behavior relates to a wide range of practices and behaviors related to sex, therefore, homosexuality, S/M (Sado Masochism) and sex work are all included. Because of the sexual activity that they have in common, they have been subjected to law enforcement, stigmatization and diagnosed with mental illness.

The charmed circle is a model of how this hierarchy can be considered and how different sexual behaviors are related to, as well as, in opposition of each other (Rubin, 1984). (See figure 1.) The inner circle illustrates how some behaviors are good, normal and natural, and more importantly, how they are accepted within society; while the outer circle shows the behaviors that are bad, abnormal and unnatural, also outside of the accepted sexual behaviors in our society.



To completely understand the sex hierarchy, there is another dimension to it, and it is the struggle over where to draw the line between good and bad sex (Rubin, 1984). (See figure 2.) This is a continuous struggle or even a conflict in a changing society. However, in this case it is a slow change. Historically, numerous deviant sexual behaviors have become more and more accepted, for example: masturbation, casual sex and monogamous homosexual relationships. But still sex work is one sexual behavior that is unaccepted.



Altogether, in the words of Rubin “all these models assume a domino theory of sexual peril” (Rubin, 1984, p. 282). What these models have in common is the line between good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable. The line represents the intersection between sexual order and chaos. It means that if one unacceptable sexual behavior would cross the line, the hierarchical system could fall apart and the sexual order would collapse. Therefore, most societies try to determine *any* sexual behavior primarily as good or bad – to keep the order!

Summary of the theoretical framework

Although both the stigma theory and the sex hierarchy are relational models explaining the accepted and the unaccepted, the models differ in perspectives. The sex hierarchy focuses on the structural level – on how to keep order in human behavior through legal, social and moral sanctions (Rubin, 1984). Meanwhile the stigma theory focuses on the process of sorting people into two kinds: the accepted and the unaccepted (Goffman, 1963).

If we combined the theory of stigma with the sex hierarchy it could be interpreted as a stigma scale. Let me explain: as the picture on page 13 (Figure nr 1) shows, the charmed circle is divided into two, an inner circle and an outer circle; each of them represents the accepted behavior versus the unaccepted. If we picture this charmed circle in front of us and at the same time recognize which behaviors responds to stigmatization, then we can see that the more far out in the circle you are, the worse the stigma connected to you. If the outer circle also included some sort of grading of behaviors where the least unaccepted behavior were closest to the inner circle and the most unaccepted were on the outermost position, the stigma

connected to each position in the circle would correspond to it, making the outer positions worse than the positions closer to the accepted circle.

To add the stories into this equation allows for a more individualized understanding of the stigma scale. Stigma connected to sex work is only something known to others when, and only when, the person or someone else is open about it. It is an invisible blemish on the character, a discreditable person as Goffman (1963) explains. The only thing that connects the person to the outer world and thus, the stigma scale, is either to disclose their experiences or to be called out. The words and the choice of the story told will be the connection to the labeling. It functions as a sliding scale dependent on the story told and who listens, which combined determines where they end up on the stigma scale. Language is their control mechanism as much as it is their source of resistance.

METHODOLOGY

One of the main methodological considerations for this thesis was how to address the problem I sought out to explore. It has involved careful consideration of the research approach as well as finding the right research method. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) describes methods to choose the best possible way to conduct your research for the purpose of getting the most out of the materials, and thus answer the research questions and purpose in the most appropriate way. Considering the aim of this thesis focuses on the experiences of men, qualitative methods seemed appropriate. Bryman (2008) describes qualitative methods as those which focus on the subject's words and thus their experiences rather than quantification.

As a qualitative method I chose semi-structured interviews as the best means to answer the research questions because the method allows focused interviews at the same time as it offers both structure and flexibility to examine the topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Bryman, 2008).

The second methodological consideration involved the research approach, meaning the perspective on and relationship between the research and theory (Bryman, 2008; Thomassen, 2007). In brief, the differences can be explained as either the inductive approach, taking the specific and building upon it, while the deductive approach takes the general to explain the specific (Thomassen, 2007).

This thesis has a more inductive research approach, but at the same time, there are a few positions taken from the start drawing the attention to the deductive way of research. It is inductive research because it is an explorative study; I did not have preconceived ideas about what I wanted to prove. On the other hand, the problem to be examined rests on the belief that disclosure means something to people because we are social and communicative humans, and that experiences of selling sex could generate feelings of stigmatization. These premises are drawn from and supported by previous research in the field (Koken, 2009; Sanders, 2012). Nevertheless, an inductive approach is consistent with how the problem (of this thesis) has been dealt with: where the theory is built upon the informants' experiences (Bryman, 2008).

Implementation

To continue with this chapter I will now discuss how I have carried out the research. In the following chapters I will present a discussion on language barriers concerning this thesis, to be continued with the issue of trustworthiness, followed by highlighting my position in Reflexivity and, at last, complete Methodological Considerations with a discussion on the ethical considerations.

Data collection and limitations

Since the thesis is conducted in Sweden, the information about it was spread mostly through Swedish networks, on Swedish websites, or in the Swedish section of gay or sex worker websites. It meant that the information about the thesis has been in Swedish throughout this first process.

I have searched for self-identified men who have sold sex one or more times, who are over 15 years old. The informants were all at the time of the interviews living in Sweden, were Swedish residents, and had all sold sex in Sweden, though some of them had experiences of selling sex in other countries. The main focus of the interviews was their experiences understood within the Swedish context.

Finding people to interview came to be the biggest problem of my thesis, and proved to be time-consuming and requiring a great deal of patience. Something that was supposed to take one month took more than six months, to find at least 6 people to interview. During this period of time, I lost faith in this project many times but always found new energy from the people I interviewed, from people who emailed me, sent me messages on quiser and others that I have met during this time, all with support and reminders of how important this study is.

I have used many different ways to spread information about my thesis. I have created an event on my own Facebook account with information about my study; this event spread among my friends, friends of friends, on to someone's blog, to Twitter and so on. In addition, as one of the most frequently suggested places I should post my information was on the online gay community quiser.com, I have tried to have a discussion with them about what I could post on the community as a member and not, but to date, I have still not received any answers. It led me to take a chance – through my personal account on Quiser I opened a public club which I have done some advertising for, the club simply provides information about my thesis but it has been somewhat censored (the word sex has been replaced with *** so that I do not break the rules of the online community and “public clubs”). Further, I have had a club on Gayromeo.com on two different occasions, but the first time it did not give me anything and the club was closed down by the site after two weeks. Later I got to know that when RFSL did their report (Larsdotter et al., 2011) they sent a message (email) through the site to all they wanted to come in contact with, which seemed to have worked for them. I reopened my club at Gayromeo.com and through a search on the site I found the escorts registered in Sweden at that point, totaling 78 of which I could see that 77 were my target group, and I sent an email to that group with a brief description about what I did and what I was looking for.

Furthermore, I have sent information about the thesis to RFSL² Stockholm, Malmö, Gothenburg, to RFSL Rådgivningen Skåne, Mikamottagningen³ Stockholm and Malmö, and to Rose Alliance⁴. Few have replied to my emails, but RFSL Gothenburg posted the information about my thesis on their web-page, and Mikamottagningen in Malmö has given me some tips on where to post the information. I have emailed several sex sites and only two replied, and the only one who has been willing to have a discussion on what I could or could not post on their site was sexwork.net. Sadly, the communication has been a very slow process. Meanwhile, I have emailed several people that have crossed my path, either people working with prostitutes, others that have conducted research in the field or others that I have been referred to. Yet again, most of them have not replied, but the few who have, have been very supportive and helpful with the very least they have been able to contribute.

² RFSL is The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights, and these are a few local branches of the organization.

³ Mikamottagningen is a local governmental service for people with experiences of sex for pay, damaging or hurting themselves with sex and/or have been victims of human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation. The former Prostitutionsgruppen.

⁴ Rose Alliance is an organization by and for current and former sex and erotic workers in Sweden.

Informants

I have come in contact with the informants through a few gay sites and through Facebook (I got two informants through Qruiser, another two through Facebook and three through Gayromeo). They have contacted me through email showing interest in my study and wanting to participate in the study. After the initial contact I sent them an email within a few hours or a day with more detailed information about the study and how to participate if they were interested.

The informants have all received the information letter, which describes the purpose of the study, what participating in the research means, confidentiality, and how they can refuse to answer any question in the interview, or withdraw from the interview at any point (Bryman, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, the letter includes information about where and how the material is going to be used, and how they can get access to the thesis when published (Bryman, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Later on during the interview, I repeated all of the information to be sure they have fully understood the terms of their participation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In terms of their privacy, I have settled for oral consent, given that they all had the information twice, both written and orally (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

All interviews have been conducted two days to two weeks after they read the information letter and agreed to participate. Three out of four interviews have been carried out through a personal interview, (where I have travelled or met them in their choice of city). They have had the opportunity to choose where we meet, and where I had the possibility, I have given some options. Three of the interviews were done at cafés, one at the home of the informant, and another two were done over Skype, as a phone call without video, and, the last interview was done via internet chat. I have been allowed to record all interviews.

The informants are seven men who have a wide range of experiences of selling sex from only a few times to several years. Most of the informants have been living in medium-sized towns or the metropolitan areas of Sweden, except for one who lived in a small town. Their names have been changed to protect their privacy. The informants are as follow: Martin is 35 years old and says he has sold sex on and off for 11 years. David, 29 years, has sold sex for a long period of time, always as a sideline. Max is 30 years old and has sold sex on and off for 7 years. Karl is 24 years old and has sold sex a few times. Sebastian is 31 years, and he has sold sex actively five years prior to the interview and recently started selling sex again. John is 21 years and has extensive experience of selling sex and was still doing so by the time of the interview. At last, William, 24 years, has sold sex on and off for approximately three years.

Interview guide

The interview guide is designed to re-connect to the aim of the thesis, by using three themes that each focus on different parts of it. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) suggests that through thematizing the interview by clarifying the study's why, what and how will not only help you to design a suitable interview guide but also to focus on the aim throughout the interview. Therefore, I have used the aim, the research questions and the knowledge in the field to develop an interview guide (Bryman, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). From this I have created themes that can be characterized as focused on first, the *personal experience* of disclosure, second, *the informants thoughts* on sharing the story of selling sex, and last, *thoughts of societal attitudes and norms*. All these themes relate and interrelate to the aim of the thesis.

