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Student Sex Work in the Netherlands: Motivations and Experiences

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Abstract

Higher education students in the Netherlands undertake various roles in the sex industry. Insight is currently lacking into why students make the choice to work in this sector and what their experiences might be. This qualitative study seeks to address this gap. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 19 student sex workers and 3 students who have considered working in the sex industry. The male, female and transgender student sex workers who took part were predominantly white and were from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. The students worked in direct and indirect forms of sex work. As an alternative to a full participatory study, the study included 'participatory elements' where three (student) sex workers provided feedback on the interview schedule and the recruitment material.

In the Netherlands, where tuition fees for Dutch and EU students are moderate, student sex work cannot solely be explained through the lens of financial hardship. Most of the student sex workers in this study also have practical and intrinsic motivations for working in the sex industry. The flexible nature of sex work enables students to organise their work around their studies. The students derive pleasure from being with clients and enjoy connecting with them. Meanwhile, feminist-oriented students gain pleasure from their ability to put into practice their feminist beliefs in their work.

That the experiences of the student sex workers in this study are pleasant overall should be seen in the light of their intersectional privilege in terms of race, class and education, their ability to access alternative recourses beyond sex work, and their access to legal occupations in the middle and higher echelons of the sex industry where, on the whole, they face relatively good labour conditions. The strata in which most students work have an elevated status and a portion of the students use this favourable position to manage the stigma of sex work and by so doing, perpetuate the stigma of sex work.

The fact that the student sex workers in this study make well-considered decisions to take advantage of what the sex industry has to offer challenges the framing of sex workers as victims, which has gained currency in the Netherlands over the last few decades.

Declarations and statements:

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Maria Pieternella van Stempvoort (candidate)

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abbreviations

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List of abbreviations:

Abbreviation	Full term
BDSM	Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Masochism
BFE	Boyfriend Experience
CBS	Statistics Netherlands
ESSM	Expert Centre for Sexuality, Sex Work and Human Trafficking
GFE	Girlfriend Experience
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRSE	International Committee of the Rights of Sex Workers Europe
LGBTQI+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer and Intersex
NSWP	Global Network of Sex Work Projects
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PIC	Prostitution Information Centre
SWARM	Sex Work Advocacy and Resistance Movement
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VAT	Value Added Tax
VER	Association of Business Owners of Relax Companies
WHO	World Health Organisation
WRS	Wet Regulering Sekswerk (Law Regulation Sex Work)

Chapter 1.
Introduction

In the minds of most people, being both a sex worker and a student in higher education are two identities that do not match. Sex workers are often perceived as being poorly educated and having no other option than to work in the sex industry (Koken, 2010; Scott et al., 2005; Sinacore & Lech, 2011). This viewpoint is contradictory to the student identity. Students are in a position to benefit from higher education with many people expecting they will have better than average opportunities in their life and career if they don't have these opportunities already. The evolving research landscape on student sex work challenges common conceptions of the identities of people working in the sex industry. For various reasons, such as the high earning potential of sex work (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Lantz, 2005; Maher et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2013; Sagar et al., 2015a; Trautner & Collett, 2010), the flexible nature of the occupation (Maher et al., 2012; Sagar et al., 2015a; Trautner & Collett, 2010) and for some, the experience of pleasure whilst undertaking the job (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sanders & Hardy, 2015; van der Wagen et al., 2010), students across the globe do work in the sex industry (D. Jones & Sanders, 2022). As this PhD thesis will show, this is also the case in the Netherlands.

1.1. How Student Sex Work Sparked my Interest

In the year 2008, I took on a position as a policy advisor for Humanitas Expert Centre Sexuality, Sex Work and Human Trafficking (ESSM), a third sector organisation supporting everyone who works or has worked in the sex industry in the Rotterdam area and who needs help, information or advice. On an annual basis, the organisation supports about 300 clients whom, on the whole, have chosen for sex work among relatively few attractive alternatives. Whilst some clients look at their (past) occupation in the sex industry as a positive choice, for others, factors such as a lack of education, language barriers and structural forces such as labour market discrimination, the inaccessibility of affordable housing and social benefits provide the context of their engagement with sex work. About half of the people Humanitas ESSM supports have experienced a level of force by someone else in relation to their work in the sex industry and a part of these clients have claimed their rights as a national or international victim of human trafficking. Besides people engaged with sex work, Humanitas ESSM also supports LGBTQI+ people, people living with HIV and people who have faced labour exploitation in sectors other than the sex industry.

Around the time when I accepted my job as a policy officer, media reports appeared in the Netherlands and abroad stating that students work in the sex industry (Dolman, 2008; Duvall Smith, 2006; Kessel, 2012; Mare, 2011; van Wesel, 2012). As an organisation, we were not very familiar

with this phenomenon. The only students who reached out to Humanitas ESSM did so because they wanted to interview us for a paper or dissertation about sex work or trafficking in the sex industry. Whilst it is fair to say that we were used to ample media attention to sex work more broadly, this new focus on students in higher education who work in the sex industry evoked my interest in the subject. I became curious how higher education student sex workers would experience their work and to what extent their lives would be different to the lives of our clients. Considering that student sex workers did not use our facilities, I also wondered what unmet needs they might have and how these could best be addressed.

1.2. Research on Student Sex Work

Whilst most articles did not include references, several journalists who discussed the phenomenon of student sex work (Kessel, 2012; Mare online, 2011; van Wesel, 2012) pointed into the direction of studies on student sex work undertaken in the United Kingdom in the second decade of the twenty-first century. In my attempt to trace the journalists' sources, I came across the pioneering research of Roberts et al. (2007a, 2007b, 2010). Despite limitations imposed upon them by ethical review boards, the authors were able to bring to the attention that students do work as sex workers and that both the institutions of higher education and wider society cannot ignore this fact. Other studies on student sex work emerged, amongst others, in Australia (Lantz, 2005), the USA (Sinacore & Rezazadeh, 2014) and Canada (Sinacore et al., 2014). In the UK, the studies undertaken by Roberts et al. (2007a, 2007b, 2010) were followed up by the Student Sex Work Project (Sagar et al., 2015a). A new research field had emerged with these studies and it has started to gain traction.

The insights that the researchers brought forward reflected, amongst others, the numbers of students involved in the sex industry, their motivations and experiences, and the response to the phenomenon of student sex work. A study found that about 2 percent of a female population of students in the south of France worked in the sex industry (Cassabonne, 2008; Dequire, 2011). Much higher percentages were found in the UK with 4.7 percent of students involved with sex work (Sagar et al., 2016) and 7 percent in the City of Berlin in Germany (Betzer et al., 2015). Most studies associated the emergence of student sex work with the financial hardship experienced by students as a consequence of the marketisation of higher education and the introduction of high tuition fees (Maher et al., 2012; Sagar et al., 2016; Sinacore & Rezazadeh, 2014). However, many students also enter the sex industry because of the flexible nature of the occupation (Sagar et al., 2015a; Lantz, 2005; Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Maher et al., 2012) and the anticipated pleasure (Janssen, 2018; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sanders & Hardy, 2015).

The main challenge that student sex workers face is the stigma of sex work and the isolation that often results from it (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Janssen, 2018). However, so far most institutions of higher education do little to address the needs of student sex workers (Sagar et al., 2015a; Steward, 2019, 2022). On the contrary, studies in the UK revealed that students risk being

expelled from their course for working in the sex industry (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Cusick et al., 2009; Sagar et al., 2015). In chapter two, I present a more detailed discussion of how, to date, research on student sex work has enhanced our understanding of the phenomenon of student sex work.

1.2.1. The Importance of Research on Student Sex Work

Students who work as sex workers may be a subpopulation within the sex industry with a greater privilege compared to other groups within this profession both because of their educational background and, for many student sex workers, because of other identities such as their socio-economic positions and their race. However, this does not mean that these cases do not deserve our attention. As pointed out above, major challenges such as stigma and isolation do impact upon their lives. Owing to these experiences, some student sex workers may need a form of professional support.

Sagar et al. (2015a) underline that student sex workers in the UK use more services compared to students who do not work as sex workers. As Sagar et al. (2016) state, it is quite likely that their varied experiences "significantly test any student support service" (p. 20). Considering the unfamiliarity with this group of sex workers within Humanitas ESSM, this can also be said about specialised service providers for sex workers in the Netherlands. Further insight into the phenomenon of student sex work will also aid service providers within and outside higher education in the development of services that meet the needs of student sex workers. Consequently, research that increases awareness of the existence of student sex workers and their needs may enhance funding opportunities for doing so.

The studies presented in both this introduction and in chapter two indicate that most institutions of higher education have been unable to respond adequately to the phenomenon of student sex work. As mentioned, students have even faced institutional discrimination owing to their involvement with sex work (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Cusick et al., 2009; Sagar et al., 2015a; Simpson & Smith, 2020, 2021; Trueman et al., 2022). Increased awareness of the fact that students do undertake jobs in the sex industry and reliable information about the phenomenon of student sex work may aid institutions of higher education in responding appropriately to intended or unintended disclosures. A training programme to educate staff about student sex work has been developed by Leicester University and Durham Students' Union in the UK (Blake & Hart, 2022; Leicester University, n.d.; Trueman et al., 2022). To date, a similar initiative has not been undertaken in the Netherlands. Making student sex workers visible may encourage institutions of higher education in the country to take similar steps.

As stated in the opening of this introduction, student sex workers oppose the stereotypes of people working in the sex industry as being deprived, poorly educated or trafficked in the sex industry. Demonstrably, most of the students who took part in this study have made a well-considered choice to work in the sex industry and are able to take advantage of what the occupation has to offer them financially, emotionally and intellectually, and in terms of enjoyment. This reality thus

challenges the commonly-held assumptions about sex workers and provides insight into the diversity that exists among people who work in the sex industry.

Whilst student sex workers face sex work stigma and possibly other forms of oppression such as racism, homophobia or transphobia, they also enjoy varying levels of privilege. They all have access to higher education, and besides this, many also come from middle-class backgrounds and are often white (Janssen, 2018; Simpson & Smith, 2020). This provides a unique context for studying how stigma intersects with axes of oppression as well as with axes of privilege.

1.3. Student Sex Work in the Netherlands

To date, the afore-mentioned Student Sex Work Project in the UK (Sagar et al., 2015a) is the largest study undertaken on student sex work. As the study was limited to the UK, there was motivation to look further at student sex work in Europe. The idea was to begin this journey in the Netherlands and I was appointed to a PhD position to do so.

Most studies on student sex work to date have only looked at the phenomenon of student sex work in countries with high tuition fees such as the UK, Australia, Canada and the USA. For this reason, it might be unsurprising to discover that much of the attention was paid to financial hardship in these studies. University tuition fees are significantly lower in the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, 2017b; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). In spite of this fact, students still work as sex workers and, as a small-scale study on student sex work in Amsterdam indicates (Janssen, 2018), they may even be doing so in large numbers. Whilst the afore-mentioned figure of 13 percent of students who have ever been involved in sex work may be impacted by a sampling bias owing to the significantly higher number compared to other studies, it is undeniable that students in the Netherlands indeed work as sex workers. Looking at student sex work in the Netherlands provides the opportunity to gain insight into the other motivations that student sex workers may have beyond the financial incentive.

The Netherlands are known internationally for having a visible sex industry while the Dutch are often perceived as being tolerant towards the sector (Aalbers & Sabat, 2012; Post et al., 2018). Although there are signs that the stigma of sex work is increasing in the country insofar as it concerns forms of direct sex work (Rottier, 2018; VanWesenbeeck, 2017), the relative permissiveness of the Dutch in relation to the occupation may have a significant impact upon students' motivations for working in the sex industry and their experiences at work.

A relatively unique characteristic of the Netherlands is that the country regulated the sex industry. This study adds to the very few studies undertaken in countries with legal sex work (Weitzer, 2022). To some extent, the licensing regime that is part of the Dutch regulatory framework (see 1.9. for more information about the Dutch approach) enhances the experiences of those who work for third parties but poses limitations on students who want to work for themselves in areas in which self-employed sex workers need a licence (van Stempvoort, 2021) and, in many cases, makes it

impossible for non-EU students to work legally in the sex industry (Heumann et al., 2017; Janssen, 2007; Pheterson, 2001).

1.3.1. Other Gaps Addressed in this Study

Regarding the attention that researchers devote to the sex industry, Bernstein speaks of a "discursive explosion" (2007, p. 13). Since the late twentieth century, feminist sociologists, anthropologists and others have written abundantly about the sex industry (Bernstein, 2007; Dewey et al., 2019). Despite the prevalence of research, several areas in research on sex work remain under-explored (Weitzer, 2022). This study addresses several of these under-researched themes acknowledging, for one, that there is a dearth in research on invisible types of sex work (Hanks, 2019; Weitzer, 2022). Most students who took part in this study work in sectors that are hidden from the public eye, such as the escort and the camming industry. Besides this, very few researchers have elaborated on the positive experiences of sex workers (A. Jones, 2019; Sagar et al., 2016; Weitzer, 2022). Filling this gap was not difficult in the context of this study as most student sex workers who took part in this research spoke widely on the positive experiences of their work.

Few studies on student sex work compare cisgender male and cisgender female sex workers (Weitzer, 2022). Whilst doing so is not the primary goal of this study, the research does reveal some differences and similarities between sex workers of both genders. Lastly, it is relatively uncommon for studies on sex work to include sex workers with a non-heteronormative sexual identity (Ibid.). For instance, one participant in this study self-identified as being a lesbian and only works with female or transgender clients. Three male study participants self-identified as either queer or gay while also supporting a clientele with a sexual preference for men.

1.4. Giving a Voice to Student Sex Workers?

Researchers and journalists dedicated to the sex industry often present their work as giving a voice to sex workers. However, I find it difficult to frame my study as such because sex workers, including the sub-population of student sex workers, are capable of speaking on their own behalf (for examples of students who share their experiences, see Absar & Jevtovic 2023; Boelens, 2020; Veccari, 2019; Warring, 2022). Yet, as evidenced in this thesis, not every student sex worker dares to come out of the shadows to talk about their job. Student sex workers who choose to speak out have to balance their desire to do so with the possible consequences of their disclosure. Being open about the occupation may lead to rejection and social exclusion. Anonymous testimonies may hence be a safer alternative, but nevertheless bear with them the risk of being unintentionally outed.

Another major challenge is that (student) sex workers are not always heard (Garofalo Geymonat & Macioti, 2016; Steward, 2019, 2022; van der Meulen, 2011). Instead of relying on sex workers' own voices, society often gives more credence to academics who speak on their behalf

(Steward, 2022). In consideration of this unjust reality, I hope that the voices of student sex workers presented in my research provide evidence to the effect that student sex workers are experts in their own lives who should be listened to.

1.5. Research Aim and Research Questions

The overarching aim of this study is to create a better understanding of the involvement of students in higher education in the sex industry in the Netherlands. In line with the grounded theory approach that inspired this study, I desired to enter the field with broad research questions (Mc Callin, 2003; Straus & Corbin, 1998). A broad focus gives the researcher the flexibility to explore what is essential in the data inductively (Straus & Corbin, 1998; Glaser, 1998). This approach suits exploratory studies on relatively new research areas in which the issues at stake are not yet clearly defined (Denscombe, 2014; Punch, 2005), such as research on student sex work.

In response to the negative experiences that some sex workers have with research on sex work, I also desired to enter the field with a wide focus (Desiree Alliance, 2016; Jeffreys, 2009; Norberg, 2006; van der Meulen, 2011; Wahab, 2003). Owing to certain assumptions and bias regarding sex work, some researchers formulate research questions that sex workers experience as stigmatising, leaving issues sex workers do find relevant for their community unaddressed (Norberg, 2006; van der Meulen, 2011). As Glaser (1998) states, research problems are most relevant for study populations when they are expressed by their own community. An inductive study with a broad focus will not only assure study participants that stigmatising assumptions are not the starting point of the study, but it also gives the participants an ample opportunity to address what they find important.