Although, I have used semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), it has been more structured than unstructured and it has helped me and the informants to stay focused on the subject, but I have still had enough flexibility to follow through on interesting leads (meaning follow-up questions). Since it is a relatively un-researched field, the will to knowledge, from my point of view, and the informants will to share their views have been balanced throughout the structured semi-structured interview. As a researcher, I find it my responsibility to not ask about more than I need to know for my study. Furthermore, to divide the interview guide into themes has helped me elaborate my informants' experiences and their ideas of the narrative of selling sex (Bryman, 2008). Even if the second part of the interview guide is on a general level and not a personal one, some of the informants have continued to answer the questions personally.

Transcription

I transcribed all of the interviews as soon as possible after each interview. Since some of the interviews were conducted in public settings it has affected the quality of the recordings, and some things said were not possible to hear. In the context of the interview, it is just a few missing words and based on what has been said it has not affected the whole of the interview. Furthermore, the interviews are transcribed word by word, distinguished with pauses, laughs, giggles, and interruptions such as phone ringing or dogs barking. The names of people, places and cities have been changed in order to protect their privacy (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). To further protect the informants from stigmatization because of the repetitive and sometimes unclear nature of speech (ibid.), the language in the transcripts has been adapted to the written language before publication. In addition, the interviews were conducted in Swedish, transcribed and adapted into Swedish written language before excerpts used in this thesis were translated into English.

Methods of analysis

To best serve the purpose of this thesis I have chosen to combine different approaches throughout the analysis. Since I am interested in the experiences of men who have sold sex, a phenomenological approach seemed to fit the purpose best. It means keeping close to the subjects' views and experiences, and to let their perspective be central for the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While this been an important approach yet not the only one, I combined it with a hermeneutic approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This gave me the opportunity to move between the whole and parts to better understand what I had in front of me (Thomassen, 2007). It meant to move between the whole of one interview to one citation, between one citation and several coded in the same way, to move between themes and clusters to one single interview again, and from that back again to the theoretical perspectives on the material and back into the themes.

Using these different approaches on the material allowed me to add theoretical perspectives early on, and with it elaborate on the meaning, and then go back to the men's perspective to further deepen the theoretical understanding of the material. It proved to be fruitful to alternate these approaches since it gave me the opportunity to stay close to the material and the men's experiences, and to have a certain distance from the material guided by the theoretical framework. The latter made it possible to discover connections that were not immediately seen in the perspective of the subjects.

I have conducted my analysis step by step like this: Firstly, after transcribing all interviews I read them through twice. I have done this to become familiar with the material and to better know it. Secondly, I started to highlight expressions, words and feelings connected to certain themes within the stories. Here the interview guide and the research question have functioned as support throughout the process. In addition, I have made a brief comparison of the emerging themes to the theories I sought out to use to see if there were connections to be made or if there were some gaps. Very few changes were made to the theoretical framework at this point. Thirdly, I read through all the marked keywords/sentences, thereafter I started to indicate similarities within each interview but also between the interviews. Fourthly, the initiated themes and clusters within each interview were collected and clustered throughout by theme rather than by person. This provided an opportunity for an overview and a better understanding of the findings. Fifthly, the next step was to organize and structure these themes to create logic and be able to see new patterns. Here the theoretical framework together with the research questions has been helpful in guiding and further developing the analysis. At last, a final thematization was made of the material to highlight main categories and subcategories. Throughout the analysis process, and also throughout the writing of the analysis, the citations used have been able to be tracked back to their original context, the interview, so these would not have been reinterpreted out of context.

Language barriers

Due to the complications of conducting an interview study in Swedish within an international program, I have encountered some problems along the way concerning language barriers, specifically interpretation and translation of certain words. The Swedish word *berätta* does not have the exact same connotation as the English word *tell*, whereas *disclose* in English does not have the same connotation as *avslöja* in Swedish. Most of the international literature I have found uses the term *disclose* when discussing issues related to my subject so I have used this term to relate to the stories of the men I have interviewed, even if they are not using the term (*avslöja*) themselves. I do so because I want to highlight the similarities between their stories and the ones in previous literature. However, I would like to point out that their stories are not like any story in general because of the strategies involved in disclosing; even though they themselves used *to tell* (*berätta*) when describing what they do. The willingness to use *tell* could also be interpreted as everyday speech, which in turn could cover –consciously or unconsciously – the disclosing part of their storytelling, and possibly be an act to make room for these stories.

Trustworthiness

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) write about trustworthiness in how to evaluate the strength and the transferability of social science, while Bryman (2008) would describe it as the quality of research. Qualitative research is based on other principles from quantitative research and therefore the evaluation of it has to be modified to suit the research to better evaluate it. Bryman (2008) has discussed the four concepts that trustworthiness consists of, each related to the evaluating criterion in quantitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Hereon these concepts will be discussed as related to qualitative research, and I will clarify how trustworthiness has been considered in the completion of this thesis.

First, credibility is comparable with internal validity, which means that if there are possibilities of several interpretations by more than one observer, this will have to be reconciled (Bryman, 2008). Since I am the only observer/researcher there will only be my interpretation. But during the interviews with my informants, I have given them the opportunity to refute my views; thereby I have tried to keep the closeness to their stories and experiences.

Second, transferability is comparable to external validity, which focuses on the generalization of the findings (Bryman, 2008). Since this is a qualitative research it is not possible to generalize these findings. Of course, the findings of this thesis are specific for this particular context and the men's experiences during this time. However, some of the themes in the findings are comparable with others' research in the field (see examples in previous research) making this one a contribution of how to understand disclosure for men who sell sex to men.

Third, dependability is similar to reliability (Bryman, 2008). All phases of the completion of the research have been documented in this report, likewise to the problems I have encountered along the way. The transcribed interviews are safely stored. Therefore, with a high level of transparency, dependability has been taken into account.

At last, confirmability regards what could be close to objectivity, which is recognized to be impossible to achieve in social science research (Bryman, 2008). Here it means to know if the researcher has let her own personal values determine the direction of the research. To be clear on the perspectives, the prejudice and knowledge I as a person and a researcher went into this research with, I have used transparency and reflexivity (see next chapter) to clarify my position and how I, as a researcher, have influenced the research.

Reflexivity

In the meeting between researcher and informant they both influence each other – it is an interaction between the two of them (Ehn & Klein, 1994). Naturally, the focus of the study is on the informants, their world and experiences, while the one not described is the researcher. So, to turn the focus from the informants to the researcher is to highlight, in this case, my own position as well as my perspective. It is described as reflexivity—to become aware of one's awareness (Ehn & Klein, 1994). In similar ways, Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) discuss reflexive objectivity as *“being reflexive about one's contribution as a researcher to the production of knowledge. Objectivity in qualitative inquiry here means striving for objectivity about subjectivity”* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 242).

I have always had a particular interest for issues concerning those who are not accepted as everyone else in society. What interests me most is the process behind singling out a group of people, making them different and consequently treating them differently, whether those differences are what opportunities are offered and who is excluded, or who has the right to access state provided services, or who faces discrimination because of who they are and are valued/devalued in the eyes of society. This interest has lead me to pursue a bachelor thesis on LGBTQ people's experiences of the social services in a help-seeking situation, to work in a half-way home for homeless women with an ongoing addiction, to carry out my internship within the masters program at a sex worker driven NGO offering services to and for sex workers, in Canada. All these experiences, among many others, form my views on otherness, exclusion versus inclusion, and are an integrated part of who I am and how I view people,

especially people who most often face stigma and discrimination. For me, the rights of the most vulnerable members of our community are our most important struggle. To sum it up, as Fannie Lou Hammer once said it: “Nobody is free until everybody’s free”⁵.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations should be integrated in the process of conducting a research from the very start (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For me, these ethical considerations became an important part of the process from the very beginning of conceptualizing a research report. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) suggest that ethical issues have two main perspectives; the micro perspective focusing on the personal level for the participants and the macro perspective focusing on social consequences of the knowledge produced.

First, before starting the process I considered if the research would harm the participants either through loss of their self-esteem, stress or harm to their development (Bryman, 2008). I found it not likely but had prepared for unusual situations to happen; therefore I had contact information for counselors and support services for sex workers if and when someone might actually need it. In addition, the interview guide was carefully put together and all unnecessary (the ones not in line with the aim of the thesis) questions were eliminated. Just because I had the opportunity to ask more than I needed I nevertheless found it to be my responsibility to protect the participants, and not take advantage of them. Balancing the desire to know with respect for the integrity of the participants was crucial for a successful progress of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, the interview can be something valuable for both parties (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While I didn’t ask during the interviews, most of the participants declared they enjoyed the opportunity to freely talk about their experiences and get new insights, to see their experiences and stories of themselves in a different light.

Second, the wider social and political consequences of this research were considered. One of the questions was whether this research would contribute to the stigmatization of sex workers in general, and male sex workers in particular. The knowledge produced could possibly contribute to this stigma, depending on the language used and perspective offered on sex workers and people with experiences of selling sex. As already declared earlier on in the thesis, these are issues I have taken into account. Another level of this is to consider whom the outcomes of the study would be for. I believe this thesis is to be of great value for anyone working with sex workers, or someone who works within the health care system or social services, and for sex workers themselves.

Finally, the ethical guidelines were considered. Due to the sensitivity of the research subject, and because this is a relatively un-researched area, I have tried to be as clear as possible with the information I have given. In brief, I have considered the research ethics of Vetenskapsrådet (2002) that includes the request for information about the aim of the research to the participants, an informed consent of the informant, that the gathered information is handled with confidentiality in regards to the privacy of the informant, and information on how the material would be used, who would have access to it and where the completed

⁵ Fannie Lou Hamer. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved January 16, 2016, from BrainyQuote.com Web site: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/f/fannielouh124505.html>

research would be published. These points were covered in the information letter that was given to everyone who showed an interest in my study prior to their decision to participate (described in the chapter Informants). The information was then repeated before the interview, so that both the participant and I would be clear on what it means to be part of the research, and how to withdraw if desired.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter is divided into three main parts whereas the first focuses on nondisclosure and the limitations of the participants' disclosure. The second part continues to explore the motives behind disclosure, at the interpersonal level in terms of what the participants shared. The third part goes on to unfolding a wider understanding of disclosure.