The following two research questions have guided this study:

Question 1:
What motivates higher education students in the Netherlands to become engaged in sex work?

Question 2:
How do student sex workers in the Netherlands experience their engagement in sex work, and how do they navigate the potential challenges?

1.6. Outline of the Study

To address the research questions stated here, I undertook semi-structured interviews over the phone, online and face-to-face with 19 student sex workers and 3 students who considered entering the sex industry. The interview schedule, which can be found in the appendix, covered topics such as the student's motivations for working in the sex industry, the positive aspects of their involvement with sex work, the challenges that the students experience in their work, and the impact of their job on

their lives. As an advocate for participatory methods, I asked 3 (student) sex workers for feedback on the interview schedule and recruitment material. To analyse the data, I adopted a modified constructivist grounded theory approach in which I followed up inductively on emerging themes in the data.

1.7. Positioning the Research Within the Sex Work Debates

There continues to be a heated debate in feminism on the question of whether sex work is an economic exchange based on consent, or merely a form of exploitation irrespective of the circumstances under which the work takes place (Gerassi, 2015). Feminist-oriented academics who have an interest in sex work position themselves somewhere along the continuum of the two standpoints (Dewey et al., 2019).

I have undertaken this study from the perspective that sex work is work. Only when sex work is recognised as a form of work, sex workers demand labour rights. By viewing sex work as such, I also move away from representations of sex workers as criminals, as victims, or as spreaders of disease (NSWP, 2017).

To express my standpoint, I have used the term 'sex work' in this study and rejected the pejorative term 'prostitution'. A practical benefit of the use of sex work is that it encompasses a wider range of activities. See for an explanation of what I consider to be sex work in the context of this study section 1.8.1. I will further elaborate on the existing theoretical perspectives on sex work in chapter three, where I also discuss in further detail why I have undertaken this study from the standpoint that sex work is work.

1.8. Key Terms within this Study

In the following subsections, I explain a number of key terms and concepts that play an important role within this study. These are: sex work, third parties, force and students. As the meaning I have assigned to these terms is not universal, I will clarify in this section how I understood these terms within the context of this study.

1.8.1. Sex Work

For the purposes of this study, I understand sex work as "the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation" (Weitzer, 2022, p. 3) based on the consent of both parties. Weitzer's interpretation of sex work encompasses a wide range of services to be sub-divided into direct and indirect sex work depending on the degree of physical contact between the client and the sex worker. Sagar et al. (2015a) refer to direct sex work as a form of work in which there is intimate contact between the service provider and the client, then defining indirect sex work as a type of work in which this is not the case.

Examples of the first type of sex work consists of what was previously referred to as 'prostitution', such as working as an escort, working on the street or working in a brothel. Some also refer to this form of sex work as 'full-service sex work' (Sawicki et al., 2019). The latter includes activities such as webcamming or acting in a porn movie. In view of the lack of clarity regarding the classification of activities in which some physical contact between the client and worker takes place but where genital contact is not a common practice, I further specify that direct sex work is a form of work in which genital contact is considered to be a standard part of the services on offer while they define indirect sex work as a form of work in which this is not the case. Therefore, in this study BDSM and lap dancing are forms of indirect sex work whilst offering a manual relief in a massage parlour is direct sex work.

To gain insight into the motivations and experiences of all student sex workers, I sought to include students who work both in direct and in indirect forms of sex work. Including only study participants engaged with direct sex work, as some researchers into student sex work have done (Clouet, 2008; Lantz, 2005), would not only leave out the experiences of the students who are solely involved in indirect sex work. It would also inhibit students who operate in both types of sex work from talking about the whole range of their experiences in the sex industry, or exploring how being active in indirect sex work may lower the threshold for becoming involved in direct forms of sex work.

Whilst 'work' is often compensated for with a salary or a hourly rate, Weitzer's broad definition of sex work provides room for other forms of compensation. Different from the studies that I present in the literature review in the next chapter in which all the student sex workers worked for money, this study has also included students who also exchanged sex for other benefits. One student considered accepting her client's offer to live in his investment property while another student exchanged online shows for a custom-made art piece. Adopting a wide definition of what counts as sex work raises the question of what the limitations are in what can be considered sex work. The examples of the in-kind compensation mentioned above may, according to some, not fit within a labour framework and would therefore not fall under the definition of sex work. I concur with Dawson (2021) about what constitutes sex work is open to interpretation.

As mentioned above, to be able to recruit students active in the exchange of sexual acts for a wide variety of forms of compensation, I phrased the occupation in my recruitment flyer as 'students in higher education who sell erotic services', and as students taking part in 'the exchange of sex for money'. However, as I will explain in the methodology chapter, a flyer proved not to be of much use within the recruitment process. I established contact with most participants face-to-face, which enabled me to adhere to the terminology the students preferred, which ranged from 'sex work' to their specific niche such as 'escort' or 'high-end escort'.

One of the two students who also accepted in-kind compensations recognised the 'sugar arrangements' she took part in as a form of sex work but did not use this term to describe her

occupation. Instead, she felt more comfortable referring to her work as ‘accompanying lonely men’. I adhered to her terminology of choice and recognised the likeliness of missing out on other students who take part in sugar arrangements whom, as is also suggested by literature on sugar relationships, may not self-identify as sex workers (Nayar, 2017; Scull, 2020) while, in addition, they may not feel comfortable with terminology such as ‘selling erotic services’ or ‘exchanging sex for money’.

1.8.2. Third Parties

In the Dutch language, business operators within the sex industry, such as the owners of escort agencies, massage parlours or brothels are often referred to as ‘exploitanten’ (those who exploit a business). A direct translation of this word into the English noun ‘exploiters’ would a priori associate these entrepreneurs with human traffickers, whilst most are not guilty of this type of crime. Alternatively, as suggested by NSWP-c (n.d.), I have adopted the term ‘third parties’ to refer to people who run a business in the sex industry. Whilst all student sex workers who took part in this study work for a third party who holds a licence issued by the local government for operating a legal business, third parties may also operate illegally. This is the case when they do not possess a licence, whilst this is required within the municipality in which they operate. I further explain the functioning of the Dutch regulated framework for the sex industry in section 1.9.1. Although I refer less frequently to staff who undertake auxiliary roles in the sex industry, such as drivers or hosts in a brothel, these employees (or independent contractors) also fall under the definition of a third party.

1.8.3. Force

As explained, I understand sex work to be an occupation based on the voluntarily participation in the exchange of both parties. Hence, sex work is inherently different from human trafficking in the sex industry. According to article 273f of the Dutch criminal code, human trafficking is the recruitment, transport, moving, accommodation or sheltering of a person with the intention to exploit the person in the sex industry or in any other labour sector (Government of the Netherlands, 2003). The forcible removal of organs or forced begging are also part of the criminal code (Ibid.). To a large extent, Article 273f is based on the Palermo protocol of the United Nations to prevent and suppress human trafficking, and to punish perpetrators to which the Netherlands as a UN member adheres. Besides the Palermo Protocol, the country also complies with the EU directive and the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings of the Council of Europe, both of whom also proceed from the Palermo Protocol. Under article 273f, minors who engage with paid sex are also considered to be a victim of trafficking, irrespective of the question whether they consent to sex work (Art. 273f lid 1 sub 2 Sr.).

Whilst none of the study participants in this study have worked in the sex industry against their own will according to the definition of article 273f, 3 study participants did receive a proposal to

sell sex before they were eighteen years old. They did not proceed with the offer but if they had done so, then the Dutch criminal code would have qualified them as victims of domestic human trafficking.

1.8.4. Students

Within this thesis, I define students as people who study at one of the 18 universities (The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders, no year) or one of the 43 universities of applied science (Government of the Netherlands, no year) in the Netherlands. The level of their programme is a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. Hence, PhD researchers are not included in this study because they have an employee status in the Netherlands (Association of universities in the Netherlands, 2015). I have also excluded pupils attending secondary vocational training from participation. Whilst the Ministry of Education classifies them from 2020 as students (Government of the Netherlands, 2017a), this was not yet the case in 2018 and 2019 when I undertook the fieldwork for this study. This research includes both part-time and full-time students who are Dutch nationals, EU students or non-EU students.

1.9. Contextualising the Study: The Dutch Sex Industry

To provide insight into the context in which student sex workers work, I outline what the Dutch sex industry looks like in terms of the different sectors that exist and the people who find employment in them. As explained earlier, the Netherlands has regulated the sex industry in 2000. In this section, I will explain in brief how this legislative framework came about. In doing so, I will highlight how some (student) sex workers benefit to some extent from the Dutch regulatory approach, whilst those who do not have access to a legal form of sex work, such as most non-EU students, face the adverse consequences of how the country organises the sex industry.

The hidden nature of the sex industry, the stigma of sex work and sex workers' mobility make it difficult to estimate how many people work in the Dutch sex industry (Bleeker & van den Braak, 2021; Wagenaar et al., 2013). Wagenaar et al. (2013) estimate that in the four largest cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), there are about 2,200 adults active in direct forms of sex work on any given day. A significant part of the sex workers who work in direct sex work recruit clients via the internet. Daily, about 6,500 to 7,000 different sex workers advertise on online platforms in the Netherlands (Bleeker & van den Braak, 2021). However, as some may work on a daily basis and others less frequently, this says little about the number of people active in this field each day. In 2009, TAMPEP estimated that about 60% of all the sex workers working in the Netherlands were migrants, of whom sex workers from central European countries were the most dominant group. More recent data on the prevalence of migrant sex work in the country is absent. In 2011, it was estimated that about five percent of all sex workers in the Netherlands were male and

another five percent was transgender (VanWesenbeeck, 2011). A more recent estimation of the gender makeup of people involved in sex work in the Netherlands is also lacking.

Whilst cisgender females can find employment across the sex industry, cisgender male sex workers and sex workers with other gender identities have limited possibilities in the Dutch sex industry (Cubides Kovacsics, 2023; van den Dries et al., 2021). Besides independent sex work via the internet, only some of the windows are accessible for transgender sex workers. Meanwhile, cisgender male sex workers have the choice to work in the only brothel for male workers in the country (van den Dries et al., 2021), or for one of the very few escort agencies for male sex workers, or they can work independently via the internet.

The Dutch sex industry manifests itself across a variety of venues. One can find small-scale brothels spread throughout the Netherlands referred to as 'private houses', which are massage parlours where massages with hand relief are offered as well as escort agencies. Larger sex clubs with a bar where alcohol is served and where performances can be viewed are often located in larger cities.

The most iconic form of sex work in the Netherlands is window-based sex work, but sex work also takes place on the street in the Netherlands. In the early 21st century, 9 Dutch cities had an official street walkers zone where sex workers worked under the protection of the police as well as in close contact with harm reduction staff. However, similar to the windows, this sector faced increased governmental attack. Near the end of this PhD trajectory, only two street zones were still open (Bleeker & van den Braak, 2021).

When I zoom into the legal framework for the sex industry in the Netherlands in the next section, I will set out a variety of reasons why Dutch society and politicians became increasingly intolerant of sex work in the past two decennia. This impacts all the sectors of the sex industry. However, as also evidenced elsewhere, visible types of sex work with a low status such as the streets and the windows face more societal rejection and legal repercussions (Koken, 2012; Bernstein, 2007). I further elaborate on the relationship between visibility, status and stigma in chapter six.

As in many places in the world (Cunningham et al., 2017; Kingston & Sanders, 2010; Koken, 2012), an increasing number of sex workers in the Netherlands use the internet to work independently in the sex industry (Goderie & Boutellier, 2006; RIEC, 2012; Heumann et al., 2017). They work as escorts or they receive clients at home or in rented accommodation (Ibid.). Considering that the generation of students who took part in this research grew up in a world in which the use of the internet is a normal part of people's daily life, it is not surprising that a large part of the students use the Web to recruit clients.

1.9.1. The Regulation of the Dutch Sex Industry

The Netherlands has had a brothel-keeping law since 1911 (Post et al., 2018). However, following the implementation of the law, brothels continued to be tolerated (De Vries, 2005). It was not until the later part of the 20th century that commercial sex re-emerged as a topic of political

debate, which had everything to do with the expansion of the sex industry at that time as well as with the changing nature of the sector (Wagenaar et al., 2017).

In the 1960s and 1970s, sexual mores had loosened and citizens experienced increased sexual freedom (Outshoorn, 2004). In combination with greater wealth, the demand for paid sexual services subsequently grew (Ibid.). The brothel owners who had become rich bought properties to expand their business (Wagenaar et al., 2017). Outshoorn describes the sex industry of that time as "exhibitionist and aggressive" (Outshoorn, 2004, p. 167). Regarding Amsterdam's red-light district, Wagenaar et al. (2017) state that:

> The once quiet canals and alleyways became gaudy corridors of live sex theatres, porn shops, bars offering erotic entertainment, sex museums, erotic cinemas and saunas, thronging with rowdy, boisterous revellers on weekend nights (2017, no page nr).

These changes resulted in an increase in public nuisance. Hence, to keep the growing sex industry under control the Dutch government adopted a model of 'regulated tolerance', which meant that informal written and unwritten rules were put in place to regulate the sex industry (Wagenaar et al., 2017). Amongst others, these rules included building regulations and ID checks of sex workers. Law enforcement was possible, as brothels were officially still illegal. However, because the Dutch public accepted the existence of the sex industry at the time, the closure of workplaces was socially not acceptable.

The informal regulation of the Dutch sex industry predated the official lifting of the ban on brothels which became effective in the year 2000. The main proponents of the legal change were the Dutch municipalities who desired to control the sex industry to maintain public order (Outshoorn, 2004) alongside feminist and sex workers' rights groups who hoped that the new direction would improve the labour conditions of sex workers (Heumann et al., 2017; Outshoorn, 2012). Sex workers themselves were also hoping for a change for the better, although they were also cautious of possible unwanted consequences (S. Altink, personal communication, no date). Unlike in other countries in Europe, there were no strong abolitionist feminist groups in the Netherlands to oppose the lifting of the ban on brothels. Christian parties rejected the regulation of the sex industry, but they were unable to prevent its adaptation because they were not part of the coalition when the law became effective (Outshoorn, 2004; Post et al., 2018).

1.9.2. The Impact of the Lifting of the Ban on Brothels

Dutch municipalities are powerful institutions (Wagenaar et al., 2013). After the lifting of the ban on brothels, they were given the authority to design their own local policy (Daalder, 2007). They dictate the conditions under which brothel owners and escort agencies can access licences while implementing certain rights for sex workers. Although municipalities cannot prohibit sex businesses, they often succeed in doing so by means of strict planning acts (Outshoorn, 2012). Such regulation has led to a significant decrease in the number of work venues for sex workers (Bleeker & van der

Braak, 2021). Sex workers did not experience a significant improvement of their rights since the lifting of the ban on brothels. Those who work for third parties mostly work under the so called *opting-in* scheme which means that they pay VAT, health insurance and income tax, whilst the brothel or agency owner is not obliged to pay social insurances to enable them to access sick payment and unemployment benefits (Wijers et al., 2014; van Stempvoort, 2021). Under this fiscal scheme, sex workers may have similar rights as independent contractors, but de facto they are often treated as employees. For example, because they are unable to choose their working hours (Outshoorn, 2014; van Wijk & Rijnink, 2020; Wijers et al., 2014). It may be that students are not very concerned with the absence of social security under the opting-in scheme because most of the time they would not enjoy such benefits in traditional student jobs either. However, when the violation of their rights under the opting-in scheme limits their freedom in terms of their inability to choose their own hours, this may compromise their academic achievements.

Independent sex workers are often subjected to a similar licensing regime as third parties (van Stempvoort, 2021; Winter et al., 2016). However, very few municipalities issue licences (Soa Aids, 2018). When municipalities are willing to give licences to independent workers, they often compromise their privacy by publishing the request online or in a local newspaper (Winter et al., 2016). This practice of essentially 'outing' sex workers, as well as the costs associated with the licence, poses significant barriers for sex workers to work legally. It is imaginable that these problems are even more pertinent for student sex workers. Considering that, as students, their involvement in the sex industry may be temporary, this investment may be too great.

However, the group who have paid the highest price for the change to the law are sex workers from non-EU countries who do not have access to the labour market (Heumann et al., 2017; Janssen, 2007; Pheterson, 2001). Previously they were often tolerated for working illegally (Bernstein, 2007; Goderie et al., 2002), but in the newly regulated sex industry, it has become much harder for them to operate (Kilvington et al., 2001). Working for legalised third parties has become impossible (Heumann et al., 2017), while increased repression and controls have also made it more difficult to operate independently (Weitzer, 2017). Most non-EU student sex workers find themselves in a similar position as other non-EU sex workers. When particular conditions are met, they can work for an employer or work for themselves as an independent contractor in any other industry, but they cannot legally work in the sex industry (Soa aids Nederland, 2023). This obstacle forces them to either solely work online or to operate illegally which, in the latter case, increases safety risks and makes it difficult to report violence (Burckley, 2023; Deering et al., 2014; Treloar et al., 2021).

1.9.3. Tighter Control

The new law proposal *Wet Regulering Sekswerk* (WRS), translated as Law Regulation Sex Work, that has been under debate in parliament for more than a decade does not address the challenges that sex workers face. Contrary to the wishes of sex workers, the law further jeopardises

their position with the introduction of a mandatory registration for people who work in direct forms of sex work along with the criminalisation of the users of services of those who were unwilling or unable to register. The legal age to work as a sex worker will increase to 21 years old, making it impossible for the younger generation of students to work legally.

The WRS has been under debate since 2008 and had by the time of the writing of this PhD thesis not been accepted (Government of the Netherlands, 2023; Wijers, 2017). However, in the meantime, municipalities developed their own local policy framework for the sex industry that often includes elements of the law proposal. For example, Amsterdam and The Hague have already increased the legal age to do sex work to 21 years old (Heumann, 2017; Municipality of The Hague, 2020). In these municipalities, students below 21 years old cannot work legally.

Several factors explain the Dutch government's move towards further control and repression. Sweden, a country in which sex work is perceived as a form of gender violence, criminalised the purchase of sex in 1999 (Kivlington et al., 2002). Since then, the Swedish government has heavily invested in the promotion of their so-called 'Swedish model' (Ward & Wylie, 2017). Meanwhile, Dutch radical feminists and Christian political groups who were never in favour of the lifting of the ban on brothels have generated much media coverage of their alliances with representatives of the Swedish government (Heumann et al., 2017). To be added to this is a moral panic on human trafficking emerging in the Netherlands in the early 21st century (Post et al., 2019; Bovenkerk & van San, 2011), with a small number of brutal trafficking cases receiving much media attention and playing a major role in this (Weitzer, 2017; Post et al., 2018). The government evaluated the outcome of the lifting of the ban on brothels to conclude that abuses in the sex industry still exist (Daalder, 2007). Media attention for this finding has further fed the moral panic (Post et al., 2018) and in view of all these factors, sex workers are increasingly seen as victims in the Netherlands.

1.10. Contextualising the Study: The Cost of Higher Education in the Netherlands

As explained earlier in this chapter, student sex work is associated with the financial needs of students in higher education. In this section, in order to better understand the extent to which this is also the case in the Netherlands, I discuss the cost of education in the Netherlands for native, EU and international students as well as the financial aid made available for students. Whilst doing so, I will give special attention to a policy change implemented in academic year 2015-2016 which has impacted about half of the student sex workers who took part in this study. Since then, students have been expected to contribute significantly more to their own studies.

As with nearly everywhere in the world over the last two decades, the Netherlands has seen an increasing number of students accessing higher education (UNESO, 2020). In the year 2018 in which the fieldwork for this research commenced, out of a population of 17 million, 750,382 students were studying towards a bachelor's or master's degree in the country (CBS, 2021a; CBS, 2021b). For Dutch and EU-students, the largest portion of the cost of education is covered by the government. In

2018, the statutory tuition fees for a full-time bachelor's or master's course were €2,060 for students from the European Economic Area (the EU, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland) and for students from Switzerland and Suriname (Government of the Netherlands, 2018). Students of other nationalities pay the institutional tuition fees that range from €6,000 to €20,000 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2020). National students who started their studies before September 2015 were then eligible for a basic maintenance bursary, a top-up bursary for low-income students, a free public transport card and a low interest loan (Law on Student Finance, 2000). In the aftermath of the great recession, the Dutch government struggled to find the resources to maintain the desired quality of education for the growing number of students. As there was no extra budget available to invest in higher education, the government decided to stop providing financial aid to students, to be able to re-distribute the money among universities (Explanatory Memorandum, 34035, 3, 2014).

The arguments that political parties used to support this financial decision varied from the Left to the Right. On the left of the spectrum, the Social Democrat Party (PvdA) and the Green Left Party (Groen Links) desired to end the situation in which low-income groups had to pay for the education of people who would very possibly have access to higher education anyway, and who would have access to much higher earnings sooner or later than those who contributed to their studies (Ibid.). The Liberal Party (VVD), which was never keen on high governmental spendings, argued that students' financial investment in higher education was an investment in themselves and was therefore their own responsibility (Erdogan, 2021).

The new financial direction named the *social loan system* was introduced in September 2015 where the abolition of the basic maintenance grant was applied to new students (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science C, no date). Since that date, Dutch students have been able to apply for a low interest loan. Similar to the previous generation of students, they also receive a free public transport card while low-income students remained eligible for top-up bursaries (Explanatory memorandum, 34035, 3, 2014). Tuition fees only rose slightly above inflation (Explanatory memorandum, 31 790, 3, 2008). EU and international students who met particular criteria continued to be able to access the same resources. Students aged 30 years old or older when they began their studies, or students who did not meet other requirements for study finance can then apply for a lifelong learning credit to cover tuition fees (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, no d

The government of the Netherlands did not put the cost of education upon the students and their parents to the same extent as, for example, the government of the United Kingdom or the United states who both support high tuition fees (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, 2018; Mixon, 2019; Explanatory Memorandum, 34035, 3, 2014). Nonetheless, with the introduction of the social loan system, the new generation of Dutch students had to borrow significantly more money to be able to complete their education. Six years after the introduction of the social loan system, the total level of student debt in the country had almost doubled (CBS, 2022c). Contrary to trends in many other places in the world where the cost of education is seen as a personal

responsibility of the students (Altbach et al., 2010), political support for the social loan system decreased in 2021. According to the 2021-2025 coalition agreement of the Dutch government, the basic maintenance bursary is due to return.

1.11. Summary and Thesis Structure

In this chapter, I have explained how I became interested in studies on student sex work via my work for Humanitas ESSM where we rarely encountered student sex workers. I briefly introduced the evolving research landscape on student sex work and argued that there is a need to follow up on existing studies by looking at student sex work in the context of the Netherlands. I have provided the aim of the study and presented the research questions guiding my work. I have explained that I sought answers to these questions by means of undertaking semi-structured interviews with 22 student sex workers and students who consider working in the sex industry.

I have described several key terms within the study. To understand the context in which student sex workers in the Netherlands work and study, I have described the Dutch legislative framework for the sex industry and gave insight into how this sector looks like in terms of sectors and people involved. I have also elaborated on the cost of higher education in the Netherlands.

In chapter two, I will review existing research on student sex work. Chapter three consists of two parts. In the first part, I discuss the main feminist theoretical understandings of sex work. I also position myself within the debate and provide arguments as to why my theoretical approach is the most suitable for this study on student sex work. In the second part of chapter three, I will discuss theoretical perspectives and concepts that emerged during my fieldwork and data analysis.

In chapter four, I will set out the research design and methodology for this study. Here I will address why I used a qualitative inductive approach, inspired by grounded theory, and I will discuss the importance of the inclusion of participatory elements. I will explain how I recruited the study participants and how I collected the data. I have also elaborated upon the challenges that I experienced in the process of gaining ethical clearance for this study.

Chapters five, six and seven then describe the empirical findings of this study. In chapter five, I discuss how a combination of financial, practical and intrinsic reasons motivate students to undertake occupations in the sex industry. I will also zoom in on their decision-making process and analyse what sources of information the students accessed prior to their entry into the sex industry.

In chapter six, I discuss how exclusionary practices based on whiteness, body weight, age, cultural and educational capital among other factors give some students access to the most prestigious and best paid strata of the sex industry and impose barriers for others. I will outline how the students perceive their (in)ability to access their desired job and make a case against the phenomenon that some students manage their own status by further stigmatising sex workers in lower strata.

The middle and higher strata of the sex industry, in which most student sex workers in this study work, pose a greater demand on the emotional labour of sex workers. In chapter seven, I

elaborate on how this can be both pleasurable and challenging for the student sex workers, while in chapter eight, I present the outcomes of the study. I set out how this study contributes to current knowledge of student sex work. I will also give recommendations for institutions of higher education. Near the end of chapter eight, I will point out the limitations of the study and suggest avenues for further inquiry.

Chapter 2.
Prior Research on Student Sex Work

This chapter discusses the literature on student sex work which has been brought forward within an evolving research landscape addressing the topic. Whilst numbers and representativity are always a difficult issue in sex work research (Abel et al., 2010; Benoit et al., 2005; Sanders et al., 2017; Shaver, 2005), it is undeniable from the current body of literature that students in Western countries work in the sex industry. Despite the commonly-held viewpoint that sex work is primarily a female occupation, this chapter proceeds to illustrate that students with different gender orientations work in the sex industry. Furthermore, the chapter sets out the different benefits of student sex work, such as the flexible nature of the occupation and the ability of workers to experience pleasure at work.

This chapter also addresses several challenges associated with student sex work, such as the stigmatised nature of the occupation and safety concerns. Whilst most student sex workers have the choice to do sex work, it is underlined here that some student look at their involvement in the sector as involuntary. Lastly, the chapter shows that there is much room for improvement in how institutions of higher education deal with the phenomenon of student sex work.

2.1. A Sex Work Population that Cannot be Ignored

In the year 2006, the French students' union SUD-Étudiant published the first estimate of the numbers of students involved in sex work in a European country (Clouet, 2008). The union concluded that 1 in every 57 female students in France worked in the sex industry (Cassabonne, 2008; Dequiré, 2011). It is unclear how the union came to these statistics. At a later stage, SUD-Étudiant withdrew responsibility for the claim (Casabonne, 2008). In response to these findings, the French police and the National Institute of Prostitution called the union's estimation an exaggeration (Ibid.). However, the percentage is considerably lower than the percentages found in later studies in other countries.

Four years later, for example, Roberts et al. (2013) concluded that 6% of a group of 200 male and female students in the UK were engaged in sex work. In a study of strip clubs around the same time, which also includes the UK, Sanders and Hardy (2015) reported that a significant number of the dancers were students (29.4%). Sagar et al. (2016) also focused on the UK and found a slightly lower percentage amongst 6,773 students of all genders (4.7%). More than 1 in 5 (21.9%) has ever considered working in the sex industry.

In the same year Betzer et al. (2015) concluded that as a group 7% of 4,386 male, female and transgender students in Berlin did sex work. Research among a group of 664 students in Amsterdam then showed that whilst only 6.3% had ever worked in the sex industry, a much larger group of 27% had considered doing so (Janssen & Steinmetz, 2017). It may be the case that the percentages mentioned are an overestimation. Student sex workers may be more interested in the topic and

therefore more inclined to participate in a survey on the subject. On the other hand, fear of unwanted disclosure may lead to false answers or may discourage people from taking part in a survey altogether. In addition to these considerations, it is possible that a part of the student sex work population might not disclose their occupation because not every sex worker self-identifies as such (Lowthers et al., 2017; Sawicki et al., 2019).

Geographical location may also play a role. Rather than those conducted on a national basis, the studies undertaken in major cities reported the highest prevalence of student involvement in sex work (Betzer et al., 2015; Janssen & Steinmetz, 2017). Large cities may provide more opportunities for working in the sex industry in terms of anonymity and the availability of a variety of sectors.

Despite the uncertainty around the representativeness of the numbers, the data undeniably shows that student sex work is not a marginal phenomenon.

2.2. Who are the Students who Work in the Sex Industry?

Whilst sex work is often perceived as an occupation that is dominated by cisgender females, the quantitative studies on student sex work showed that within the sub-population of student sex workers the numbers of cisgender male and transgender sex workers were significant. This trend was most prominently visible in Sagar et al.'s (2015a) study. Their survey indicated that in the UK, the percentage of male sex workers outnumbered the number of female sex workers. At 3.6%, the number of student sex workers who identified as being transgender was lower.

The research of Ernst et al. (2021) in Berlin showed that 61 of the 227 student sex workers identified as cisgender male. Although this study provided no opportunity to select other gender identities than male or female, the fact that 34% left their gender identity open may indicate a high prevalence of transgender sex workers. In Amoah and Cowling's (2016) survey in the UK, more than one in ten study participants stated that they were male. An even larger group of 16% of the student sex workers identified as transgender. The high prevalence of the latter group may be impacted by the fact that the recruitment for the study took place within LGBTQI+ networks (Amoah & Cowling, 2016).

Whilst the afore-mentioned percentages vary and a certain bias may again play a role, the data suggests that sex work among students is certainly not a phenomenon that only exists among female students. The numbers of male and transgender student sex workers in the mentioned studies is higher than the estimated 7 percent of male and 6 percent of transgender sex workers among the general sex work population in Europe (Tampep, 2009). None of the studies on student sex work explain the origin of this difference.

Considering the high prevalence of male and transgender students who work in the sex industry, the absence of this group is striking in qualitative studies. For instance, Sagar et al.'s (2015a) mixed method study and Steward's (2022) qualitative study include an interview with only a single male student sex worker. The remainder of the qualitative studies on student sex work are solely

focused on females. Qualitative studies can provide in-depth understanding of study participants' experiences, views and perceptions within the context of their lives (Davies & Hughes, 2014), entailing that such an in-depth knowledge of the experiences of male and transgender student sex workers is currently lacking.

In most small studies on student sex work, only national students participated (Clouet, 2008; Sinacore et al., 2014; van der Wagen et al., 2010). The larger studies, which were undertaken in the top ten countries with the largest number of international students of the world such as the UK, Germany and Australia (UNESCO, 2020), also included foreign student sex workers. In Sagar et al.'s (2015a) study in the UK, EU and non-EU students made up respectively 5.1% and 5.1% of the total group of student sex workers. Amoah and Cowling's (2016) survey was also undertaken in the UK and included 7% student sex workers from overseas. Meanwhile, Ernst et al. (2021) indicate that in the survey they undertook in Berlin, 3.1% of their study population consisted of EU-students alongside a group of 1.3% of non-EU students. In comparison, 1 in 9 of the students in Lantz' (2005) study in Australia were international students.

These percentages are significantly lower than the percentage of international students in the respective countries during the years in which the studies took place (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2014; Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017). It may be that international students are indeed involved in sex work in smaller numbers. However, it may also be the case that they are more hesitant to disclose their involvement in sex work; for example, when visa restrictions force them to work illegally, or because they do not want to add more stigma to their migrant status.

The inclusion of international students in research on student sex work is important for different reasons. Whilst some may come from relatively wealthy families, like many non-EU students in the Netherlands (Popescu et al., 2021) they may nevertheless face financial hardship because most countries charge foreigners high tuition fees. Financial aid provided to nationals may not be available for international students. When sex work is illegal on a student visa, which is the case in the Netherlands for instance, international student sex workers have to work illegally making them far less safe.

Very few researchers on student sex work have paid attention to the racial background of their study participants (D. Jones, 2019). D. Jones noticed that student sex workers of colour were underrepresented in her study on female student sex workers in the USA (2019). In the UK and Australia, Simpson and Smith (2020) only interviewed white study participants which they relate to the fact that higher education in the respective countries is largely dominated by white people.