Nondisclosure

All of the informants of this thesis have practiced nondisclosure, though in varying degrees. In Olsson (2010) forty-five percent of the men participating in the study had never told anyone. Similarly, in Larsdotter et al. (2011) many of the participants had never disclosed to anyone or only to a close friend. With this in mind, it is interesting to consider the motives behind the participants' choice *not* to disclose. During the analysis three main motives appeared obvious as barriers for disclosure, they are described as follow: *Gay Stigma*, *Whore Stigma* and *As Protection for Others*. Thereafter, I will elaborate what they do not share with others in the section *What not to tell*, and I end this chapter on nondisclosure with a section on total secrecy, known as *Passing*.

Gay Stigma

Although, homosexuality does not necessarily possess the stigmatized label today that it did in the past, people still disclose their sexual identity if they see themselves as something other than heterosexual. Depending on the context, "coming out" can be very a different experience for different people, varying from easy to difficult. Several of the men I interviewed mentioned experiences of homophobia or being made the "other" as a consequence of them being out or perceived as gay, making this a reality for them.

John comments as to why he never disclosed selling sex to anyone: "No, but I was close to telling that I've had sex with men. I tried to mention it to a friend, just for fun, but everyone has such homophobia. Now it doesn't matter" (John, 21 years).

Sexual practice is not the same as sexual identity (Larsdotter et al., 2011), still, engaging (either a few times or repeatedly) in same sex acts can be understood or perceived as homosexuality. Goffman (1963) explains it as when the discreditable, in this case a person who has engaged in same sex acts becomes known, his virtual identity can be reduced, and if it is, he will be labeled as homosexual.

So, whether they are gay or not the men will be interpreted as gay if they disclose selling sex to men. Thus, the virtual identity of homosexuality affects what will be possible to disclose and therefore serves as a barrier. John's example of why he decided to never disclose having had sex with men proves exactly this. Koken et al. (2004) found the same among their participants, male sex workers who had not told anyone about their engagement in sex work nor that they had had sex with men. The authors call it a 'double closet' (Koken et al., 2004, p. 24).

Homosexuality becomes an issue, not necessarily because of the participant's actual sexual identity, but since the act of selling sex to men is understood as an expression of

homosexuality, solely because they are engaging in a same sex act. Therefore, their identity cannot be understood separately from their act of selling sex, irrespective of how they themselves identify. Similarly, female sex workers with predominantly male clientele have been interpreted as heterosexual and previously few researchers have even asked about their sexual identity (Koken, 2009; Larsdotter et al., 2011).

Additionally, if the virtual identity of homosexuality is too much to handle by the intended audience, it also serves as a barrier to disclosing sex work. Martin describes how he does not disclose to some people in his life that he has sold sex because, as he says: “It’s enough that they know I am gay” (Martin). His statement reveals that among these people, otherness is singled out. It means that he is already, at some level, struggling with the discrepancy between his virtual identity and his actual identity. It is for this same reason that Max tells me he never told his mum about his experiences of selling sex: “She doesn’t like that I am gay at all” (Max).

Accordingly, to tell someone who struggles with the idea of homosexuality about the experiences of having sold sex seems difficult. It would further expose the subject to alienation and, in worst case, make him incomprehensible. I suggest it is an example of how the line between good and bad (Rubin, 1984) is maintained and how it comes visible. Having two deviant behaviors, both being gay and a “prostitute”, is like having one too many – making it harder to label this particular behavior since it is not only homosexuality nor prostitution while both at the same time. The inability to define, and to label, can be interpreted as an expression of the sexual chaos Rubin (1984) discusses. Therefore, the person may be subjected to incomprehension.

At the same time, the unwillingness to disclose experiences of having sold sex can be an understanding of the listener’s resistance toward accepting the unwanted, a reluctance to challenge the existing sexual hierarchy. Here Martin considers how people who have a hard time understanding homosexuality might think about men selling sex: “I think it is, they can hardly get it into their head that there are other sexualities than heterosexuality. I have a feeling that it would be fiercely difficult to get these people [to understand] that there are homosexual prostitutes” (Martin). It reveals not only the resistance to the unwanted but how cogent the sexual hierarchy actually is. “Fiercely difficult” could be seen a manifestation of the dynamics upholding the system, which through their very existence obstructs the possible chaos beyond the sexual order. Thus, Martin finds it incredibly difficult to disclose any experiences of selling sex.

Whore Stigma

The term prostitute is often associated with (predominantly) women as victims or deviants (Koken, 2009). In addition, the dominant version of narratives of prostitutes expresses more or less explicitly the whore stigma through daily speech and/or expressions used (whore, prostitute) in a negative or derogatory way. Even though whore stigma primarily refers to female sex workers, the stigma seems to affect male sex workers too. Certainly, all the participants in my study have experienced whore stigma, although in varying levels. So have the men in Koken et al. (2004), likewise with other studies conducted both in Sweden and internationally (Eriksson & Knutgård, 2005; Larsdotter et al., 2011; McLean, 2012).

Whore stigma leads the subject to adopt strategies to try to evade it – one of these strategies is nondisclosure. Goffman (1963) calls it passing, meaning that the ones who have the

possibility to pass will do so from time to time, just “because of the great rewards in being considered normal” (Goffman, 1963, p. 95). Karl describes it like this:

(...) people tend to jump to conclusions that don't match up. There is an accepted view that this is harmful, at the same time it is something that is waved off. It's illegal to buy. It's something the society opposes and it's described as very dangerous with risks. That's what affects the public opinion. Of course you cannot tell (Karl).

His statement shows how societal values are expressed through people's ideas of what sex work can be about, ideas which Karl does not think are representative of his experience. Once again, the virtual identity is contrary to the actual identity (Goffman, 1963). Moreover, these ideas are supported and expressed through the statutory order, which criminalizes the buyer and sends a clear message to the public: it is illegal to buy sex. Karl interprets it as an obstacle for disclosure; similarly, some of the informants express the same in Larsdotter et al.'s study (2011).

Furthermore, anxiety over the consequences related to a known stigma is another limitation. William says: “Since I know, I am afraid it would harm me, because people have a very fixed opinion of what kind of person you are if you have sold sex, or what it means” (William). He also expresses the same perception of other's negative views of selling sex as Karl. William, on the other hand, is scared that these perceptions could cause him harm. This is also found, for instance, in McLean's (2012) study on male sex workers. A very real anxiety about being found out and being known as a sex worker, made them adopt precautions towards clients and to keep their sex work a secret (McLean, 2012).

In addition, the whore stigma takes the form of victimization. Both David and Sebastian gave examples of how they avoid disclosing their experiences of selling sex to people they suspect would feel sorry for them. Sebastian explains:

They would probably feel sorry for me. It really is the worst you thing you can do, to feel sorry for someone else. It's degrading and I don't like feeling like that. I don't want pity because I am dealing with this. I mean, I am an intelligent, smart person; I could work at many different things. They would view me as a victim (Sebastian).

To be seen as a victim without identifying as such, is to be deprived of self-determination and agency. It is to be diminished. It raises the feeling of being questioned, which is supported by Sebastian's statement; it leads Sebastian to give an account for his actions. He asserts his ability to choose other things to do for a living (as contrary to the prostitute), making it clear that he is not a victim.

While David avoids disclosing sex work to people he thinks would feel sorry for him he avoids the whole situation of being victimized. He, too, perceives these prejudices against people who sell sex as limitations for disclosure.

At the same time, being seen as someone who is less than others is an example of how stigmatization takes form (Goffman, 1963). Sebastian tells me how he understands that disclosing that he sells sex is not a good idea if he wanted to date someone seriously: “Possibly my value would drop, I've experienced it, so it was not anything one would stand for. It was not a respectable income to tell the ones you were getting serious with” (Sebastian). This type of rejection of one's way of making money is also found in Koken et

al. (2004), where one of the men did not think his partner would agree with his escorting, so he keeps it a secret.

As Protection for Others

The third barrier for disclosure is expressed as a worry for close ones to experience the negative judgments of others that can be associated with sex work. It takes the form of protection for the intended subjects, most often when they talked about their families. David explains why he would not consider disclosing to his family: “But it would put them in a difficult situation, they wouldn’t know how to handle it, I think. It would make their lives worse, to know, and therefore I find it unnecessary for them to find out” (David). His statement reveals that engaging in sex work is related to something that needs to be managed, something negative that could possibly make their lives worse, something so vicious that it would affect them even though they are not engaged in it. With the many examples in mind of how stigmatization can be expressed, certainly, this is true of whore stigma.

Meanwhile, Max describes it like this: “I don’t think they would understand. They would find it difficult, or get worried, and it feels unnecessary – because they shouldn’t have to be worried or find it difficult. So I wouldn’t tell them” (Max).

Goffman (1963) describes how stigma spreads to closely related persons of the stigmatized individual, he writes: “[they] are all obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized person to whom they are related” (Goffman, 1963, p. 43). He concludes with the fact that because of this relational stigma, these types of relationships usually are avoided (Goffman, 1963). David’s and Max’s way to protect their close ones by keeping sex work a secret could be interpreted as their way to avoid the kinds of relationships that could possibly be bearers of the whore stigma. Also McLean (2012) found that male sex workers protect close ones from stigma associated with sex work.

What not to tell

This section will give examples of which subjects the informants are leaving out from their stories. It is what Goffman (1963) describes as one way of trying to control the tension, to deliberately leave out some parts of the reality of the stigmatized individual’s experiences. This cannot be considered a complete description of the subject since the informants very well could, and probably did exclude parts of their story with me as well.

David tells me one of the things he does not disclose is: “(...) no one really knows the extent, I think. Especially during one time, it became I remember sometimes as many as three per day” (David). The scope of sex work is something several of them have in common as a subject of nondisclosure, as well as when in time it takes place. William describes how he never discloses when he is selling sex; his strategy is to keep the information simple and abstract. In contrast, only one informant is very careful not to talk about how much money is involved. Max expresses it: “Okay, one thing I never told, that I don’t want to tell you either, is how much money is involved. (...) this is where I have to draw my line” (Max).