To address the absence of student sex workers of colour in research on student sex work, Steward (2022) approached the gap by adopting a purposive sampling framework for his research on student sex work, making contact with six study participants of African American, Asian and Latina descent. His work underlined that his study participants experience more financial hardship, struggle

to have access to certain parts of the sex industry because of racism and face more unpleasant treatment by clients. This outcome shows the relevance of including a racially diverse study population in studies on student sex work.

2.3. Motivations for Student Participation in the Sex Industry

Researchers point out a close relationship between student sex work and high tuition fees in a number of countries such as the UK, the USA and Australia (Binch, 2013; Dequiré, 2011; Maher et al., 2012; Roberts, 2007a, 2007b; Sagar 2016; Sanders & Hardy, 2015; Sinacore & Rezazadeh, 2014; Steward, 2022). Fees in these three countries have risen tremendously over the last decade (Lantz, 2005; Sagar et al., 2015b; Sanders & Hardy, 2015). In the UK, annual tuition fees rose to above 10,000 euro in 2017 for domestic students (House of Commons Library, 2018), while they were about 3,000 euro in Australia in the same year (Universities Australia, 2020) and around 9,000 euro at state universities in the USA (The College Board, 2017). Fees for international students were many times higher.

Besides tuition fees, students also have to cover expenses such as books and other study material. Whilst not all student sex workers come from poor backgrounds, few will be able to cover the costs easily. Loans are usually provided, but borrowing considerable amounts of money is not popular amongst student sex workers (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Sagar et al, 2015a).

Besides being able to cover the costs of higher education, what is almost an equally important motivation for undertaking jobs in the sex industry is the flexible nature of the occupation (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Anderson & Petro, 2017; Binch, 2013; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Janssen, 2018; J. Jones, 2019; Lantz, 2005; Maher et al., 2012; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sinacore et al., 2014; Sinacore & Lech, 2011). The quote below, from a student sex worker in Canada, illustrates this reality:

> It gives me that ultimate freedom of, when you're in crunch times, with school, you get these crazy crunch times that are really insane so I decided to take a month off and just do my work and succeed in my school, which is what I'm here to do, and then I'll work harder when I get out of school. (Sinacore et al., 2014, p. 46)

Similar to this student, in most of the studies on student sex work discussed in this chapter the interviewees express how the flexible nature of their job enables them to combine their work with their studies.

The need for a well-paid flexible job is not the only reason why students do sex work. A large part of the studies on student sex work show that at least a part of the study participants in the studies enjoy their work intrinsically (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Binch, 2013; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Janssen, 2018; Janssen & Veninga, 2016; Maher et al., 2012; Sagar et al., 2015a, 2016; Sanders, 2012; Sanders & Hardy, 2015; Simpson & Beer, 2022; Van der Wagen et al., 2010; Westerik, 2009). These intrinsic motivations do, however, appear to be varied. For example, one

study reported that the participants are fascinated by the occupation and they feel attracted to the mystery around it (van der Wagen et al., 2010). For others, they are curious about what the occupation involves (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Janssen, 2018; Sagar et al., 2016) and may be excited about doing something that is 'forbidden' (Clouet, 2008; Sanders & Hardy, 2015; van der Wagen et al., 2010). A number of student sex workers also worked in the sex industry to experience sexual pleasure (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Janssen, 2018; Sagar et al., 2015a).

Undertaking jobs in the sex industry because of perceived (sexual) pleasure fits with a student culture that embraces the search for hedonistic pleasure. Sanders and Hardy refer to this phenomenon as "the pleasure dynamic" (2015, p. 759) among students. Besides sexual gratification, the pleasure students seek in the sex industry is also connected to taking part in the night-time economy (Roberts et al., 2013; Sanders, 2012; Simpson & Beer, 2022). In the UK, where a large part of the dancers in strip clubs are students (Roberts et al., 2013; Sanders & Hardy, 2012), some students compare their work with a student night out (Simpson & Beer, 2022).

Two studies indicate that students who work as escorts place much value in the social aspects of the job (Sinacore & Rezazadeh; van der Wagen et al., 2010). The students perceive their work as skilled labour that requires empathy, knowledge of human behaviour and assertiveness. One additional benefit of their work is the fact that they can further develop their communication skills in their work. However, in contrast to this, a student in Sagar et al.'s study (2015a) looked at her occupation as requiring very few skills. She said that, "It's money for having no skill whatsoever" (p. 19). Similarly, the respondents in Sander and Hardy's (2015) study on students who work as lap dancers then saw their work as very easy. The difference may be explained by the different sectors in which the students work. It is indeed likely that skills such as empathy and understanding human behaviour play a lesser role in lap dancing than in the escort sector.

Their interaction with clients is also a source of enjoyment for some student sex workers. Some students report that they enjoy fulfilling customers' needs (Janssen & Veninga, 2016). They feel rewarded when clients give them the feeling that they need them (Sinacore & Rezazadeh, 2014; Sagar et al., 2015a). A student sex worker explains how addictive this is for her, confessing that "As sleazy as it is, I like it when guys come in and leave happy. I feel like I've actually helped them in a way" (Sagar et al., 2015a, p. 19). Several student sex workers also appreciated the positive attention they get from their clients (Janssen & Veninga, 2016; van der Wagen et al., 2010; Binch, 2013).

In the upmarket sections of the escort industry, student sex workers attach significant value to working with wealthy and highly educated customers (van der Wagen et al., 2010; Clouet, 2008). The idea that men are prepared to pay large sums of money for them then adds to their confidence (Clouet, 2008, van der Wagen et al., 2010). However, several sex workers who do not work in the most exclusive and expensive parts of the sector also experienced increased self-esteem (Sagar et al., 2015a; Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Westerik, 2009; Binch, 2013). One student who receives clients in

her apartments explains: “I think it’s made me like myself more you know… I’m proud of who I am… I like my body” (Binch, 2013, p. 38). The student sex worker learned to appreciate her physical appearance because of her job.

Whilst some student sex workers benefit from a luxury lifestyle (van der Wagen et al., 2010; Hardy & Sanders, 2015) or the fact that they do not accumulate debt (Sagar et al., 2015a; Hardy & Sanders, 2015), for others the income from sex work is the only way to have access to higher education and to achieve social mobility (Clouet, 2008; Lantz, 2005). Lantz (2005) interviewed national and international student sex workers in Melbourne who pursued a higher education for a better life. As explained, tuition fees are high in Australia which is even more so for international students. While the goal of the student sex workers was to work towards a future career, they already experienced upwards mobility as a student. The very fact that they had access to higher education gave them a distinct position within their families. One student sex worker explained that “It’s a big deal for my family – BIG - no one’s ever done it before” (Lantz, 2005, p. 394). The downside of their achievement is the gap it creates between their families and themselves that is caused by their different lives. Besides this, as a first-generation student they were unable to rely on their families’ help with their studies (Lantz, 2005).

The French student sex workers that Clouet interviewed (2008) had similar experiences. While the purpose of their education was to work towards a career after graduating, they experienced social mobility during their studies as well. Besides the status derived from their increased purchasing power because of their income from sex work, they benefitted from the cultural capital of their clients who taught them the required codes to get along with their new peers at university. One additional asset was the fact that clients supported them intellectually, something their lower educated parents were unable to do.

Whilst sex work can be an attractive part-time job for many students, there are also students who indicate that they did not enter the sex industry by choice. In Amoah and Cowling’s (2016) and Sagar et al.’s (2015a) quantitative studies in the UK, a not insignificant group of about 14% of student sex workers revealed that they felt forced to do sex work. Sagar et al.’s survey showed that this group experienced a range of negative feelings in relation to their work: “a negative effect on self-esteem and sexual exploitation, followed by lack of employment rights and fear of violence” (2016, p. 15). Neither Amoah and Cowling’s (2016) study, nor Sagar et al.'s (2015a) survey disclosed whether these student sex workers experienced economic pressure which they labelled as 'force', or pressure from a third party that may fall under the label of human trafficking in the sex industry.

The Student Sex Work Project (Sagar et al., 2015a) translated testimonies of student sex workers into a script for the film *The Fog of Sex* (Morris, 2015). One of these scripts tells the story of a student sex worker who is coerced by her boyfriend to attend a casting for the porn industry. Besides this film fragment, none of the qualitative studies on student sex work discussed in this chapter refer to student sex workers who experience force. Therefore, further insight is lacking into what students

mean when they say that they work in the industry against their will, how these situations may occur and what kind of pressure may take place.

2.4. The Main Concern of Student Sex Workers: Stigma

Most studies on student sex work point out that the stigma of sex work is one of the main challenges associated with the students' occupation (Amoah & Cowling, 2016, Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Jansen, 2018; Lantz, 2005; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sinacore & Rezazadeh, 2014; van der Wagen et al, 2010). Janssen (2018) indicates that the stigma of sex work was the most frequently mentioned reason for why students who were interested in entering the sex industry refrained from doing so (Janssen, 2018). The students who did enter the sex industry felt that they had to hide their job from family members, classmates, tutors and other university staff (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sinacore & Rezazadeh, 2014). The price they pay for this is high. Keeping their job secret causes a significant amount of stress (Sagar et al., 2015a). The students constantly fear the discovery of their occupation (Binch, 2013). Fear of disclosure isolates the students and limits their access to support (Lantz, 2005; Sinacore et al., 2014).

Janssen (2018) has further analysed the concept of stigma among female student sex workers. As this study also shows, sex work stigma is a gendered stigma. Women have to adhere to a double sexual standard (Pheterson, 1993), as promiscuous sexual behaviour is much more permissible for men than for women (Ibid.). Women who transgress the boundary are at risk of slut-shaming (Janssen, 2018). The fact that female student sex workers are sexually active outside the legitimate place of a romantic relationship makes them vulnerable to this.

Besides gender, class plays a role in the gendered stigma of sex work for women (Janssen, 2018). The ‘slut’ status of a promiscuous woman has a clear association with a lower-class type of femininity (Ibid.). Janssen (2018) interviewed a group of female middle and upper-class student sex workers who place much effort in trying to avoid this association. This association was one of the reasons why they desired to work in the higher strata of the sex industry where encounters are more exclusive and less focused on sex. Regarding her first steps in the sex industry, a student sex worker said:

> I felt more comfortable contacting the agency [a high-end escort agency] instead of the other agency [an agency in lower strata] where you have more a feeling as if you are a hooker. Going on a date, acting like a girlfriend is more my style… In the lower class it’s more like half an hour and if someone books you for half an hour what can you connect with someone in half an hour, nothing (Janssen, 2018, p. 15).

Here the ‘acting like a girlfriend’ is more in line with the ‘classy’ style of femininity that society expects the student to uphold compared to the half-hour date in which the sex worker solely has sex. For this reason, work in the higher strata is less stigmatised. The students of van der Wagen et al.’s (2010) study, who worked as high-end escorts, were also involved with identity work to avoid any

association with lower-class types of sex work. The fact that this did not always have the desired outcome was unsettling for some of them. One study participant said:

> To the outside world I am a real hooker. People have no idea that you cannot compare work as a high-class escort with work for an average escort agency (2010, p. 138).

It was upsetting for this student to realise that society does not understand that her identity as a high-end worker differs from the identity of someone who works for an escort agency in a lower stratum. Besides escort work in the lower echelons of the sex industry, participants in Van der Wagen et al.'s study (2010) refer to window sex work and pole-dancing as being lower ranked within the so-called *whorearchy* (Mellor & Benoit, 2023; Witt, 2020). This phenomenon refers to the different statuses that are attached to the different strata that exist in the sex industry and the hierarchy this creates between different sex workers. I further elaborate upon this theme in chapter 3.

Besides penalties for transgressing norms for femininity, female student sex workers also have to deal with the myth that all women involved in sex work are victims of coercion or poverty. To oppose this victim image, they emphasise that it is their own choice to work in this sector (Janssen, 2018). A student sex worker who works in the high-end escort industry said:

> When you have little to choose, it is a misery. However, in the high-class sector you are always allowed to say no. We do not need the money. For us, it is 'take it or leave it.' (Branderhorst, 2007, p. 5).

In another study, a student sex worker who works in pornography, stated:

> If I was ever in dire need, I could always ask my parents for money, you know, it's not like … I'm not in an exploitative marginalised position that so many of these women are in, you know what I mean? (Janssen, 2018, p. 94).

Both students use their favourable socioeconomic position to deal with the victim stereotype of sex workers. As proof of the voluntarily nature of their involvement in sex work, they use the alternative financial recourses they have at hand or can access. By doing so, they create a contrast between their own choice to do sex work and the presumed lack of choice of other female sex workers.

Sex workers are often stereotyped as having very few qualifications and skills (Sinacore & Lech, 2011). The student sex worker in the following quote manages this aspect of sex work stigma by emphasising how she differs from sex workers who are lower educated. She said: "Ya know I'm intelligent, and articulate, I'm not stupid like the other girls" (Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010, p. 8). The student reinforces the assumption that other sex workers are lowly educated, positioning herself as an exception to this rule. The temporary nature of the students' engagement with sex work also enables the students to present themselves as superior compared to a more stigmatised 'other' sex worker (Mavin & Grandy, 2013). By framing their work as a temporary transgression and contrasting this with the presumed long-term engagement with sex work of sex workers who are not students, they attempt to create a more positive identity for themselves (Grandy & Mavin, 2012; Haeger & Deil-

Amen, 2010; Janssen, 2018; Sinacore et al., 2014). Besides the short involvement in sex work, the reason why the students work in this sector also aids them in uplifting their status (Mavin & Grandy, 2013). Their work is "acceptable only if it was for a short while and for a good reason" (Grandy & Mavin, 2012, p. 102). Students use the fact that they work towards a degree as a justification for their involvement with sex work.

In several ways, the students' 'other' sex workers who are not students in their attempt to manage the multiple aspects of the stigma of sex work and to create a more positive identity for themselves. The students' views of sex workers who are not in higher education raise questions on how student sex workers came to look at their colleagues in this way, and to what extent this perspective is justified. While universities teach students to challenge assumptions and to be critical (Silius, 2005), several studies presented in this section (see for example Grandy & Mavin, 2012; Janssen, 2018; van der Wagen, 2010) show that a section of the student sex worker population holds stigmatising ideas of their co-workers. The way in which female student sex workers both struggle with the stigma of their own occupation while also stigmatising other sex workers shows how persistent the stigma of sex work is.

2.5. Safety

Besides stigma, the lack of safety is a major concern for many student sex workers (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Lantz, 2005; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sinacore et al., 2014). The UK students working in parlours increase their safety by creating a good relationship with the management and with their co-workers (Sagar et al., 2015a). Independent sex workers take safety measures such as carrying a weapon (Ibid.). Students also improve their safety by using technology to screen clients (Anderson & Petro, 2017).

These safety measures are not enough to make all of the students feel safe at work. In the study of Sagar et al. (2016), almost half of the students working in direct sex work fears violence. This group is twice as large as the student sex workers who provide indirect services. Incidences of real violence took place amongst 15.2% of the student sex workers (Ibid.).

As one would expect, the students who felt coerced into sex work feel less safe compared to students who have intrinsic reasons for working in the sex industry (Sagar et al., 2016). Besides Sagar et al. (2016), Amoah and Cowling (2016) provide insight into the level of safety student sex workers in the UK experience. A group of 17% sometimes feel safe at work, while a worrying 15% rarely feels safe whilst a group of 9% never feels safe. Contrary to expectations, the percentage of student sex workers who had experienced any form of harassment or assault were much higher than the number of students who reported to fear it (65% and 47%) (Amoah & Cowling, 2016). It is difficult to draw conclusions based on these findings, but it may be that the students were able to implement safety measures to avoid these incidents from happening again, or that they moved on to a type of sex

work in which they felt safer. It may also be that the student sex workers underestimate the likeliness of the recurrence of these crimes.