What is similar between the respondents is that no one shares details of the services they provide. Karl explains: “Details. That is uninteresting. (...) You don’t discuss details around

it, of what they look like, or what you did, and where it was and so on. It's not how we talk about it either" (Karl). In addition to details, they do not mention if the buyer was unattractive, or if they ever feel disgusted by anyone. It is reasonable to assume these are the things that would further expose them to the virtual identity of the whore. These subjects (when, where, exactly how, how often) could possibly trigger the lecturing they all wish avoid, when others know what is best for them.

One of the informants has had thoughts about his choices of disclosure, and the things he left out when sharing his story with close ones. During the interview, years after his first disclosure, he reflects upon the treatment he got from his friends and what he actually really wanted. In this excerpt, he has just told me about the things he left out disclosing to his friends:

Martin: Yes, exactly. Because I know they wouldn't understand. And then I would have to explain in detail, graphically, and I don't care for that and I don't think they would want to listen to graphical descriptions of what I did, even if I think it could have been good in some ways to do.

Linda: How do you think it could have been a good thing to do?

Martin: Yes, that is, I kind of got the opposite reaction when I disclosed, after a while it became, what to say, part of our social life. (...) So, I think they would've had another reaction if I would've told them graphically, then they might have understood, or they would've seen through me and realized I wanted another support than it to be seen as completely normal. It would've been quite nice if my friends could've said 'Hey you, I don't find this so damn good, don't you think you should break this circle?' (Martin).

He realizes that leaving out parts made it easier for his friends to accept and normalize what he was doing, although what he really wanted was to get support, and help out of it. Ultimately, it was a struggle between being respected and not judged, yet to be seen.

Avoiding victimization

Karl has another perspective of avoidance, after describing what he does not share with his friends, Karl says: "We do not talk about it like that" (Karl). William explains it like this:

Linda: If you had experienced unpleasant situations, would it be something you would share with others?

William: Yeah, I don't think so. It could have a lot to do with the person I am, because I seldom, no matter what, if I have experienced an unpleasant situation I rarely discuss it with others (William).

He sees himself as a person who does not share uncomfortable situations with anyone. He is the type of person who holds things to himself. Interestingly, David phrases it similarly though he has a particular experience in mind. He says:

That what happened a long time ago in Y city, that I would keep to myself. It was an unpleasant man, a creepy place and I felt a bit used and a little ... no, not raped, that's probably the wrong word, but I was not okay with it. But [I] went through with it anyways. Nothing really happened, it was just a very, very unpleasant feeling of how he treated me (David).

While David has been through a situation where he did not feel comfortable, where he even felt taken advantage of, he is not prepared to share it with anyone. He stresses in the interview that this kind of experience is not something he tells anyone else, it is one of those things he keeps to himself. Similarly, McLean (2012) found that even though several of the participants faced psychological issues due to sex work they were unwilling to seek help.

I turn now from the avoidance of disclosing some of the experiences the men have of selling sex to what they found possible to disclose. Karl points out that these are not the things they share when he and his friends discuss previous experiences of selling sex. William and David shift the focus from what is possible to who they are as people, describing their lack of disclosure about difficult experiences as a personal stance. These examples could all be interpreted as self-reliance. In some sense the men need to take care of their own business. Similarly, McLean (2012) found self-sufficiency to be a recurring motive for the participants to describe how they dealt with psychological tension.

David develops his choice of nondisclosure: “No, it was nothing specific about the actual incident, but just the feeling of it, then I don’t know how to tell it either” (David).

Ultimately, the reluctance to acknowledge discomfort could be a consequence of being exposed to whore stigma. Possibly, disclosing situations of discomfort could mean moving closer to the expected story of the prostitute and therefore being viewed as a victim. The problem might not be becoming a victim within a situation, but the fear of being identified as *the* victim, reduced to the whore who is nothing but victim. This leaves us with no grey areas of discomfort, or any other unpleasant experiences to be told and the possible stories are either the accepted stories the men in the study give examples of, or it is the typical and accepted story of the whore.

Passing

Only one informant used passing as his main strategy (Goffman, 1963) which, in this case, meant total secrecy. He had not told anyone about his experiences, and he was the only one who was determined to do the interview in the most anonymous way possible. Thus I was, at the time of the interview, the only one he had ever disclosed selling sex to.

As mentioned in chapter Gay Stigma, John has not disclosed that he has had sex with men, although he once tried, but did not because of the homophobia he experienced. As he felt unable to disclose this information, he decided not to disclose anything about him selling sex. Currently, he is living in total secrecy, not being open with his experiences of having had sex with men or that he is selling sex to men. Koken et al. (2004) found this among their participants too. Most of the participants employing passing as strategy were open with their sexual identity, thus only hiding their sex work. But a few were in what they call a “double closest” (Koken et al., 2004, p. 24), hiding both just like John.

During the interview, I asked him if he wanted to tell anyone about him selling sex. He said ‘No’ and continues: “No, not that I think of it a lot but, a little. But right now I consider it my secret. (...) That’s okay. (...) I disconnect from it” (John). John means it is no problem keeping it a secret, although admits that he sometimes feels a little bad about not being able to talk to anyone. But still, he says, after a while he feels better again. John employs this strategy despite the fact that he has extensive experience of selling sex, spanning several years. He expresses few of the consequences mentioned in Koken et al.’s (2004) study, where several of

the passing men described the emotional stress of hiding. However, he describes how he has to organize his life to prevent his secret from coming out, for example: “I am very discreet, have two phones and all accessories I got I got locked in two cases in a closet” (John). And, it requires some lies so people do not know where he spends his time.

Goffman (1963) calls this strategy for in-deeper-ism, where the stigmatized individual feels pressured to “elaborate a lie further and further to prevent a given disclosure” (Goffman, 1963, p. 105). Which could possibly give rise to the emotional stress of keeping track of the information given to others. Hence, John seems to have found a convenient way to separate his private life and the life of selling sex. Similar to previous research (Koken et al., 2004; Koken, 2009; Larsdotter et al., 2011), the fear of being stigmatized is the main reason to why John chooses to keep on passing.

Disclosure

I will now continue to explore disclosure. Six out of the seven informants I interviewed disclosed their experiences of having sold sex to *some* people. Therefore, the next question to unfold is their motives for disclosing their experiences of selling sex. The participants’ motives will be described as follows: *For Their Own Sake*, *To Inform* and *Challenging the Views*. The chapter will continue to explore disclosure by unfolding to whom the participants have chosen to disclose, and will conclude with what they did disclose and with a perspective on the affect of time in disclosure.

For Their Own Sake

The men interviewed used a number of ways to describe what I have interpreted as disclosing for their own sake. What they have in common is how they explain disclosure being meaningful for themselves as the motive for them to disclose.

Max describes how he discloses his experience of selling sex for the first time as a way to find out how he truly feels about it. At the time, he had been selling sex for a while. Max says:

I think I was very aware that there was some sort of risk (...) that there could have been something self-destructive with this behavior. I don’t think I wanted to be self-destructive but I was aware that it was possible, or at least I thought there was some sort of risk for it. (...) I think I told that time because I wanted to explore my own reaction to what had happened, if I experienced it as problematic or not (Max).

Johansson (2007) describes how, through narratives, we learn to understand our own experiences. In this case, his friend asks him open questions and helps Max reflect on his own experiences. Max describes it as a short but important conversation where he was able to explore his feelings about selling sex. The narrative becomes a joint project where both the storyteller and the listener together shape the story (Johansson, 2007) and this enables Max to understand his experiences.

Later in the interview Max tells me that he is still selling sex, not very often but occasionally. He says that it feels uncomplicated to sell sex today. He means that he is settled about how he thinks and feels about selling sex and therefore has no need to tell anyone about it.

Sebastian describes disclosure as a way to vent, especially during the period when he sold sex often. It was his way of sharing the experiences of selling sex, to have someone to talk to and to discuss what was going on, in this case, to his closest friend.

But then I shared my life, I lived with my best friend there and we shared most things. I told him everything, about my experiences and how it was, what jobs I went to, how the people, the clients behaved, how it was and what I mostly got to do (Sebastian).

Sebastian expresses it as something you have to have – someone to share your experiences with. His friend was important. In other words, his friend respects him for who he really is, as Goffman (1963) would describe it, for his ‘actual social identity’. Thus, Sebastian would be strengthened for who he is, protecting him from the ‘virtual social identity’ of the whore. In addition, telling stories and sharing stories has an existential meaning (Johansson, 2007) since it both connects people to each other, like Sebastian and his friend, and also on a personal dimension where the storytelling offers an opportunity to understand and make experiences meaningful.

Another informant describes his disclosure in a strategic way. David tells me about when he told his closest friends that he was selling sex.

Linda: How did you experience these situations when you disclosed?

David: It was nice, especially with these three. At that time, I sat there and tried, okay today I am going to tell them. Then you sat there for a while and how the hell do you get this into a discussion? It was probably just to, okay lets stop this, I have a thing I have to tell you. Right then, of course you have safety in mind, so it was nice to get it out so they would know if something happened to me. Then it’s few who would know what could have happened. But otherwise it’s not a big deal for me (David).

For David, safety is his motive to disclose his involvement in sex work, especially during the time when he sold sex quite often. He wants someone to know what possibly could have happened *if* something happened. Even though this is his motive, in the interview he tells me he never was completely honest about when, where or how often he did sell sex, (making this safety strategy somewhat useless). Although, this can be seen as an attempt to build some safety strategies. Possibly the previous chapter can give some insights of why he chose the way he did. But as another informant tells me: “It still feels good to have told, to not have to die with it as a secret” (Max).

What Max, Sebastian and David could have in common is exactly what Max says here, namely not having to keep a secret. Koken et al. (2004) shows how passing generates emotional stress for most people engaged in it, and concludes that it is probably why most men in their study did disclose their involvement in sex work. These different attitudes expressed by Max, Sebastian and David regarding disclosing could be understood as way of not having to keep a secret, and to be alone – sharing might be a way to also share the potential burden of bearing a secret alone.

To Inform

Martin, on the other hand, has another motive for his disclosure. The first time someone got to know that Martin sold sex, it was his friends who became suspicious. They had all gone out to a club one night and everyone knew that Martin was broke. He went out for a while to meet

up with a buyer, and came back later with quite a lot of money. Money he then spent on himself and his friends. An obvious question arose about where all the money had come from. Martin tells me this was the starting point for him being honest about him selling sex.

After this very first time, it became normalized in their group that Martin sold sex. He describes disclosing primarily as informative, (namely) to let people know that male sex work exists and the reality of it, and secondly as a way to get support from his close ones. But similar to David, Martin is not completely honest about what he does and how he experienced it.

Challenging The Views

This motive to disclose is about giving voice to their perspectives and experiences of selling sex, primarily to show another view of what sex work can be about other than the perspectives held by the society in general. William describes his motive like this:

It's a bit like a personal rebellion of some sort against the very, very simple and one-dimensional view of what the sex trade is like, and what it means and who it involves. (...) And also to be able to talk about it, to be able to shake people's perceptions of what it can mean. It is a bit of a provocative gesture, (it's what) it has been" (William).

His way of describing it as a provocative gesture shows how he is aware of his story's disturbance of the 'dominant version of narrative' (Mishler, 1997) surrounding prostitution. His story is an alternative one, viewing selling sex in a different way than the 'dominant version of narrative' would. He uses the words "to shake people's perceptions" revealing the act of challenge his disclosure has, as well as the act of resistance to be subjugated by the dominant version (or narrative) of prostitution.

David, on the other hand, has an additional motive to his disclosure (as described under For their own sake). He expresses: "at the same time I want to stimulate the debate – there are indeed other ways" (David) than the *dominant version of prostitution* offers. He too, has an alternative story that he wishes he told more people about.

Sometimes it feels like I have to for the sake of the discussion. If I notice that the discussion is headed too much to the victim mentality then I always want to disclose to outweigh the conversation, that there are other sides (David).

Choosing whom to tell

Naturally, to disclose involvement in sex work does not necessarily mean to tell everyone all the time. As mentioned earlier, they carefully navigate through stigma, preconceptions and harmful treatment, trying to avoid the worst and finding the smoothest way forward. David explains: "I want to set my own image. I am not ashamed of it, I am not. No, I am not. I just choose carefully whom I tell" (David). Of course, as David points out, this includes to whom they disclose and to whom they do not. Therefore, the most common strategy of my informants is to deliberately choose whom to tell, thus creating two groups in their life, the ones who know and the ones who do not. Goffman (1968) describes it to be a widely employed strategy to divide the world into two, one small world that knows it all, and another

world that does not know anything. It seems none of my informants have disclosed *everything* to someone though they have told some things to several people.

Friends

All of them, who have disclosed their experiences of selling sex to someone, have told their closest friends. This group includes Sebastian, David, Max, William, Karl and Martin. They have told people they trust and feel close to. Close ones can actually function as a protective circle for the stigmatized individual making them feel more accepted than they really are (by the greater society) (Goffman, 1968). David illustrates it:

It is because everyone I have told knows me too, so then they can put it into context too. I don't know how it would be if someone I didn't know got to know, who only saw me as the whore. Right now, people I tell now see me as David who has sold sex too, but who is so much more (David).

David describes how the people he tells knows him, therefore, they can see him for his actual identity, for who he really is, protecting him from the virtual identity of the whore. Consequently, they are the protective circle.

Some of the informants have disclosed to more than close friends. William explains whom he has told:

Yes, exactly. That I have on several occasions. That was also one of the premises to start doing it [to sell sex], to be able to talk about it. I have done that, told friends and I have sometimes talked about it with people I have meet at parties for example, or during discussions about the sex trade. Then I have sometimes been able to say: 'I do have some experience of that and... ' (William).

Although he has told more people than only his close friends, neither he nor any other of the informants have been extremely open as a few of the participants in Koken et al. (2004), for the latter it meant they disclosed involvement in sex work to everyone.

Interestingly, many of those in the know are homosexuals, while others are described with certain characteristics. For instance, when William mentions who he tells, he says: "many of them are homo- or bisexual and those who are not, who see themselves as heterosexual tend to be very liberal when it comes to sexual morals" (William). Since only the heterosexuals need an explanation – as tending to be very liberal– it could be understood that the homo- and bisexuals already share certain views, they know something, or, it could be believed they share some specific understanding that does not have to be explained, unlike the heterosexuals. Possibly, the homo- and bisexuals share a common understanding. Karl has similar thoughts, describing why it is easy to tell his friends who are gay: "You know gay men [laughing] it's nothing weird to talk about fucking and such things" (Karl). His statement could be interpreted that a more permissive atmosphere exists among gay men. Karl continues: "But then, in the gay community you know, or most anyways know that it's different there. Of course it is easier to talk about it in our little crew" (Karl). He describes the gay community as different from mainstream society, where it is easier to disclose involvement in sex work. Subsequently, it could indicate that the gay community is more of an accepting group. Similarly, Koken et al. (2004) found acceptance of sex work common within the gay community among their participants, and describes it as "sex work as normative within the gay community" (Koken et al., 2004, p. 28) just because of how

widespread it seems to be within the gay community. Notably, Karl is the only one who expresses it in this way; the others were more reluctant about it. Max, for instance, said: "... but in the gay community it [sex work] doesn't feel okay" (Max). Sebastian, and Martin too, are more negative to whether or not sex work is more accepted within the gay community than in the wider society. Thus, it is inconclusive whether or not they gay community is more accepting towards involvement in sex work.

Another attribute of those who know are that they are more liberal and less likely to adhere to moral standards set by society. David explains: "I don't know, it is people I consider much like myself, which also are in the gray area of morals. They know there are many ways of seeing things" (David). And Sebastian describes one of the people he told like this: "he is not – what to say – the man of morals. He's liberal too" (Sebastian). In contrast, people with high moral standards are described as unable to see things from a different perspective than society views it and are therefore, less accepting. Hence, it is likely that they fall within the accepted and good sexual behavior according to the sexual hierarchy (Rubin, 1984), which not only results in them being beneficiaries of the system, but that in itself makes it harder for them to scrutinize the sexual hierarchy. Then of course, it is people who are considered liberal and less moral which are chosen to be the one to know.

Family and partners

Several of my informants have told at least one family member that they have sold sex. Two of them have told a sibling. William said that he would not want to tell his parents but goes on to tell me how he is close to some of his siblings: "Of them, I have told one of them. Because we, I live with one of my siblings. So that sibling knows. We talked about it quite a lot. But that, that hasn't been a problem" (William). He tells me an opportunity came up to disclose that he sells sex, so he did. Since then they have talked about it and the sibling is supportive. Similarly, in Koken et al. (2004) many of the family members in the know were supportive.

Sebastian has also told his sibling, and tells me about a situation when he discloses he started selling sex again to some people: "But my brother is probably the one who has most prejudices out of these people, so I had to smooth things over" (Sebastian). To not cause too much negative response from his brother, he engages in information management techniques (Goffman, 1968) and adjusts and leaves out parts of his story.

Martin's mother does know that he has sold sex, he describes it like this:

Martin: But it's actually like this, my mother asked. I didn't want to tell her of my own accord but actually she asked a few years ago if I had had sex for money, and then I answered 'Yes'.

Linda: How did it feel that she asked?

Martin: It was terribly hard. Of course it was. But at the same time, I felt like we somehow got much closer. She had a hard time to come to terms with it, of course she had. But, the discussion stopped after that, that was it, she didn't want to know more. She just wanted her suspicion verified (Martin).

His mother asked, and he answered but did not disclose much details. In the moment, they both face the virtual identity of his norm breaking behavior. He is afraid of becoming the stigmatized individual in the presence of his mother. However, her unwillingness to know more could be seen as a way to protect Martin from further exposure to the virtual identity,

thus, to ensure his actual identity. In addition, he feels they got closer since he became honest with what he previously kept hidden.

Karl, on the other hand, would like to tell his mother but is unsure if she knows, he said: “I believe, I haven’t told mom really, but I have insinuated many times” (Karl). As with many other things in his life, he wishes to be open about it to his mother.

Few of the informants in my study considered disclosing sex work to a partner. Several of the men in Koken et al. (2004) who had serious relationships did disclose involvement in sex work to their partner. Thus, supportive lovers protect them from the virtual identity of the whore. The only one in my study who has disclosed to a partner is Martin. Unfortunately, it has not always worked out as well as Martin wanted. One of his previous partners had been supportive and non-judgmental which he found helpful at the time. Others have taken it as an excuse to live in a non-monogamous relationship. Nowadays when he looks back, he says what he wanted was for someone to set limits for him and force him to choose either the partner or sex work. But no one ever did.

To health and social care

During the interview I asked if they had ever told, or if they would consider disclosing, if they would find it necessary, their experiences of selling sex to someone within the health or social care. Only one of my informants has disclosed to healthcare, more specifically to a testing site for HIV/STI. Sebastian said:

Yes, but then I have said it. They are very good there [testing site for men who have sex with men]. They are themselves homosexual men who are doctors, they understand. I do not have any scruples for that. If I were to meet a heterosexual doctor, then I don’t know how to put it (Sebastian).

Obviously, Sebastian describes gay men working at this testing site as an enabling factor for him to be open, similar to how homosexuals were described just above, as people who share a common understanding. In this sense, the doctors serve as gatekeepers into the healthcare for men who sell sex to men; at least, they did for Sebastian. On the other hand, Larsdotter et al. (2011) found that most of their informants did not dare to tell health and social care. And, it is exactly the same for the other informants in my study. No one else would even consider disclosing having sold sex to anyone within either health or social care.

Choosing what to tell

Since they cannot for sure predict how another person will react, or how they themselves will be regarded if they disclose their involvement in sex work, and when keeping it a secret is not an option, they try to navigate all these obstacles through their stories. They do it through adjusting their story to the audience. David says:

I stay off conflicts so then I adapt my story depending on whom I am telling it to. People know bits and pieces. (...) just because I want to avoid confrontation. Like if someone comes into my life and tells me I have to stop with this or this is no good for you (David).

His example shows how he adapts the story to the listener by only disclosing some part of his experience. He tries to read the person in front of him, to avoid confrontation and thus, to avoid the consequences of his norm breaking behavior. It is an example of how he has learned to manage the consequences due to the virtual identity (Goffman, 1963). Moreover, several of the informants shared a common experience where others claim to know what is best for them, telling them how to behave and what to do. They all try to evade this type of lecturing about their life choices through only disclosing the type of information they think the listener can handle, or not at all. David describes his strategy: “But I don’t think they want to know details either, they probably want to keep it on a level they can handle somehow” (David). Goffman (1963) calls this technique to minimize the tension in the social interaction covering. It is a way to take away the focus of the stigmatized virtual identity and an attempt to let the social interaction flow as unimpeded as possible (Goffman, 1963). Thereby, it is a technique to control the consequences of the stigma.