2.6. The Need for Help and Institutional Responses

A part of the student sex worker population needs a form of professional support. In Sagar et al.'s (2015a) study based in the UK, 21% of the student sex workers had ever used counselling. Amongst the students who have never worked in the sex industry, this percentage was more than a quarter lower at 15%. Amoah and Cowling (2016) further investigated the needs of student sex workers in the UK. Whilst there were significant differences between individual interviewees, the researchers identified health services, disability services and counselling as the types of support that the students used most frequently (respectively, 29%, 27% and 26% of the students used these services) (Ibid.).

Whilst 26% of the student sex workers access counselling, another group (22% of the students) would rather not do so for anything pertaining to sex work. Although the survey did not provide further insight into why the students are reluctant to contact these services, it is likely that this may be related to their fear of having to disclose their occupation. This fear is known to be a limiting factor in student sex workers' access to services (Anderson & Petro, 2017; Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010). Most student sex workers also feel that the support universities and student unions provide is far from enough (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Sagar et al., 2016), which may also be a concern of students who do not work as sex workers.

A large case study in Wales showed that academic staff often do not know how to respond to disclosures from student sex workers (Sagar et al., 2015b). When the study took place, there were no guidelines for support and referral available despite university staff believing that this would help them responding adequately. Policies on student sex work were also lacking (Ibid.). The research undertaken in England and Scotland led to the same conclusion (Cusick et al., 2009). In the absence of clear policies, Cusick et al. (2009) asked the institutions to send any documents that could be relevant regarding student participation in the sex industry.

Several institutions replied to this request by handing over policy documents with disciplinary measures. There are indeed cases known in which student sex workers were banned from their course because of their work in the sex industry (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Cusick et al., 2009; Sagar et al., 2015b; Simpson & Smith, 2020). Few respondents in Cusick et al.'s (2009) study shared documents related to health and wellbeing. Whilst student sex workers are at risk of discrimination, only three participants in this study handed over diversity statements or anti-discrimination policies (Ibid.).

In order to address the universities' inability to protect and support student sex workers, the University of Leicester and Durham student's union launched a training programme on student sex work for students and staff (Blake & Hart, 2022; Leicester University, n.d.; Trueman et al., 2022). Unfortunately, soon after implementation the University of Leicester had to withdraw part of its

programme because of accusations of promoting “a dangerous industry” (Trueman et al., 2022). Durham student’s union faced similar accusations (‘Durham University Defends Student Sex Work Training’, 2021, 13th November). Such incidents indicates that institutions of higher education in the UK attempting to support student sex work operate in a very challenging climate.

Chapter 3.
Theoretical Underpinnings and Concepts

Since the 1970's, feminist researchers have been at the forefront of research on sex work (Majic & Showden, 2019). However, this does not mean that they have reached a consensus regarding which standpoint to take vis-à-vis the subject of their study. Until now, different theoretical approaches span from taking sex work as a legitimate occupation based on the consent of the parties involved to regarding it as a form of exploitation irrespective of the conditions under which the work takes place (Dewey et al., 2019). In the first part of this chapter, I explain what feminist theory is and why a feminist lens is useful for research on sex work. Then, I provide insight into the main feminist understandings of sex work and point out why I have used both the sex workers' rights perspective and intersectionality to guide this study.

In the second part of this chapter, I move from the theoretical perspectives of the phenomenon of sex work in general to the theory and concepts that emerged during the iterative process between data collection and analysis (Bryant, 2019) as being essential to the understanding of the motivations, experiences and challenges of student sex workers in the Netherlands. I respectively discuss stigma, boundary work, the whorearchy, economic, social, cultural, linguistic, educational and erotic capital and the performance of emotional labour.

3.1. Feminist Theory

Gerassi (2015) describes feminist theory as "a broad transdisciplinary perspective that strives to understand roles, experiences and values of individuals on the basis of gender" (p. 2). Gerassi focuses on the experiences of individual people here. However, Dish and Hawkesworth (2015) rightfully add that the impact of these identities goes beyond the personal level, as they "structure public institutions as well as manifold dimensions of social and political life" (Dish & Hawkesworth, 2015, p. 2). Feminist theory consists of different branches that share a number of core assumptions invaluable for research on sex work.

Feminist theorists understand gender as a social construct around which society is organised (Rilley, 1999), which makes it possible to expose some of the power mechanisms that are at play within the sex industry (Sullivan, 1992). Besides gender, many feminist researchers also take other forms of oppression into consideration, such as class and race to name two (Dish & Hawkesworth, 2015), so enhancing understanding of the diversity of sex workers' experiences.

One central notion in feminist theory is the refusal of objective knowledge (Ibid.). Feminist scholars recognise that their values and beliefs regarding sex work cannot be separated from the studies they undertake (Koken, 2010; Sanders et al., 2011). Reflexivity is encouraged within feminist research as regards these and other assumptions, or indeed, any other aspect of their research (Sanders

et al., 2011). In addition to their theoretical contribution, many feminist scholars also use their research to promote social justice (Ibid.). However, as the next section will point out, ideas of what social justice entails differ significantly within the range of feminist standpoints.

3.1.1. The Feminist Sex Wars

During the so-called "sex wars" of the 1980s, a divide between two feminist camps emerged (Chapkis, 1997, p. 11). Sex work was one of the subjects that played a role in this discussion (Cooper, 1989). Radical feminists and Marxist feminists argued that entry into the sex industry is never voluntary (Gerassi, 2015). Differently to these viewpoints, 'sex positive' feminists recognised that sex work can be a choice (Wahab, 2002). Proponents of this group are liberal feminists, sex radicals and sex workers' rights groups, with the latter often combining their campaigning with an intersectional approach (Orchard, 2020). Whilst the different camps are known to have very specific standpoints, researchers on sex work who associate with one of the perspectives may in practice also divert from these standpoints and/or merch different perspectives (Sutherland, 2004).

The following sections provide further insight in the different viewpoints regarding sex work and highlight why my thesis is informed both by the sex workers' rights perspective and intersectionality.

3.2. Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism is based on the works of the 19th-century philosophers, Marx and Engels. Marx and Engels saw the industrial revolution taking place and witnessed the introduction of the capitalist system which led to great inequalities (Marx & Engels, 1979). Their goal was to evoke a revolution that would lead to an equal distribution of wealth. Marxist feminists connect a gender critical awareness with the Marxist insight into the working of capitalism (Andermahr et al., 2000; Whelehan, 1995). They argue that women of the proletariat are not solely subordinated by their social class, but also by gender. Marxist feminists are sceptical of Marx and Engels' belief that gender inequality would automatically dissolve with the disappearance of capitalism (Boucher, 2014).

Marx stated that "prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the labourer" (Marx, 1975, p. 350). Both sex workers and other labourers have no other choice than to work for survival under the capitalist system (Bell, 1994). Marxist feminists shared the Marxist assumption that women's entry into sex work is caused by poverty, capitalism and class inequality (Sloan & Wahab, 2000), but argue that this viewpoint does not provide insight into the whole picture (Holmstrom, 2014). Moving away from a single axis framework, they stress the impact of gender on women's poverty. The recognition of the existence of sex workers who are not cisgender females is limited amongst Marxist feminists.

A significant contribution of the Marxist feminist outlook on sex work is an acceptance of the viewpoint that sex work is a form of work. Only when sex work is work can labour law protect the rights of sex workers. In line with the viewpoint that sex work is work, Marxist feminists established the idea that the occupation does not differ much from other types of labour under capitalism. Marxist feminists recognise that most people have limited choices in the current economic system. This idea has received wide acceptance amongst sex work researchers and sex worker's rights groups.

However, there are also trade-offs associated with the Marxist feminist perspective. The understanding of sex workers (and other workers) as victims under capitalism and patriarchy does not give sex workers much agency. This passive perspective stands in sharp opposition to the political desires of many sex workers who demand acknowledgment of their ability to make choices. Aside from this conflict, the understanding of sex work (and other work) as exploitative does not enhance understanding of the experience of sex workers who see their involvement with the sex industry (and possibly also in other jobs) in a different light. Another concern is the limitation of their understanding of the operation of power in only two axes of oppression: gender and class (Bhandar, 2013; Ferguson, 2008; Gerasi, 2015; Sloan & Wahab, 2000; Whelehan, 1995). Possible axes of privilege are also missed and the primary focus at cisgender women is of little use to understand the realities of sex workers with other gender identities.

3.3. Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism evolved out of classical liberal philosophy (Baehr, 2004). Liberal philosophy came into existence in the beginning of the modern era (Hobhouse, 1900) and is still a dominant philosophy in Western society today (Freenden & Stears, 2013; Miriam, 2005). A number of traditional liberal values are still present in today's liberal philosophy, such as "liberty, individuality, progress, rationality, the general interest, sociability, and constraints on power" (Freenden, 1996, p. 176). Unfortunately, these values were not always seen as necessary for women at the time. For this reason, liberal feminists organised themselves to demand for change (Jensen, 1996). Their focus points were the right to vote, the right to own property and the right to access to education (Abbey, 2011).

Liberal feminists support classical liberal values such as freedom of choice, liberty and self-determination and therefore argue that people have the right to choose sex work. Liberal feminists oppose unnecessary state interference (Jaggar, 1980) and feel that the state should not impose its moral viewpoints on citizens. In line with these positions, they support the decriminalisation of sex work. Whilst liberal feminists recognise the agency of sex workers in relation to their choice to enter the sex industry, they recognise that this choice is made in a context of gender inequality. Factors such as the gender pay gap and the absence of childcare support may be the driving force behind such a decision (Zatz, 1997).

Most liberal feminists show little awareness of subordination of women according to class (Abbey, 2011) which brings them into opposition with Marxist feminists. Neither do liberal feminists consider other forms of oppression besides gender. Harris (1990) refers to this phenomenon as 'gender essentialism', "the notion that a unitary, 'essential' women's experience can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, and other realities of experience" (Harris, 1990, p. 585).

Liberal feminists also distinguish coerced sex work from voluntary sex work. Modern liberal feminists argue that sex work is voluntary as long as there are no signs of violence (Cruz, 2018, Green, 1989). Similar to Marxist feminists, liberal feminists do not pay attention to male and gender-diverse sex workers.

Nonetheless, the liberal viewpoint on sex work brings along a number of productive perspectives for research on student sex work. Liberal feminists distinguish sex work from trafficking and recognise that sex work can be a choice. In so doing, they acknowledge the agency of sex workers. Liberal feminists' rejection of specific legislation for the sex industry is also in agreement with the desire of most sex workers to decriminalise sex work (van der Meulen, 2013). However, two aspects make the liberal feminist viewpoint less suitable for research on sex work. Firstly, the ignorance of other identity markers besides gender; and secondly, their narrow focus on cisgender female sex workers.

3.4. Radical Feminism

Radical feminism emerged in the late 1960s in the United States and in Europe (Whelehan, 1995) and is still influential today (Oude Breuil, 2023; Scoular & Carline, 2014). Unlike liberal and Marxist feminism, radical feminism is not based on an existing philosophy developed by men, but on the views and experiences of women. Radical feminists provided insight into the collective oppression of women through consciousness raising (Sutherland, 2004). Positioned in small groups, women reflected upon their lives and by doing so gained insight in the impact of patriarchy on their lives. Important themes were sexuality, sexual violence and gender-based violence, while radical feminists played a major role in particular in putting these subjects of violence onto the agenda.

Radical feminism also has several shortcomings. Similar to liberal feminists, proponents of the viewpoint do not complicate their analysis of power with an intersectional lens. The central argument of radical feminism is that all women are part of an underprivileged class, irrespective of their socio-economic position, their ethnicity, sexual preferences and other factors (Andermahr et al., 2000; Sanders et al., 2009). Another significant drawback of radical feminism is their perspective on sex work.

Radical feminists see sex workers as victims of male violence. For these feminists, to protect the victims who are understood only to be of the female gender - as radical feminists ignore sex workers with other gender identities (NSWP-b, n.d.; Scoular, 2004) - the sex industry itself must

come to an end (Ibid.). Radical feminists aim to eliminate the sex industry by promoting the criminalisation of clients. Four central arguments can be identified as to why radical feminists want to eradicate the sex industry. Firstly, they claim that men pay for sex to degrade and control women (Jaggar, 1980); therefore, sex work, or 'prostitution' in their vocabulary, is "one of the most graphic examples of men's dominance over women" (Pateman, 1983, p. 561). Secondly, they argue that sex work is never a choice (Sanders et al., 2009) as, in their view, sex workers enter the industry because of (sexual) child abuse, drugs dependency and/or because they lack support (Giobe, 1994; Kallock, 2019). Under the assumption that women cannot consent to sex work, radical feminists do not view sex work as a form of labour (Farley et al., 2004; Jaggar, 1980; Sutherland, 2004). When sex workers claim that they choose for their occupation, radical feminists accuse them of having a false consciousness (Bindel, 2017).

Thirdly, radical feminists believe that sex work has a negative impact of gender equality by portraying women as objects who can be bought (Kallock, 2019; Sanders et al, 2009). Fourthly, they argue that the existence of the sex industry limits the sexual freedom of all women because those who choose to have multiple sexual partners are at risk of being associated with the occupation. Said otherwise, owing to the existence of this institution of the sex industry, women "must guard against 'slipping' into this category or being assigned to it" (Jaggar, 1980, p. 359) which keeps women in their place and reinforces male power (Jaggar, 1980).

However, it is for several reasons that the radical feminist viewpoint does not provide a suitable lens to better understand sex work. The central assumption that sex workers are *a priori* victims makes it difficult to grasp the diversity of experience of sex workers. Yet the victim perspective makes little sense, especially for relatively privileged sex workers such as students who are highly educated and who often have alternative ways to generate income.

The idea that sex work is a form of sexual slavery *per se*, instead of a form of labour taking place under varying conditions that range from good to exploitative, makes it impossible to gain insight into these conditions and to address them. Besides this problem, the reality is that only when sex work is official taken to be a form of work will sex workers enjoy the protection of labour law. Another problematic aspect of the framing of sex work as sexual slavery is that this perspective makes it difficult to identify real occurrences of sexual violence within the sex industry.

Radical feminists can only hold their victim approach by silencing the voices of sex workers who do not look at themselves as such (Sanders et al., 2009). This perspective is the very opposite of what I have aimed to achieve in this study. Similar to Marxist and liberal feminists, radical feminists obscure the fact that sex workers are not solely cisgender females.

I also challenge the idea that the existence of the sex industry enforces gender inequality by transmitting the message that women can be bought as sexual objects at any time by men who desire to do so. While displaying one's self as an object of desire is an undeniable part of the job, this objectification takes place within clearly defined boundaries. As sex worker Sundahl explains:

> To any enlightened observer, our very existence provides a distinction and a choice as to when a woman should be treated like a sex object and when she should not be. (1988, p. 176)

Sex workers decide for themselves when they are available and to who. However, there can be agreement with the radical feminist concern that any woman is at risk of falling prey to the category of "the prostitute". In most cultures, women and girls face punishment when they "transgress the rules for femininity" (Webster, 1981, p. 50). According to Pheterson, "any woman can be called a whore at any time for somehow stepping over the line" (Pheterson paraphrased in Bell, 1994, p. 113). Pheterson refers here to the transgression of the boundaries of female chastity.

However, to blame sex workers for the existence of this double sexual standard misses its logic. As early as the beginning of historical time, people learned how to separate 'good' (chaste) women from 'bad' (unchaste) women and this gender ideology is still present in the modern world (Assante, 2007; French, 2002; Lerner, 1986; Stephenson, 1988). The only solution is the destigmatisation of the consensual sexual behaviour of women, whether it takes place in exchange for money or not.

3.5. Sex Radical Feminism

Sex radical feminism emerged during the sex wars mentioned earlier (Basiliere 2009; Chapkis, 1997). The movement is a coalition of academics, sex workers, artists and queer theorists (Peluso, 2016; Sutherland, 2004). The goal of sex radical feminism is the liberation of sexual minorities such as LGBTQI+ people, BDSM-practitioners, polyamorous people, sex workers and other groups who divert from the heteronormative monogamous pattern (Peluso, 2016; Rubin, 1984). Sex radical feminists argue that anyone should be able to choose any sexual practice freely that is based on consent.