This too involves a learning process which the stigmatized individual goes through. Although, Goffman (1963) describes the learning process, primarily, as something the passing individual goes through, he stresses that covering, as such, is similar to the techniques of passing. Since this experience of learning how to cope appeared in several interviews expressed precisely like this, learning how to and what to tell, the learning process seems essential.

William tells me he has tried to disclose his experiences of selling sex in different ways, just to see what happens with the person listening, and ultimately, who he becomes. This is how he explains how he settled with the story he usually tells:

As a rule, I usually I point out that I am the active partner in the sex. I am the one who *does the other* (...) And that I make good money at it, and that it doesn’t require much effort on my part. (...) There are a few reasons for it, partly because it’s true but also because it is easier for people to accept without reacting with worry or revulsion. Because I think there is a huge taboo there. There is a huge taboo if it would have been the other way around, if I had been the passive partner, the treatment would have been different, I think (William).

His experience of disclosure has led him to adapt his story to ease the tension in social situations. He explains that the audience accepts the story if he tells it in a certain way, highlighting some important parts. By describing himself as the active masculine persona, he avoids being the one who is objectified. Through this, he avoids being made the stigmatized individual, although he is selling sex. Admittedly, it could be stated as a successful technique.

Sebastian tells me this story that he told a friend a few days before meeting me. It is the moment when he discloses selling sex to his brother/friend, once again, after a couple of years having stopped:

No, I presented it more like ‘ It was nice, I met an older man.’ (...) ‘He wanted to pay and so he did. We sat and talked and had a conversation. We barely had sex!’ Because this person he got so drunk since we had wine together and then we had sex a bit but I think I put it as we had not had sex at all, almost. Of course, it feels a bit better then. (...) You try to remove the worst perception of a whore, a cheap whore, a cheap whore who lies on their back getting fucked and then gets very little money for it. But you want to put it, you want to emphasize more that I am an escort. It is more luxury prostitution. I sit there and drink wine with him, talking and conversing (Sebastian).

Here it becomes clear how Sebastian, in this case, uses the attributes of accepted, normal, good sexual behavior – drink wine, talk and converse – to strengthen the positive values connected to what he does. Thus, he suppresses the most known and distinct attributes for the stigmatized virtual identity of the whore. Also known as the information management technique, namely: “A related type of covering involves an effort to restrict the display of those failings most centrally identified with the stigma” (Goffman, 1963, p. 126). Which clearly is the case for this example since he tries to present himself as something other than a “cheap whore”. In addition, his way of reframing his actions as escorting instead of as being a whore, as society views it, is another example of how he uses more acceptable terms to avoid stigmatization. While, the hierarchal system of sexual behavior clarifies the relationship between good and bad sexual behavior, and how they are interconnected, ‘the charmed circle’, in particular, gives an insight of how these behaviors are in opposition to each other (Rubin, 1984). Hence, the positive values chosen by the informant – they are the ones that provide legitimacy.

Sebastian goes on, by describing another occasion of disclosure:

I also emphasize for him that (...) I don't actively been looking for sex as a prostitute, that I don't actively have this escort profile where I look for money but I emphasize rather *that he*, this person, *offered me money* and then I jumped on it. (...) It's more that I put it as a compliment, that I am so attractive I get money for it. You know, then you diminish the whore label and you become more luxury whore, luxury somehow (Sebastian).

Yet again, he stresses the importance of putting his story so it will not recall the characteristics of the whore. He does not look for money, rather it was offered, which makes him less responsible for these acts, and the focus moves to the purchaser. At the same time, this money represents a compliment in that to be desired so much, he becomes a whore of luxurious sort.

In brief, covering seems to be a commonly used strategy among the participants in my study, which also relates to, at least, international studies (Koken et al., 2004; Koken 2009). Almost three quarters of the men in Koken et al.'s (2004) study had disclosed their involvement in sex work, even if only to one other person although most did tell more people. Furthermore, many women in Koken (2009) choose the “middle road”, meaning they were not completely open nor in complete secrecy with their involvement in sex work. Certainly, the covering strategy provides a skillful way to avoid living in secrecy, at the same time as it protects the individual from harmful treatment.

Reflections on when to tell

Previously I have discussed the motives behind the men's disclosure, to whom they choose to disclose to and what they share with others. All these stories involve the question on when to tell. It includes, for example, when Sebastian went to the testing site for men who have sex with men or how David described the situation where he told his friends for the first time. Another example is the story of when David told his mother he has sold sex. It is evident that *when* is a situation where an opportunity comes along, an opening for them to disclose, or a question that opens up. Just as these situations function to enable disclosure, time itself could have an impact.

Time seems to have a positive effect in that it permits past experiences to be told without as much moral objection as we have seen in previous chapters. Even though it was only one of my informants who during the interview reflected upon the fact that it was easier for him to tell about his past experiences of escorting than to tell about the present ones, it is of importance. Sebastian explains:

It was easier to tell that I sold sex then, when I was younger, in the past. That, to look back at the past and see that I sold sex then. I wanted to push the boundaries and so on. One can always present it in a way it doesn't sound cheap (Sebastian).

Sebastian goes on explaining:

But recently, when I started selling sex again, part-time, and met some clients, then I pulled away from telling it actually. Because it did not feel like... I was 31 and maybe I should not go back to that, to that track. Then, a sense of shame came over me. It did (Sebastian).

It seems like it was easier for Sebastian to tell about his experiences of selling sex when he was younger, when he had a choice of how to present his story of having experiences of selling sex. The difference in his stories, the one he tells about his early twenties and his present story lies exactly in this, how he presents it rather than past times. He uses the narrative of the young and wild when he describes himself and his experiences from his early twenties. His story contains plenty of crazy things from his early adulthood, thus providing himself some sort of protection where a young man can do "crazy" things and not be judged for it. In addition, he is well adjusted (highly educated) today; therefore he can "afford" to have done some crazy things in his past. However, being over thirty, obviously not young and wild anymore, makes it harder for him to disclose his present involvement in the sex trade. Ultimately, the present story offers no protection and he is left with feeling ashamed of himself.

The meaning of Disclosure

As previous chapters indicate the informants practice nondisclosure and disclosure to suit their interests best, either to find support, challenge normative views on sex work or to avoid discrimination and stigmatization. Before I conclude this analysis I would like to elaborate on disclosure and the meaning of it. I will do so by presenting how the men in my study reflect on the meaning of being able or not to disclose and what it means for them. At last, I will look into how disclosure also serves as a justification (of sex work).

First, I would like to highlight a few examples of how the informants themselves have reflected on disclosure. William says: "It really means a lot. If you tell something and if you tell something like this (...) It's very deliberate to tell something like this. It's not something that you happen to tell" (William). His citation highlights one of the aspects of disclosure, and that is the conscious act it really is. Thus, consciousness is part of being a bearer of stigma whether it is known or not (Goffman, 1963).

Another example of the awareness of disclosure explained by David: "I wish I told more than what I did, because I always find it important to tell actually. But then it is this balance, what

will this person feel about me afterwards, how will they view me” (David). As David says, disclosing implies constant considerations of this kind: Will it be worth it? Pros and cons are weighed.

Several of the informants describe disclosing as a risk. It means taking the risk of being subjected to the ‘virtual identity’ of the whore, the risk of being degraded as a human being – of being stigmatized. Another informant says: “It is an endangerment for sure. Because one cannot ever know how the other person reacts when you tell. (...) At the same time, I believe there are great gains” (Martin). Herein lies the difficulty. Disclosure is the possibility to find allies, to get support and maybe even be an eye-opener for some. Surely, disclosure involves deliberate actions, as well as opportunities and limitations.

Important to Me and Good for Others

Several of the men interviewed in this study described how disclosing and being able to tell about their experiences of selling sex has been positive for them. Firstly, disclosure generates feelings of acceptance, of course, depending on whom they disclose to. In this way disclosure shields the negative impact of the virtual identity by being respected for their actual identity. Secondly, positive disclosure provides a protective circle around the individual (Goffman, 1963). Thirdly, there are examples of how disclosure reaffirms their self-image. William illustrates an example:

It, it’s absolutely part of how I see myself and how I want to be, as a person who is not shunned by it and that is not limited by honesty or what is considered appropriate. I see myself as a person that can exceed such limits in a good way, and that I can talk about it reinforces the image. That is good, absolutely (William).

Sebastian has similar thoughts on how disclosure has been positive for him. He means how he sees himself has helped him avoid shame; disclosing his experiences of selling sex reinforces his self-image, once again, protecting him from the virtual identity of the whore (Goffman, 1963). Mishler (1997) discusses how storytelling, and more specifically recomposing stories of oneself, is seen by some as a necessity to develop an independent identity. To get a positive response as William and Sebastian describe, re-affirms their self-image and strengthens their actual identity.

Martin describes disclosure as something very important in another way. He says:

I think it has meant a lot, because I believe I would have used it in greater extent as a destructive behavior if I had not told people, if I had not been able to let off steam, so to speak (Martin).

For him, disclosure has had crucial significance; it has helped him and served as sort of a lifeline. Without disclosure selling sex could have been far more negative and destructive for Martin. Interestingly, he is the one, as mentioned before, who reflects upon the fact that he probably could have gotten more support from his friends if he had been more honest with them about his experiences.

On one hand, many of my informants have disclosed their experiences of selling sex. Out of them there were some who were more ambivalent towards their need to disclose. They recounted disclosure as not a big thing for them at the same time as they told me how great it

felt to share their story, to me and to others. Similarly, several of the participants in *Osynliga synliga aktörer* (Larsdotter et al., 2011) initially said they did not feel a need to talk to anyone about their experience of selling sex, but changed their opinions during the interviews. I interpret it as difficult to express a need for disclosure, to share or maybe discuss selling sex because of the closeness of becoming someone in need. To be someone in need might compromise how you will be interpreted, either as a person who owns his story or as the whore. Consequently, to expose yourself to being understood as weak is something they avoid due to the risks involved.

On the other hand, what I found interesting is that they were keen on highlighting other's need for disclosure, especially for them who face problems, loneliness or stigma related to selling sex. They all show a high awareness about other's situations, knowing that there are people who experience sex work as more troublesome than they do. This awareness is closely connected to the other's possible need for disclosure, and foremost, their need for support. The others are described as young men, men in small towns who are lonely due to their sexual practices and perceived homophobia where they live, or the ones who are condemned as the whore.

Accordingly, it seems required of them to have an understanding that others might not have the same type of experience of sex work as they do. Likewise, their understanding of the whore is as prominent as they describe society's views. Goffman (1963) describes one of the steps in the learning process of the stigmatized individual to learn the normal point of view. By learning the normal point of view he becomes aware of who he could be, therefore the need to cope with the fact that he does not conform to what society deems normal. It is possible that the participants' trustworthiness is at stake if they do not come clear about their understanding of others. Consequently, the point of view each of the participants has concerning sex work could be at stake.

Disclosure as Justification

Finally, I would like to raise an interesting aspect of disclosure that emerged during the work of this thesis. An aspect that is different from what I have discussed earlier but far too important to exclude.

The participants' stories of disclosure reveal how much is required of them and what it really means to become open with experiences of selling sex. Even though I deliberately did not ask about their motives for engaging in sex work (for further explanation see Methods chapter), or why they started, most of them have told me precisely this during the interviews. Hence, my interpretation is that disclosure also includes some amount of justification. Martin explains how come he sometimes chooses not to tell:

It is also periods like this, when I don't want to, I cannot stand hearing myself talk about it, I cannot justify my choices. (...) Although I haven't exactly been defending myself, I have always felt that with disclosing that I have sold sex there is always a 'why?' (Martin).

He feels his choices are questioned every time he discloses that he sells sex. He clarifies that he does not feel the need to defend his choices and yet a justification is required, either directly as in this example, or indirectly (for example) to me, when he still feels obliged to explain. It could be explained as a linguistic, and social, expectation of what is required when

disclosing an action that goes against our normative behavior, Scott & Lyman (1968) identifies it as account making.

Most of the informants have explained why they sell sex, or they have told me why they started doing it at all, often embedded in another story. For instance, David says why not sell sex to them since he still has sex with them, when he explains what he usually discloses. Martin tells me he kind of slipped into selling sex when he talks about how he feels obliged to explain his choices. John mentions that he usually enjoys selling sex when he explains that he will not disclose it to anyone. All of these are examples of how disclosing experiences of selling sex go hand in hand with motives for doing it. (At least, in their stories to me.)

Another interesting perspective is how for some of my informants, motives to disclose are reflected in their motive to sell sex, or vice versa. The way they justify their disclosure reflects their feelings towards selling sex.

For instance, William's motive to disclose interlinks with his motive to sell sex, outlined in the chapter *Challenging the Views*. He regards it as a rebellious act, where he gets the opportunity to own the question, and tell people about it on his terms. He knows the reality behind the simplistic and one-dimensional views. And he takes pride in fighting the whole stigma. Furthermore, Max motives to sell sex and to disclose go hand in hand: "I think the reasons for it, it was not that I was broke or anything, I just wanted to try" (Max). He wanted to explore, equally, as his motive to disclose which was his way to explore how he felt about having sold sex.

In conclusion, the question of disclosure about involvement in sex work cannot be understood without understanding the reasons why the person in questions sells sex. This is exactly what account(making) is about; how condemned actions cannot be told without the subject describing, explaining (justifying or making accounts) or even defending his actions in the same breath as he discloses the act itself (Scott & Lyman, 1968).

SUMMARY

The main purpose of this thesis is to study the strategies that men who sell sex to other men use for disclosure or nondisclosure of these experiences. In addition, it is to identify factors and circumstances that enable or limit men's disclosure. Further, it is central to explore the meaning and implications of the different strategies for these men.

Seven men were interviewed for the purpose of this study. The men had a wide range of experiences ranging from having sold sex a few times to, for most of them, having sold sex for several years with many ongoing clients. The respondents were at the time of the interviews between 21 to 35 years old.

The informants described a multitude of strategies of how to manage the information about them selling sex. They do so by employing stigma management techniques such as passing and covering, which allow them to control what others know about them (Goffman, 1963). It is through disclosure and nondisclosure that these men do so. Six out of seven men did disclose something but not everything to at least one other person. In contrast, only one person did not disclose anything to anyone. The strategies will be presented as follows: starting with nondisclosure and continuing with disclosure.

The first aspect of nondisclosure is why the men choose not to share their experiences of selling sex with others. Whether it is gay stigma or whore stigma, they all reported experiences of stigma. Half of the informants recount situations where they experienced homophobia. It could be parents that did not accept their son to be gay, or friends that would not understand that someone would want to have sex with men. Furthermore, it could be other people in their lives that would have a hard time dealing with them being gay. It is evident that gay stigma acts as the first barrier for disclosure for these men about sex work.

All of the informants in my study have experienced whore stigma. These experiences of stigma include publicly being made the other, or, more often it was the realization that if they became known they would face whore stigma. Nevertheless, they have experienced whore stigma by being constructed as a victim, even when that is not how they view themselves or their experiences. Or they were afraid they would be seen as someone who is less valued, diminished and belittled. Several of the men had experiences of others knowing what was best for them when disclosing information about their experiences of selling sex; meaning they would be lectured about the wrongs with sex work.

Even if the men in this study have not experienced severe consequences as many of the women, and some of the men, in the studies included in previous research (Koford et al., 2011; Koken 2009; Koken et al., 2004; Sanders 2012), their stories reveal a significant barrier for disclosure about sex work.

Finally, protection for others worked as a barrier for disclosure. Through nondisclosure the men protected people around them from getting worried or feeling bad about knowing that their close one sold sex. This too is a stigma management technique as Goffman (1963) describes it, to protect close one's from sharing the negative consequences of the stigma connected to sex work.

The second aspect of nondisclosure was what the men chose not to share with others. They all shared a common strategy of not sharing details about selling sex. For some it meant that they didn't disclose the scope, or when in time it happened. For one person it meant that he didn't share how much money was involved. In addition, several of the men did not disclose experiences of uncomfortable situations. They explained it as not having the need to do so, similar to McLean (2012). Self-reliance seems to be an important value for these men.

So, why do these men choose to disclose at all? They do it for their own sake, to get support, to not have to be alone with a secret and to share their experiences. Disclosure has a fundamental existential value; through sharing our stories with others we make sense of ourselves (Johansson, 2007). Moreover, they disclose to challenge the views on male sex work; either to make people aware of that fact that it exists or to show that there is another side of the reality of sex work that rarely gets described.

Disclosure is, ultimately, about managing consequences by choosing whom to tell, when and exactly what. The men carefully sort people around them into two categories, the ones in the know and others that know nothing. Six out of the seven men who have disclosed did so to their close friends. Most of them were supportive. In contrast, only one informant had disclosed selling sex to health care professionals. Furthermore, several of the men had disclosed to at least one family member. One of them felt supported while the others felt a relief of being known even if it meant that they, in some sense, needed to manage the tension of being known.

Only one informant described how time worked in his favor when he told about past experiences of sex work. He found it easier to get away with disclosing selling sex by telling the story of when he was young and wild, when he did crazy things like selling sex. This way he avoided being stigmatized for his actions.

What the men choose to disclose are clear examples of how they manage the consequences of the virtual identity of 'the whore' (Goffman, 1963). To only disclose some part of their story is a well-known and used strategy (Koken et al., 2004; Koken, 2009; Sanders, 2012). It is a way to let the social interaction flow as freely as possible although they become known as someone who have sold or are selling sex. They use the attributes of accepted, normal and good sexual (male) behavior to describe their experiences in order to create space between them and 'the whore'. In addition, they reframe what they do, for instance by using words like escorting.

Disclosure is a constant calculation of pros and cons. In the pursuit of being able to be who they are, to do what they do and be open about it, they need to navigate through others perceptions and stigma. The men are well aware of the risks involved. After all, disclosure means quite a lot to these men.

CONCLUSION

Disclosure is a balancing act; gay stigma and whore stigma on one hand, the need for support and sharing their experiences on the other hand. It is an analytical conclusion based on the theoretical framework that centers on Goffman's stigma theory (1963), the theory on the sex hierarchy (Rubin, 1984) and narrative theory (Johansson, 2007) with focus on the existential need for sharing our stories. It means that stigma is referred to as an analytical and theoretical concept throughout this paper.

What is most striking in this thesis is how the whore stigma affects men too, although, not as viciously as for many of the women in previous research (Koford et al., 2011; Koken 2009; Koken et al., 2004; Sanders 2012). But it has obvious consequences as demonstrated by the informants' narratives. It pushes them to tell stories about themselves that will either make them be seen as the whore, or they will tell a story about themselves becoming something other than the whore. It is my interpretation that the whore stigma, and the narrative around it, is so pervasive that it absorbs every expression that summons the idea of *the whore*. Expressing weakness, being perceived as objectified, being in need of support or money, being passive or too feminine, are all to be avoided and so they need to be careful about how they share their experiences.

On the other hand, men seem to have more room to tell their story and not be judged as the whore. The examples drawn from my study show this, as do other studies in the field (Koken et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2015). Masculinity and the construction of the man might offer other possibilities for men to own their choices, their sexuality and their body than women traditionally are allowed (Smith et al., 2015). This may be the difference in what stories are permitted to be told. Somehow it seems that the (physical) body cannot be separated from the act of selling sex, and therefore no story can be told outside of that context as the body represents. This is similar to the historical definition of stigma as something marked on a person's body—a mark that cannot be hidden (Goffman, 1963).

A consequence of the balancing the men do to counteract the stigma and tell a story of themselves as something other than the whore, is that they are left to care for themselves. As expressed in the thesis, the men frame it as something about themselves rather than a consequence of what is possible to express without losing social status or the respect of owning their choices, their sexuality and body. It is a functional strategy as long as they are able to be self-sufficient, as long as their experiences do not exceed their boundaries or ability to cope. Once this limit has passed, the support that is needed might be far out of reach.