Sex radical feminists primarily see sex workers as sexual minorities who face discrimination because of their non-mainstream sexual behaviour. Rather than assigning them victim status, they encourage sex workers to use their oppression to challenge existing hierarchies from within. Sex radical feminists see sex workers as "a symbol of women's sexual autonomy and, as such, as a potential threat to patriarchal control over women's sexuality" (Chapkis, 1997, p. 30). For this reason, the figure of the sex worker plays an important role in sex radical feminism.

Whilst sex radical feminists are mostly interested in sex workers' potential for subversion, they do recognise that sex work is work. Convinced with the idea that consensual sexual acts should not be controlled by state regulation, they argue that sex work should not be criminalised (Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Sex radical feminists were the first feminist group to be concerned with the lived experiences of sex workers and argued that anyone who speaks on their behalf should listen to their voices (Peluso, 2016; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). In opposition to the radical feminists who refuse to

cooperate with sex workers who reject the victim narrative, sex radical feminists welcome all sex workers in their movement, irrespective of their experience.

Sex radical feminists have contributed to research on sex work by making explicit how heteronormativity impacts upon sex workers' lives. Their fight for acceptance of sexual diversity may also improve the position of sex workers. However, different than the other sexual minorities for whom sex radical feminists advocate, sex workers undertake their non-heteronormative behaviour in a labour context. Besides approval of their sexual practices, they also need labour rights. Nonetheless, increased acceptance of sexual diversity can function as a first step in achieving better working conditions as this may diminish sex work stigma. The second step would be to work towards the acceptance of sex work as a legitimate form of labour. Sex radical feminists sympathise with this fight, but they do not actively advocate for it.

In line with the purpose of this study, sex radical feminists seek to include the voices of sex workers in the debate. However, their preoccupation with the subversive role of the sex worker leaves questionable the extent to which they fully embrace the diversity that exists among sex workers. It is thinkable that many sex workers have to prioritise financial needs over activism. What's more, sex radical feminists mainly represent cisgender female sex workers who support a male clientele (Aimee et al., 2015). Taking into account their awareness of the variety of gender and sexual identities that exist, they would do well to open up to sex workers who do not self-identify as cisgender female.

3.6. The Sex Workers' Rights Perspective

The sex workers' rights perspective emerged in the 1970s in a response to the criminalisation and oppression of sex workers in the western world (Bell, 1994). The central assumption of the sex workers' rights perspective is that sex work is a legitimate form of work. With this standpoint, activists campaigning for sex workers' rights move away from representations of sex workers as criminals, as victims or as spreaders of disease (NSWP, 2017). Hence, the focus point of sex workers' rights activists is the decriminalisation of sex work (McKay, 1999). In a decriminalised context, sex workers can work without fear of repercussions, enjoy labour rights and have access to justice (NSWP-c, no date). The decriminalisation of sex work also supports destigmatisation.

The testimonies of sex workers laid at the heart of sex workers' rights activism and academic work (Kotiswaran, 2011; Perkins, 1991; Sanders et al., 2009). The movement showed the world that sex workers are acting subjects with agency. Advocates of sex workers' rights show awareness of the context in which people choose for sex work. They recognise that this choice should not be seen in isolation of gender inequality, poverty, racism and other forms of exclusion (Alexander, 1988; Chapkis, 1997; Sanders et al., 2011). Besides this, the defenders of sex workers' rights recognise that sex work is not necessarily harmless. Nonetheless, a choice made within existing limitations should not be equated with coercion. Sex workers' rights activists hence draw a line between voluntarily sex work and forced labour (Bell, 1994; Cavallier, 2011).

3.6.1. Why I Adopted a Sex Workers' Rights Lens

I concur with the central assumption of the sex workers' rights perspective that sex work is a legitimate form of work that should be decriminalised. Only when sex work officially qualifies as work, and when no legal barriers exist that impede the execution of the job, can sex workers enjoy their labour rights. In undertaking research through a sex workers' rights perspective, centring then upon the views, experiences and needs of sex workers will provide a solution to a number of shortfalls in sex work research. Such shortfalls include the formulation of research questions that sex workers experience as stigmatising and/or of little importance for their communities (van der Meulen, 2012), or the interpretation of data that is not in line with their realities (Wahab, 2003).

Unlike radical feminist researchers who purposely collect data among precarious groups such as street workers, drugs users, homeless sex workers and sex workers in prison to prove a particular point (Koken, 2010; Majic & Snowden, 2019; Sanders et al., 2011; van der Meulen, 2012), research undertaken from a sex workers' rights perspective provides space for a diversity of study populations with varied experiences in sex work. Defenders of sex workers' rights keep "the empirical door resolutely open" (Kotiswaran, 2011, p. 48) where the perspective "moves away from monolithic portrayals (e.g. workers as desperate, deviant, victimised, and exploited) by documenting and accounting for the rich variation in the world of commercial sex" (Weitzer, 2009, p. 714). Weitzer refers to this as the "polymorphous paradigm" (Ibid.).

Sex workers' rights academics and activists of the second feminist wave have mainly focused on cisgender female sex workers (Panichelli et al., 2015). In addition to this focus, the absence of non-white sex workers within the movement has been an ongoing concern (Janssen, 2007; Kempadoo, 1998; Panichelli et al., 2015). Fortunately, the proponents of sex workers' rights in the 21st century are much more aware of the importance of inclusivity (Aimee et al., 2015; ICRSE, 2016; Mgbako, 2020), which is also visible among sex workers' rights scholars who are now more likely to adopt an intersectional approach (Orchard, 2020). As I explain in the next section, I am following in their footsteps by combining the sex workers' rights perspective with intersectionality.

3.7. Intersectional Theory

Intersectionality was developed in the late 20th century by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Carbado et al., 2013). Departing from a court case in which the judges were unable to deal with overlapping forms of discrimination, the legal scholar realised that society lacked a framework for dealing with multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. As a tool to address this problem, she introduced the concept of intersectionality which acknowledges that subordinated identities cannot be separated because they impact people's lives simultaneously and in interaction with one another. The inquiries that ran alongside what Crenshaw referred to as a single axis framework risk were thus limited to "the experiences of otherwise privileged members of the group" (Crenshaw, 1998, p. 140).

Intersectionality has gained vast popularity in academia since the 1980s and it soon became part of the feminist canon (Carastathis, 2016; Davis, 2008). In addition to Crenshaw's primary focus at gender and race, feminist and other academics have broadened intersectionality to include class discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination against people with disabilities (ableism), amongst others (Kallock, 2019; O'Neil & Campbell, 2010). As mentioned, many sex work researchers who have undertaken their studies through the lens of sex workers' rights have embraced intersectionality. I have hence followed their example.

Different to the radical, liberal and sex radical feminists who adopt a single axes approach (around respectively gender and heteronormativity) and Marxist feminists who use a double axes approach (around gender and class), I recognise that a multitude of social identities impact upon the lives of sex workers. In addition to the more generally applied axes of meaning such as gender, class and race, I also remain open to additional identity categories and structures pointed out by sex work scholars. Examples of the above are, amongst others, sex work stigma, institutional oppression such as the criminalisation of sex work, welfare reform and social inequality that may impact sex workers' entry and/or exit, personals skills such as language proficiency, and personal characteristics such as resilience (Bromfield et al., 2021; Kallock, 2019; O'Neill & Campbell, 2010). Awareness of these identities and structures and their interaction provides a better and more nuanced insight into the complexities of sex workers' lives.

What might further illuminate the specific position of students who work in the sex industry is the ability of newer adaptations of intersectional theory to encompass axes of privilege such as whiteness and class privilege (Banks et al., 2013; Levine-Rasky, 2011).

In the first part of chapter 3, I discussed the main feminist understandings of sex work and contextualised this study within the debate. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the theory and concepts that I identified during the fieldwork and data analysis as being relevant for the understanding of the motivations, experiences and challenges of student sex workers in the Netherlands. I start with stigma, the most prominent challenge that (student) sex workers face. I then proceed to discuss boundary work, the whorearchy, Bourdieu's different forms of capital and the performance of emotional labour.

3.8. Stigma

In this thesis, I have used the concept of stigma outlined by Goffman (1963) in his landmark publication *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Goffmann understands stigma as a social attribute belonging to a person that deeply discredits them. Much like a disability or handicap, this attribute can be visible. However it can also be invisible, unless the stigmatised person exposes it, such as a mental health condition, an addiction or, as in this study, a stigmatised occupation. Essential to Goffman's understanding of stigma is that the attribute in itself is not the cause of the stigma, nor is the stigmatised person. Instead, the process of stigmatisation emerges in the relationship between the

attribute while the audience consisting of the 'normals'; the people who are not stigmatised. Goffman uses quotation marks here because, in another context, the 'normals' can also fall victim to stigmatisation. Goffman (1963) does not acknowledge the resistance against stigma nor its possible decrease or elimination over time (Weitzer, 2018). Nevertheless, his insight that, instead of being a characteristic of the stigmatised person, stigma is created in the relationship between actors does imply the possibility for change.

Nonetheless, to date sex work stigma is omniprevalent in the world. The stigma of sex work is one of the largest concerns for sex workers (Weitzer, 2018) which is no less the case for student sex workers (Janssen, 2018, J. Jones, 2019; Simpson & Smith, 2020; Sagar et al., 2015a.; van der Wagen et al., 2010). Sex work stigma does not only have an impact on sex workers, clients and intermediaries. Anyone who associates with a person marked by stigma can experience what Goffman refers to as *courtesy stigma* (1963). Family and partners, service providers for sex workers (Benoit et al., 2018b) and sex work researchers (Berger & Guidroz, 2014) also experience levels of stigma.

The impact of sex work stigma is severe. The social exclusion of sex workers leads to mental health problems, low self-esteem, difficult intimate relationships, self-stigma and the acceptance of unjust treatment (Benoit et al., 2018; Sanders, 2005b). Stigma can also create barriers in sex workers' access to housing, healthcare and other public services (Sawicki et al., 2019; van Stempvoort, 2023). In many places of the world, the stigma of sex work also leads to the development of counterproductive or harmful legislation (Benoit et al., 2018; Daniel et al., 2023).

The extent to which sex workers experience stigma depends on a variety of factors. In chapter 2, I made reference to the gendered nature of sex work stigma. As a consequence of the double sexual standard, women are sanctioned for sexual behaviour outside a heteronormative relationship and for having sex with multiple sexual partners, whilst promiscuous behaviour is encouraged among men (Farvid, 2021; Pheterson, 1993). Yet, male sex workers who provide services for other men may face stigma based on the fact that they have sex with other men (Comte, 2014; Minichiello et al., 2013; van den Dries et al., 2022), while men who work in the heterosexual market may face exclusion because they transgress ideas around masculinity by subjecting themselves to the desires of females (Comte, 2014).

Besides gender and sexuality, other factors that impact upon the severity of sex work stigma are race, age, socioeconomic status, health, body weight and the stratum of the sex industry in which a sex worker works (Benoit et al., 2015; Daniel et al., 2023; Easterbrook-Smith, 2022b; Koken, 2011; Pheterson, 1993; Sawicki et al., 2019; Tomko et al., 2021). Many sex workers face multiple stigmas simultaneously (Benoit et al., 2015; Sawicki, 2019). Some sex workers can lessen the harms of sex work stigma by putting their identities with a more positive meaning in society on the forefront (Grandy & Mavin, 2012). Being a student in higher education is an example of this (Grandy & Mavin, 2012; Simpson & Smith, 2020; Trautner & Collett, 2010). Considering the above, the experiences of

stigma vary significantly among different sex workers (Benoit et al., 2018), which may also be said about the way sex workers deal individually with stigma (Ibid.).

Research on sex work has pointed out a number of different ways through which sex workers deal with sex work stigma. Many sex workers conceal their work to pass as 'normal' (Goffman, 1963). They live a so-called 'double life' and hide their work to intimate others (Jansson et al., 2023). To be able to do so, they make up a cover story (Benoit et al., 2018; Hanks, 2019). The non-disclosure of their work has severe psychological consequences (Benoit et al., 2018b). This impacts adversely on intimate personal relationships (Trautner & Collett, 2010). It can lead to isolation and makes it more difficult to access support (Benoit et al., 2005). The risk of being discovered causes stress and may cause sex workers to become hyper vigilant (Benoit et al., 2018; Koken, 2011; Tomura, 2009; Trautner & Collett, 2010). Once sex workers are outed, they often have to deal with feelings of guilt (Weitzer, 2000).

Some sex workers find a middle way and only disclose parts of their involvement with sex work (Benoit et al., 2018; Daniel et al., 2023; Sanders, 2005b; Weitzer, 2018). For example, they pretend that they did sex work in the past whilst still working in the sex industry, or they only disclose less stigmatised aspects of their work. For example, they pretend that they dance topless whilst in reality they dance fully nude. Another way sex workers can deal with potentially negative attitudes is to seek intimate relationships with sympathetic others (Goffman, 1963; Koken, 2011; Tomura, 2009). A social network that consists of people who have a greater understanding of the occupation enables sex workers to be open about their work without the risk of being stigmatised (Tomura, 2009).

Research also highlights that sex workers manage stigma by taking on a working role (Tomko et al., 2021; Weitzer, 2009). By means of using a different name, by dressing differently and by adopting a worker persona, sex workers feel less stigmatised outside their working hours. Later in this chapter, I point out that this approach to their profession also helps them in separating their work from their private life.

Sex workers can also mitigate stigma by redefining their occupation. These "rationalisation narratives" (Sanders, 2005b, p. 153) may both enhance their self-esteem (Tomura, 2009) and contribute to a better outcome of the disclosure of their occupation to others. Sex workers can make their work appear more legitimate by stressing its values and benefits, such as the educational or the therapeutic aspect of their job (Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Sanders, 2005b, Tomura, 2009; Trautner & Collette, 2010; Weitzer, 2009). Another possibility is to point out the skills that are required for the occupation (Gravin & Mandy, 2012; Tomura, 2009). Moreover, an increasing number of sex workers contribute to the redefinition of sex work at a larger scale (Benoit et al., 2018b; van der Meulen et al., 2013). They reframe sex work as a legitimate form of labour via collective activism for sex workers' rights.

In opposition to sex workers' rights groups who stimulate solidarity amongst different sex workers, it is not uncommon to see sex workers manage the stigma of sex work at the expense of

other sex workers. They draw symbolic boundaries (Lamont et al, 2015) between themselves and their colleagues by underlining aspects of their identity that give them a superior status. This type of boundary work is not only a phenomenon that exists among sex workers. Other stigmatised individuals also create hierarchies between themselves and others who are impacted by the same stigma (Goffman, 1964). Stigmatised people further stigmatise others based on aspects such as the greater visibility of the stigma, the extent to which the stigma disturbs others, or the extent to which they confirm stereotypes (Ibid.). What may explain this behaviour is that people who live with stigma are raised within the same society as 'the normals' and therefore have the same norms and values (Ibid.).

In chapter 2, I pointed out a number of different ways through which the student sex workers featured in existing research on student sex work attempt to create a more favourable identity for themselves at the expense of other sex workers. I discussed how some student sex workers seek access to jobs that resemble heteronormative courtship to move away from a lower-class type of femininity that one finds in other types of sex work. Other student sex workers give themselves a superior status by contrasting their choice to do sex work with the presumed lack of choice of sex workers with a lower socio-economic background.

Several of the student sex workers have used their student identity to undertake boundary work. One student used her access to higher education to point out how she differs from strippers, whom she sees as being less intelligent. Several student sex workers framed their work as a temporary transgression of societal norms and, as a consequence, further stigmatise sex workers who work in the sex industry for a longer period of time. Student sex workers also legitimise their work by stressing the fact that they have to cover the costs of higher education and by so doing, delegitimize the motivations of other sex workers who do not have such costs to cover.

Research into the general population of sex workers also describes sex workers undertaking boundary work to make their work appear more legitimate. Poverty-stricken sex workers present themselves as being more ethical compared to sex workers who chose to do sex work in absence of dire financial needs (Andrijasevic, 2004; Montgomery, 2015). A similar narrative can be found amongst mothers who state that sex work is more acceptable when someone works to be able to feed children (Rivers-Moore, 2010).

Sex workers may also draw boundaries between themselves and other sex workers based on the type of services they are willing to offer. Some sex workers who only offer a limited number of sexual acts position themselves as superior in relation to sex workers who offer a wider range of services and/or who accept greater health risks (Tomura, 2009). Meanwhile, as I will explore below, (student) sex workers also undertake boundary work by using their positionality within the whorearchy (Mellor & Benoit, 2023; Witt 2020).

3.9. The Whorearchy

The sex industry is a very hierarchical sector (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007; Hoang, 2010; Kong, 2006; Stardust, 2015; van Wijk et al., 2017; van der Meulen, et al., 2013; Wahab, 2004). The status of the different strata within the sex industry vary significantly and, as a consequence, the workers within these strata face different levels of stigma (Davina, 2017; Grandy & Mavin, 2012; Morrison & Whitehead, 2007; Sawicki et al, 2019; Smith, 2018). Since the 1980s, academics and activists for sex workers' rights have referred to the stratification of the sex industry as the whorearchy (Daniel et al., 2023; Mellor & Benoit, 2023; Witt 2020). Sex workers internalise their status within the whorearchy to the extent that it impacts their self-esteem, their perspective of the value of their work and their ability to set boundaries (Burnes & Dawson, 2023; van Mens, 1992).

A number of factors impact the positioning of the different types of sex work within the whorearchy. The identities and the physical characteristics of the sex workers within a particular sector play an important role. Sex workers who find themselves in a relatively privileged position in terms socioeconomic background, nationality and educational background, and who possess Western beauty norms such as being white, slim and being of a relatively young age are more likely to be able to access the highest strata of the sex industry (Bowen, 2021; Brooks, 2010; Hope Ditmore, 2010; van der Meulen et al., 2013). Working in these sectors gives sex workers an elevated status. In a two-way relationship of causation, the third parties for whom these students work derive status from their ability to employ a relatively privileged group of workers (Momerency, 2011; Trautner & Collett, 2010). By employing these workers, they attract middle- and upper-class clients with higher purchasing power. In turn, these clients derive status from being able to afford the services of sex workers with a higher status. At the same time, they reconfirm the status of these workers by enabling them to serve a wealthy clientele (Oselin & Barber, 2019).

The nature of the services on offer also plays an important role within the whorearchy. Owing to the limited physical contact between sex workers and their clients in indirect sex work, or the absence of it, these forms of sex work have a higher status in the whorearchy (Dewey & Zheng, 2013; Fuentes, 2023; Gabryszewska, 2014; Herrmann, 2022; Sawicki et al, 2019; Toubiana & Ruebottom, 2022; Weitzer, 2018). Webcam models are known for frowning upon adult film performers and sex workers involved with direct sex work (Mathews, 2017). Herrmann (2022) goes so far as to state that the social distancing of strippers from full-service workers is the "prime example of the whorearchy" (p. 45).

Direct forms of sex work in which physical contact does take place are further stratified based on the number of clients a sex worker sees and the duration of the encounters. Owing to the greater similarity to heteronormative dating, so called *low volume work*, in which sex workers accept only a small number of clients with whom they often spend several hours, has a high status in the whorearchy (Easterbrook-Smith, 2018, 2022a, 2022b). These long encounters provide room for other activities besides sex. To entertain clients for a longer period of time, sex workers rely to a greater

extent upon communicative and other skills. The fact that these encounters are not solely focused on sex and that particular skills are required for working in low-volume work enhances the status of this type of sex work (Bettio et al., 2017).

The so-called *high-volume* types of sex work in which sex workers provide services to many clients and stay with these clients for a much shorter time-frame have a much lower status (Easterbrook-Smith, 2018, 2022a, 2022b). In addition to the number of clients a sex worker sees, the corresponding fees also impact the status of the occupation and its workers (Bettio et al., 2017; Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; Hope Ditmore, 2020; Kong, 2006). Kong (2006) sees these two aspects as the main causes of stratification:

> 'Many' (sex with more than one partner) and 'money' (sex for money) seem to be the two defining features of a 'whore'. (Kong, 2006, p. 422)

The location where the work takes place and its visibility also greatly impact the status of the sector. The very visible high volume-oriented sex work on the street has a low status (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; Sanders, 2004). Window sex work is equally visible (Aalbers & Sabat, 2012; van Wijk et al., 2010) and the workers in this sector have to provide services to a high number of clients to cover the costs of their workplace (van Wijk et al., 2010). This sector is positioned below the middle market (Borg, 2017). The overt sexuality in these two sectors are perceived as a threat to public morality because they disrupt heteronormative ideas of monogamy (Peršak & Vermeulen, 2014). Other concerns with publicly noticeable forms of sex work are citizens' safety concerns, declining consumer spending and a drop in property prices (Giambona & Rubas, 2017; Krüsi et al., 2016; Peršak & Vermeulen, 2014). The moral panic around human trafficking and the idea that it is no longer morally acceptable to have (drug-using) sex workers working on the street (Bovenkerk, 2011; Reitzeman, 2019; Ribbens, 2005; Siegel, 2015) has further deteriorated the status of window and street work.

The relatively invisible indoor types of sex work are positioned higher in the whorearchy, especially when they have access to capital to be able to upscale their business to be able to cater to a wealthy clientele (Bernstein, 2007; Brents & Hausbeck, 2007, 2010).

The conditions under which sex workers work in a particular sector also impact the status of the sector. Sex workers with a certain level of privilege work under better conditions and experience a higher level of safety (Brooks, 2020; J. Jones, 2019). As Buck (n.d.) argues, the "stigmatizing of sex work does not lie exclusively in the sex work itself, but in the privileges (or lack of) inherent in one's position as a certain type of sex worker" (p. 16). Hence, the superior labour conditions of some sex workers clearly impact upon the status of these workers (Bettio et al., 2017; Buck, n.d.; Fuentes, 2023; Ham, 2018).

3.9.1. Inclusion Criteria in a Stratified Industry

In consideration of factors such as the higher status of the work, superior working conditions and higher earnings, jobs within the higher strata of the sex industry are in great demand (Janssen, 2018; van der Wagen, 2010). However, access to these jobs is unequally allocated. As mentioned, the question of in which stratum sex workers may work is, to a great extent, a question of appearance and identity. Western aesthetic demands such as being white and slim, in combination with factors such as age, gender, sexuality and ability enable some sex workers to work for third parties in the middle and upper parts of the stratified sex industry, imposing restrictions on others (Bowen, 2021; Brooks, 2010; Hope Ditmore, 2010; Nelson et al., 2020; Rigg, 2020; van der Meulen et al., 2013).

Some differences exist between male and female sex workers. For example, whilst body shape is of great importance for both men and women, for male sex workers this is not only related to body weight but also to muscularity (Logan, 2010). Self-employed sex workers are not dependent upon third parties, but the mentioned criteria are often reflected in the fees they charge (Logan, 2010; Nelson et al., 2020).

Besides the afore-mentioned characteristics, the social status of sex workers in society as a whole also impacts greatly upon the kind of jobs they can access (Abel, 2023; Bernstein, 2007; Hoang, 2011; Tsang, 2017). To conceptualise social status, I draw upon Bourdieu's theories of capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1996). According to Bourdieu, three forms of capital and their interplay position people within the social stratification structure. These are economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Economic capital refers to monetary wealth as well as to property rights (Bourdieu, 1979/1996). Social capital refers to group membership (Ibid.), where knowing the right people then paves the way for accumulating economic capital (Ibid.). Finally, cultural capital refers to the taste, consumption pattern, skills and knowledge of the leading social and economic classes (Huang, 2019).

Bourdieu further defines cultural capital as embodied, objectified and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986). Embodied cultural capital is related to style, mannerism and language use (Huang, 2019). In his later writings, Bourdieu also referred to the above as linguistic capital (1991), where capital refers to the ability to speak in a similar fashion as high-status people in terms of accent, intonation and vocabulary, amongst other elements (Bourdieu, 1991). Objectified cultural capital is related to physical belongings such as pictures, books and music instruments (Bourdieu, 1986). Under the category of symbolic cultural capital, Bourdieu understands qualifications and expertise (Bourdieu, 1979/1996). In specific reference to academic achievements, Bourdieu also used the concept of academic capital (1979/1996) or educational capital (1980). In this thesis I refer to educational capital rather than academic capital because of the association of the latter concept with the Dutch adjective 'academisch', which is not used to refer to universities of applied sciences.

The elements that are most significant for the positioning of sex workers within the whorearchy are economic capital, cultural capital, linguistic capital and educational capital (Abel, 2023; Hoang, 2011; Tsang, 2017). Amongst others, these forms of capital are visible in sex workers'

ability to afford expensive clothes and their knowledge of how to dress in the style of the leading classes, their eloquent speech, their educational level, their mannerism and their knowledge of how to behave in high-status venues, such as expensive hotels and restaurants (Hoang, 2011; Tsang, 2017). Hence, sex workers' possession of the afore-mentioned forms of capital enables them to cater to a wealthy clientele in the higher strata of the sex industry.

As stated earlier, with the concept of linguistic capital, Bourdieu refers to a particular way of speaking in one's native language. In the context of this thesis, I also use the concept to refer to the ability to speak Dutch. Bourdieu's (1979/1996) theory of social capital inspired scholars to develop other forms of human capital (Neveu, 2018). For example, Hakim has conceptualised the aforementioned aesthetic requirements for sex workers as *erotic capital* (Hakim, 2010). Alongside beauty as its most prominent feature, erotic capital entails sexual attractiveness, liveliness, style of dress and sexual competence, amongst others (Ibid.). Following on from Hakim, I refer to the afore-mentioned physical demands of the higher strata of the sex industry as erotic capital.

3.10. Emotional Labour

In the previous sections, I pointed out that (student) sex workers who enjoy intersectional privilege because of a combination of dominant identities, such as being white and cisgender and the possession of erotic and other forms of capital, are more likely to be able to find employment within the middle and the higher strata of the sex industry. In the middle market, and even more so in the highest segment of the sex industry, where encounters with clients often last longer than in the lower strata, communication with clients often absorbs significantly more time than the performance of sexual acts (Cunningham & Kendall, 2017; Weitzer, 2023). Consequently, these jobs place a great demand upon the workers' performance of *emotional labour* (Hochschild, 1983/2003).

In *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Hochschild (1983/2003) defines the concept of emotional labour as the adjustment of workers' private feelings to meet the expectations of clients, customers or patients. Different to 'emotion work', the management of emotions in the private sphere, emotional labour takes place within a labour context (Hochschild, 1979). The phenomenon is most present among service industry workers. To perform emotional labour, workers use the technique of *deep acting* or *surface acting* (Hochschild, 1983/2003). Deep acting refers to the manipulation of one's own feelings to be able to develop genuine emotions. In her research on strip clubs, Wood (2000) exemplifies how deep acting can enhance a dancer's profit. One of her study participants explains:

> I just have to tell myself that it doesn't matter, that I'm just going to work, that it doesn't matter if I have a good night or a bad night. Because if I put that pressure on myself, then I'm tense, and that shows. (Wood, 2000, p. 24)

The visibility of the stress caused by the financial insecurity of her job may impact the dancer's earning potential adversely. For this reason, she tried to change her mood before going to work. Alternatively, workers can also rely upon feigning suitable emotions. Through surface acting, the dancer can pretend not to experience any stress, even though that is not reflecting her real emotions.

Whilst the pleasant behaviour of service industry personnel is often appreciated by the public, emotional labour can negatively impact the well-being of workers (Hochschild, 1983/2003). This is even more the case when workers rely heavily on surface acting without genuinely evoking positive feelings towards their customers. These workers may feel estranged from their own feelings which imposes a burn-out risk. This risk further increases when the labour conditions are poor, when workers have little autonomy, when they experience little appreciation for their work and when the harm associated with service industry work such as dealing with unpleasant customers is not recognised.

Service industry personnel can enhance their well-being by using what Hochschild (1983/2003) refers to as *healthy estrangement* which is the separation of the private from the work self. This technique gives workers control over their emotions at work. Service providers who adopt a professional work role are less likely to take unpleasant experiences at work personally. Nevertheless, the performance of emotional labour requires a significant amount of energy, while the risk of a negative impact on the worker's well-being continues to exist (Hochschild, 1983/2003).

Hochschild's analysis of the phenomenon of emotional labour has greatly influenced the conceptualisation of sex work by academics and sex worker activists (Koken, 2010; van der Meulen, 2011), and this is for good reason. Skills such as being able to build up a relationship of trust with clients, being able to make clients feel at ease and the ability to feign or create feelings of affection, interest and desire are paramount to work in the sex industry. This is especially the case for sex workers who operate in the middle and the higher strata of the sex industry.

Another benefit of Hochschild's (Ibid.) conceptualisation of emotional labour is that her findings shed light on how sex workers can adopt healthy work practices. Her insights also serve a political goal. The finding that sex workers employ emotional work similar to the emotional labour of service providers in other fields supports the destigmatisation of the profession. This shows that sex work is a job that requires an emotional involvement that is not dissimilar to the emotional investment of workers in other service industry jobs.

Hochschild's (Ibid.) work also opposes the assumption of some radical feminists (see for example Barry, 1995) that the mental switch made by many sex workers before they commence their job is a sign of psychological harm. Instead, Hochschild points out that the separation of work and private life enhances the well-being of all service industry workers. Besides this point, Hochschild's (Ibid.) work shows that the possible adverse psychological impact of service industry work is not necessarily tied to sex work. All service industry jobs are associated with this risk.

Chapkis (1997) was one of the first scholars to use Hochschild's concept of emotional labour in sex work research (Koken, 2010). To remain emotionally healthy in sex work, Chapkis (1997) endorses Hochschild's healthy estrangement which sex workers can achieve by developing a sex worker persona that is different from their private identity. Upon commencing their duty, sex workers can step into their working role, evoke the right feelings for their clients and leave these feelings behind once the work is done. Being less emotionally involved in the work makes it easier to draw boundaries with clients. Chapkis (Ibid.) stresses that it is important that sex workers see their professional role in a positive light as feelings of guilt can undermine their well-being.

Sanders (2005a) concurs with Hochschild (1983/2003) and Chapkis (1997) that sex workers can enhance their emotional health by keeping their private and professional life separated. In her study on indoor sex workers in the UK, she identifies several techniques that sex workers use to achieve this separation. Some sex workers do not allow clients to touch particular parts of their body whilst others experience condom use as an emotional barrier between themselves and their clients. Sanders (2005a) also encountered sex workers who find it helpful to remind themselves of the fact that sex work is nothing more than a job. The techniques that sex workers use to separate their work from their private life also aid them in dealing with stigma (Tomko et al., 2021; Weitzer, 2009). Owing to the separation of their work and their private identity, the stigma of sex work impacts them less severely.

Sanders (Ibid.) labels the work identity of sex workers as a *manufactured identity* (2005a). In addition to the benefits on their mental health, the manufacturing of a carefully constructed professional identity can also serve sex workers' commercial interests. However, the researcher stresses that the way sex workers represent themselves should have some authentic basis, otherwise clients may see them as not authentic enough.

Bernstein's (2007) research has also played a major role in the further elaboration of the concept of emotional labour in relation to the sex industry. In her 2007 study on indoor middle class sex work in the United States and Europe, she describes a group of women whom, different to the sex workers that Chapkis' (1997) and Sanders' (2005a) describe, merge their private and their work persona. Instead of a working identity, referred to by Bernstein as a *double self*, these sex workers adopt a *single self* (Bernstein, 2007). The women experience their work as more valuable and meaningful when they perform their labour in a more authentic way. Here, only one aspect separates these women's private intimacy from their work intimacy, which is their hourly rate. For this reason, Bernstein refers to their work as *bounded authenticity* (2007), authenticity that lasts as long as the length of the booking.