These strategies employed by the men in my study to find acceptance as men who sell sex to men, are at the expense of less respected and valued sex workers. The strategy of positioning themselves as something other than the whore *is* reinforcing the whore stigma. For example, as one of the informants in this study explains how he tells his friends how he was not looking to get paid but instead he was offered money. By framing his work (act of selling sex) like this, he steps away from the one who sells sex to *get* money, in other words the whore. Ironically, whore stigma is the very thing they are fighting and resisting with their stories. At the same time, this strategy might very well be a coping strategy. Smith et al. (2015) found it to be an important coping strategy for the men in their study. Certainly, it could be the case for the informants in this study too, since it is a commonly used strategy among them.

As these consequences are outlined, the question remains: Are there better ways to fight and resist the whore stigma than to step on others to be viewed, accepted and even better

respected oneself? Because it would benefit so many people within the sex trade, both the ones who are in need of support and the ones who are okay with what they do. Possibly it would enable diverse and nuanced stories from men who sell sex, as well as from others within the sex trade. A greater representation of experiences and stories would alleviate the stigma and make it easier for people to find support if needed – because the person would not have to make a choice between protecting themselves from stigma and asking for help when needed.

So, to change the perspective I turn now to what has been more or less neglected, namely the listener. In a mundane way the listener's perspective is rather passive, although the stories in this thesis tell us how the listener's perception, their treatment and their choice of words determine what will be said. The men adapt their story to the listener, or their perception of what the listener can (stand to) hear.

As a result, disclosure could be considered a dual process, one of the storyteller himself and one of the listener. It is a two-way communication where both parties affect the outcome. However, disclosure about the experiences of selling sex is not like any other experience; sex work is a stigmatized phenomena, which means the storyteller and the listener have different positions due to the subject. The listener will have the power to either condemn or accept the person's action. Ultimately, it means to condemn or accept the person in front of the listener.

For social work professionals, and health care professionals it is crucial to understand the power their position holds, not only because they are professionals also because they are listeners. Their position could be explained as a gatekeeper for these stories. If this position is not taken seriously, we will not realize how the possible stories are reduced to only be what we want it to be or what we can stand to hear. It affects these men, and it would possibly affect the ones in need even more if they were not adapting their story into the expected. As much as the whore stigma pushes men to tell their story in a specific way to maintain respect and acceptance, the listener is responsible too for maintaining these stories. The stories are what we expect them to be or they will not be at all.

It might seem a bit dramatic to put it like this, but as the testimonies of these men demonstrate: the men choose to disclose their experiences in a way that distances them from how 'the whore' is conceptualized and I can only interpret it as a consequence of the polarization on sex work versus prostitution which forces people to fit their story into either category. People's experiences usually extend far beyond two opposite positions as only good or really bad. Reality is always much more complex than that. As social work professionals and fellow human beings we have a responsibility to include other voices, and by that I mean sex workers' voices.

I want to conclude just as I began this thesis, with the words of Dawn:

(...) that to listen to and include sex workers' voice in dialogue is a skill that we have not yet developed, just as we have not learned how to include the voices of anyone who does not conform to accepted behaviours or ideas.

What does it mean to be given the rare and privileged opportunity to have a voice? To me, it means possibility and responsibility (Dawn, 2013, p. 13).

In the same way as the respondents in my thesis took the opportunity to share their stories with me, and with many others, they too did so with great responsibility for their own sake,

for the sake of close ones and for the story they have shared about men who sell sex to men. Listeners should do the same, to view it is a possibility to hear or learn something new and to do so with great responsibility.

From a human rights perspective, more and more voices are raised for sex workers rights; Amnesty International is now taking a stand for decriminalization concerning sex work (Murphy, 2015). Although this thesis did not focus on the legal aspects of sex work, the informants did express how the law contributes to the silence of sex workers. UNAIDS⁶ (2002) considers criminalization of sex work to affect the stigma surrounding it, and consequently, the legal uncertainty of people who sell sex. That criminalizing laws result in increased stigma is known in Sweden (see SOU, 2010:49), but still the moral aspect of sex work is prioritized over the safety of people involved in the sex trade. And this clearly affects the disclosure of men who have sex with men, not meaning they will not disclose but *it will* affect what stories will be told.

Further research...

This thesis has given ideas to many interesting further research projects. These include future studies on the relationship between men who sell sex and health and social care. It would also be interesting to follow up on motives to disclose in connection to men's motive and story about why they sell sex (account making). This was only a brief elaboration in this thesis but one of great interest that I have not had the opportunity to further study.

In addition, to deepen the understanding of disclosure and nondisclosure in future studies, I find it necessary to understand how it limits or enables coping strategies concerning selling sex, to more fully understand how disclosure and nondisclosure affects sex workers. Furthermore, it would be an interesting research to study disclosure and nondisclosure in connection and relationship to coping strategies, and to explore disclosures and nondisclosures impact on safer sex strategies and behaviors among male sex workers.

⁶ UNAIDS is The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

(This is not the original interview guide but the translated one; see Appendix 2 for the original interview guide in Swedish)

Introductory question:

- You noticed the ad, what caught your interest? Do you want to tell me about your experiences in this field in general? What do you think?

Disclosure:

- Have you told anyone that you have sold/sell sex?

If told:

- Who did you tell and how did that go? (Special occasion? When? Where? How?)
 - How did you experience the situation?
- What did you tell – what did you exclude?
- Why did you decide to tell?
- How did the person react when you told?
- Can you describe what disclosing means for you? How does it affect you that you can disclose?
- Does it affect your self-esteem or your self-image that you can tell?
- Is there anything you cannot or won't tell? Please tell me more...
- Who can you disclose to/not disclose to? Family, friends, relatives, co-workers/colleagues, health care, agencies/authorities?
- Would you like to share a story of when you decided to not disclose that you sell sex even though you intended to disclose?
- (If you would describe yourself when or if you disclose, how do you describe yourself?)

If not told:

- How come you haven't told anyone?
- Have you been close to disclosing? What kept you from telling?
- Have you wanted to tell or would you like to tell?
 - If so, what – all or some?
- How is it to not tell about this part of your life? (How does it feel –to not be able to tell?)
- Is there someone you haven't told that you would like to tell? Why? Friends, family, relatives, co-workers/colleagues, health care, agencies/authorities?

General thought about disclosing:

- What do you think in general it means to be able to tell?
 - Are there any risks or gains of disclosure?
- If you think in general, is there any situation you would consider important to be able to disclose? Which one in such case?
- Many people can talk about their experiences from their job, for example, when it has been good or not so good – how does that compare to selling sex? What do you think about this?

The experience of society's view of being a man and selling sex:

- What are the barriers to disclosing, in your opinion? For example, prevailing attitudes, general norms and attitudes, social norms and laws?
- How do you think other people think about men who sell sex?
 - (How do you perceive society views people who sell sex?)
- How do you think the criminalization of the purchase of sex has affected your disclosure?

Background questions:

I have some background questions which you can choose to answer or not.

- Approximate age?
- Do you have short or long experience in the field?
- Do you know others that have similar experiences?

Ending questions:

- How did you experience this interview? (Have this interview meant something to you? If so, what?)
- We have now discussed many things connected to the ability to disclose, is there anything you think we've missed?

Appendix 2

Intervjuguide

Ingångsfrågor:

- Du såg annonsen, vad i detta var intressant? Vill du berätta om dina erfarenheter i det här fältet rent allmänt? Fick du några tankar spontant?

Berättande:

- Har du berättat för någon att du sålt/säljer sex?

Om berättat:

- Vem berättade du till och hur var den situationen?(Speciellt tillfälle? När? Var? Hur?)
 - Hur upplevde du situationen?
- Vad berättade du – vad uteslöt du?
- Varför valde du att berätta?
- Hur reagerade personen när du berättade?
- Kan du beskriva vad berättandet betyder för dig? Hur påverkar det dig att du kan berätta?
- Påverkar det din självkänsla eller din självbild att du kan berätta?
- Finns det något du inte kan eller vill berätta? Berätta lite mer...
- För vilka kan du berätta och för vilka inte? Vänner, familj, släkt, Arbetskamrater/studiekamrater, hälsosjukvården, myndigheter?
- Skulle du vilja berätta om en situation när du inte valde att berätta att du säljer sex, fast du egentligen kanske var på väg att berätta?
- (Om du skulle beskriva dig själv när eller om du berättar, vad beskriver du dig själv som?)

Om inte berättat:

- Hur kommer det sig att du inte har berättat?
- Har du varit nära att berätta? Vad hindrade dig?
- Har du velat berätta eller skulle du vilja berätta?
 - Vad i så fall – allt eller delar?
- Hur är det att inte berätta om denna del av ditt liv? (Hur känns det – att inte kunna berätta?)
- Finns det någon du inte berättat till som du skulle vilja berätta till? Varför? Vänner, familj, släkt, Arbetskamrater/studiekamrater, hälsosjukvården, myndigheter?

Generella tankar om berättandet:

- Vad tror du rent generellt det betyder att kunna berätta?
 - (Finns det några risker eller vinster med att berätta?)
- Om man tänker rent allmänt finns det någon situation du tror att det är viktigt att man kan berätta, vilken i så fall?
- Många människor kan berätta om sina erfarenheter från sitt jobb som t.ex. när det har gått bra eller mindre bra – skulle man kunna jämföra det med försäljning av sex? Hur tänker du kring det?

Upplevelsen av samhällets syn på att vara man och sälja sex:

- Vilka är hindren enligt dig att man inte berättar? Te.x. Den närmaste omgivningens attityder, allmänna normer & attityder, samhällets normer och lagstiftning?
- Hur tror du andra människor tänker om män som säljer sex till män?
 - (Hur upplever du att samhället ser på människor som säljer sex?)
- Hur tror du kriminaliseringen av sexköpet har påverkat ditt berättande?

Bakgrundsfrågor:

Du behöver inte berätta, det är frivilligt men så här mot slutet har jag några bakgrundsfrågor.

- Ungefärlig ålder?
- Har du kort eller lång erfarenhet i fältet?
- Känner du andra som har liknande erfarenheter?

Avslutningsfrågor:

- Hur har du upplevt intervjun? (Har den här intervjun betytt något för dig? Vad i så fall?)
- Nu har vi diskuterat så många olika saker som är kopplat till att kunna berätta, är det något du tycker att vi har missat?