Different to Chapkis (1997) and Sanders (2005a), who endorse the double self as a healthy work practice, Bernstein (2007) pays little attention to the possible negative consequences of the limited professional distance between her study participants and their clients. Besides the possible adverse psychological impact of the single self, as mentioned by Chapkis (1997) and Sanders (2005a),

the relative closeness of these sex workers to their clients may also confuse the latter regarding the nature of the encounter (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012).

In her study on sex work in Vietnam, Hoang (2010) further elaborates Bernstein's understanding of emotional labour in sex work. Similar to Bernstein's research, sex workers in the middle and upper market of the Vietnam sex industry undertake a significant amount of emotional labour. This emotional labour consists of expressing sentiments of care, genuine interest and desire, amongst others. Hoang refers to this type of emotional work as *expressive emotional labour* (2010, p. 256) and *relational work* (ibid).

Whilst it may be the case that the emotional labour the sex workers undertake in the afore-mentioned strata is visible in how they express themselves when interacting with clients, the most laborious aspect of the job is what lies behind their care for their clients, being the process of either deep acting or surface acting. In her 2010 study Hoang makes little reference to this important aspect of the work of sex workers in the middle and higher strata.

The studies on emotional labour in sex work that I have discussed in this section were undertaken amongst indoor sex workers (Bernstein, 2007; Chapkis, 1997; Sanders, 2005a), some of whom have a middle-class background (Bernstein, 2007). Hoang contributes to the debate by illuminating that sex workers who work under precarious conditions in the lower end of the sex industry also invest emotionally in their job. In the lower strata of the Vietnam sex industry, sex workers serve clients that they find unattractive, dirty and unpleasant. For this reason, they undertake emotional work to manage and to disguise feelings of disgust towards their clients and their bodies. Hoang labels this type of emotion management *repulsive emotional labour* (Hoang, 2010). This type of emotional labour enables sex workers to hide the negative attitude they hold towards their clients.

Clients in the middle and upper parts of the Dutch sex industry may have better personal hygiene and may behave themselves more pleasantly because of their awareness of their own role in the creation of the GFE or BFE - a service that the underprivileged clients in Vietnam cannot afford. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Dutch sex workers who work under more privileged circumstances find themselves in a position where they never have to suppress feelings of disgust. Sanders (2005b) and Cheung (2013) report that for many female indoor sex workers in respectively the UK and Hong Kong, the sight of genitals and bodily fluids make them feel repulsed. When human beings are intimate with a desired other, arousal automatically suppresses those feelings (Borg, 2013). However, this mechanism may not help sex workers as they have sex with someone whom they would in most cases not want to have sex with without financial compensation. Therefore, Hoang's notion of repulsive emotional labour is also relevant for the study of emotional labour amongst sex workers with a greater level of privilege.

3.11. Chapter Summary

In the first part of this chapter, I explained why many researchers employ a feminist lens to undertake research on sex work. I then proceeded to discuss the main feminist theoretical understandings of sex work. Respectively, I discussed the Marxist feminist, liberal feminist, radical feminist and the sex radical feminist viewpoints on the profession. I then described the sex workers' rights perspective and intersectionality. I also gave arguments as to why I have used the two afore-mentioned approaches to guide this study.

In the second part of this chapter, I covered the theory and concepts that emerged during the studies iterative process of data collection and analysis as being relevant for the understanding of the motivations, experiences and challenges of student sex workers in the Netherlands. I respectively discussed stigma, boundary work, the whorearchy, economic, social, cultural, linguistic, educational and erotic capital and the performance of emotional labour.

Chapter 4.
Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methods used in the study. It lays out the rationale for a modified grounded theory approach whilst also discussing the choice of semi-structured interviews for data collection.

In response to the negative experiences of sex workers with research into their work, participatory (action) studies have become increasingly popular within the field of sex work studies (Van der Meulen, 2011). As the participation of student sex workers in all stages of the study was beyond the scope of the trajectory of this PhD, the study has sought to include a number of 'participatory elements'. The role of these elements is discussed here and their importance within the overall context of the study.

In this chapter, I will proceed to discuss how I navigated the difficult process of gaining ethical approval to commence this study. As sex workers are often considered to be difficult to reach, I will describe how study participants were recruited and give insight in the study sample. Later in the chapter, I outline the steps that I took to analyse the data and explain why this was the most appropriate approach to come to valid results. The level of generalisability will then be discussed, whilst the end of the chapter provides a summary of the methodology and sets out the content of the next chapters.

4.1. A Qualitative Approach inspired by Grounded Theory

The most suitable way to gain insight into the motivations and experiences of student sex workers was to employ a qualitative approach. The method for data collection that I relied upon in this study were interviews with student sex workers. Qualitative interviewing gave me the possibility of gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, views and perceptions, whilst enabling me to look at these within the context of their lives.

This goal would have been difficult to achieve with a quantitative approach (Davies & Hughes, 2014). As surveys limit participants' input to predetermined response options, they provide little space for respondents to clarify their answers or to introduce additional relevant thoughts (Ibid.). By using surveys, I would have had no possibility to ask follow-up questions to better understand the participants' viewpoints. A further exploration of topics emerging during the interview would also have been impossible, which is otherwise vital in enabling the study participants to elaborate on themes and experiences they consider to be important to share.

The practice of following up on evolving findings lies at the heart of grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). I used a number of key elements of this methodological approach within this study. Grounded theory is an inductive research method in which the researcher does not start

with a particular theoretical standpoint in mind but looks for patterns within the data to create a theory that is grounded in the data (Merriam, 2009). The researcher enters the field with preliminary research questions in line with the purpose of the research (Punch, 2005). The concepts that emerge during the analysis of the data are verified alongside new data (Birks & Mills, 2015; Descombe, 2014). Grounded theory is therefore known as a *constant comparative method* (Ibid). This process enables the researcher to explore all possible explanations for the phenomenon found in the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) which continues until theoretical saturation takes place. Whilst the possibility of the emergence of new insights is endless, with theoretical saturation, Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to the point where new findings do not further contribute to the study.

There are three reasons for why I found inspiration in grounded theory within this study. Firstly, the exploratory nature of grounded theory that focuses on the data without requiring much pre-existing knowledge matches well with understudied or new fields of investigation (Denscombe, 2014; Punch, 2005). Research on student sex work is a relatively new subject area. So far, only a relatively small number of studies have taken place on student sex work and to date, only one study has taken place in the Netherlands (Janssen, 2017).

Secondly, instead of drawing upon pre-determined theories or hypotheses, the fact that grounded theorists approach the research objective with what Punch (2005) calls an 'open mind' is beneficial for the population under study - the student sex workers. The 'open mind' reassures them that the starting point of the research will not be assumptions they may perceive as stigmatising, such as the presumed relationship between abusive childhood experiences and sex work, or the idea that all sex workers are victims (van der Meulen, 2011).

Thirdly, being centred around the voices of the study participants (Dodsworth, 2012), the inductive method gives study participants the space to influence the direction of the study. This approach helped me to make the research relevant for the population under study.

As mentioned, I chose to use several key elements of the grounded theory method within this study. Despite its widespread use (Birks & Mills, 2015; Martin & Gynnild, 2011), the application of grounded theory can be a challenging endeavour. Many doctoral students struggle with its use (McCallin 2003; Ünlü & Qureshi, 2023). Moreover, the different approaches to grounded theory that emerged over time may cause confusion, while limited access to training make the successful application of the method difficult (Birks & Mills, 2015; J. Jones, 2019; Martin & Gynnild, 2011; McCallin, 2003).

Birks and Mills (2015) point out that when undertaking a full grounded theory study is not achievable, researchers can nevertheless take advantage of the method by adopting a number of its key elements in their research design to enhance their study (Birks & Mills, 2015). I followed up on this suggestion.

Whilst grounded theory is in essence a flexible method, a number of aspects are often perceived as being fundamental to its application (Birks & Mills, 2015). I was able to use these

elements within this study. These are the iterative process of data collection and interpretation via the afore-mentioned constant comparative method (Birks & Mills, 2015; Descombe, 2014), the writing of memos in which the researcher reflects on the study (Birks & Mills, 2015), and the acknowledgment of the value of the researchers' understanding of the subject under study, referred to by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as *theoretical sensitivity*.

Two fundamental aspects of grounded theory have proven to be difficult to integrate within this PhD thesis. These are data collection via theoretical sampling and the three-staged method of data analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015). Theoretical sampling provides a sampling method aimed at the inclusion of study participants who are able to provide further insight into emerging themes within the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019). However, owing to time limitations and because sex workers are a *hard-to-reach group* (Barros et al., 2015; Benoit et al., 2005; Boels, 2014), theoretical sampling was not feasible for this study. Alternatively, I used convenience sampling (Barros et al., 2015) to further analyse emerging insights. I will further discuss the sampling method in 4.7.

The three-staged method of analysis refers to the three steps that grounded theorists undertake to induct theory from their data (Birks & Mills, 2015). The first step is substantial or open coding (Punch, 2005). In the second step referred to as intermediated coding, the researcher connects the different codes (Birks & Mills, 2015). The third and often most challenging step is advanced coding and theoretical integration (Ibid.), where theory emerges that is grounded in the data. Adopting the three-staged approach is difficult for novice researchers when they have no access to training and guidance from expert grounded theorists (Birks & Mills, 2015, McCallin, 2003), as was the case for me within my PhD trajectory.

Alternatively, I relied upon the first two levels of coding for my data analysis. Aided by my theoretical sensitivity and the memos that I wrote throughout the study I was able to derive theory from the data. The process of answering a number of guiding questions proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990) to stimulate analytical thinking contributed to this process. In 4.11, I provide more insights into the process of data analysis.

4.1.1. Positivist Versus Constructivist Grounded Theory

As developed by Glasser and Straus, classical grounded theory has been praised for its rigorous method for data analysis compared to other qualitative approaches (Charmaz, 1995). The founders of the approach were confident that the method significantly reduces the subjectivity of the researcher (Puddephatt, 2006). Glasser and Straus even refer to the 'discovery' of theory within the data, as if the meaning already exists and only has to be laid bare by the researcher (1967). In leaning towards positivism (Charmaz, 2006), I find this viewpoint difficult to hold as the researcher inevitably impacts the entire process of generating grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2001). Two researchers who code the same data will not necessarily come forward with the same outcome (Madill et al., 200; Puddephatt, 2006). As Charmaz rightfully argues, "truth can be local, relative, historically based,

situational, and contextual" (Puddephatt, 2006, p. 9). For this reason, this study is inspired by a constructivist grounded theory approach in which the role of the researcher in the enquiry is acknowledged (Charmaz, 2001). To follow up on this standpoint, I provide insights in 4.2 into how I position myself within this study.

In line with their positivist viewpoint, Glaser and Strauss have advised researchers against an early-stage review of previous studies (Giles et al., 2013). It is thought that a literature review falling at the start of a research project may involve researchers forcing presumptions upon the data which will threaten the otherwise objective outcome of the inductive method (Ibid.). Besides the fact that contrary to the positivist viewpoint I acknowledge how the viewer shapes what he sees, the idea that I would not have prior knowledge regarding the subject under study would be hard to maintain. Therefore, I followed the more recent adaptation of grounded theory provided by Charmaz, who favours a literature review at the beginning of the study (Giles et al., 2013).

Besides studying extensively the existing research on student sex work, I have also explored the different theoretical understandings of sex work in general. Reviewing the literature before my entry into the field has enabled me to direct the study at gaps in existing research on student sex work and assisted me in my ability to formulate a suitable preliminary interview schedule. In line with the grounded theory method (Glaser, 1998), I have also used the relevant literature as additional data. Upon identifying emerging themes, I triangulated these with the relevant literature via the constant comparative method (Birks & Mills, 2015; Descombe, 2014).

The consequence is that my study is not only inductive but also deductive. Some examples of emerging themes that I verified against existing theories and concepts are the emotional labour that student sex workers perform at work (Bernstein, 2007; Chapkis, 1997; Hochschild, 1983/2003, Huang, 2010) and the importance of student sex workers possessing the educational and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1996) requisite for their access to higher strata in the sex industry. Hence, in chapter three I discussed both the theoretical underpinnings and concepts of the study I saw as relevant prior to my entry into the field and the theoretical insights and concepts that emerged during the iterative process between data collection and interpretation (Bryant, 2019).

4.2. Data Collection via Semi-structured Interviewing

This study seeks to provide in-depth insight into student sex workers' motivations and experiences. The most suitable way to do so is by asking student sex workers to share their subjective realities in an interview as "in order to understand other persons' construction of reality, we would do well to ask them" (S. Jones, 1985, p. 46). Meanwhile, other qualitative methods proved less suitable for this study. For instance, documentary research focusing on letters, diaries, memoires, (auto)biographies and blogs written by student sex workers in the Netherlands may provide insight into the motivations and experiences of student sex workers. However, my inability to find such material made it impossible to adopt this form of data collection. Observations do not usually lead to a

better understanding of views and opinions (Kumar, 2022), and here I anticipated that few student sex workers would be willing to participate in such a study.

The most suitable interview type for this study were semi-structured interviews, being those in which a number of guiding questions can be adapted where necessary (Noaks & Wincup, 2004). The flexible nature of this type of interviews enabled me to give respondents enough space to share what they saw as important which led to a rich understanding of their views and experiences. To benefit fully from data collection via semi-structured interviews, the researcher must have some understanding of the research topic, also referred to as the earlier mentioned theoretical sensitivity (Giles et al., 2013), "to facilitate alertness to significant themes" (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 81). In addition to my extensive literature review, my afore-mentioned occupation and connections with the sex workers' rights movement gave me insight in the subject under study, which aided me in understanding what themes were relevant to flow upon and what prompts to ask.

The stated benefits of semi-structured interviews can also apply to unstructured interviews. However, this data collection method is less suitable for this study. An unstructured dialogue is more difficult to control which makes it harder to follow-up on emerging themes via the constant comparative method (Birks & Mills, 2015; Descombe, 2014). As mentioned in 4.1., fully structured interviews (surveys) lack flexibility which make them less suitable for a study inspired by grounded theory.

I chose to rely on one-to-one interviews within this study owing to a number of practical benefits. Interviews with one respondent are relatively easy to organise and they are more budget-friendly than group interviews that require a meeting space and travel reimbursements (Descombe, 2014). Besides this, an interview with one respondent is easier to manage (Ibid.). The stigma of sex work is another reason why one-to-one interviews are more suitable for this research than group interviews. Group participants may not want to disclose their profession to others.

Most of the interviews took place face-to-face as this provides the best opportunity to build up rapport (Rowley, 2012) which increases the richness of the data (Lo Iacono et al., 2015). To make the study participants feel as comfortable as possible, I let them choose the location of the interview. Two interviews took place at the University of Amsterdam, two at meeting rooms provided by support services for sex workers while the remainder of the face-to-face interviews took place in cafés. The large geographical distance between my home town and the hometown of a part of the study participants was the reason why two interviews took place online and why a third interview took place over the phone.

A fourth interview took place over the phone because of privacy concerns. This student preferred not to meet in person because she desired not to disclose her identity. She also asked me not to audiotape the interview because, as she put it, "You never know where things may end up". I wrote down her answers during the interview and made field notes when the conversation came to an end.

All the other interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. With the consent of the participants concerned, five transcripts were made by professional transcription services, while one transcript was made by a study participant who was financially compensated for her time. The remainder of the transcripts were completed by the researcher.

The length of the interviews varied significantly depending on the question whether they took place in person or not. The interviews that were conducted online or over the phone lasted no longer than one hour whilst the face-to-face interviews lasted one to three hours. The long face-to-face meetings enabled me to talk with the participants about a variety of topics, including topics unrelated to the study, which enabled me to create rapport while it also gave me further insights within the context of their lives. During the interviews that I conducted online or over the phone, I experienced more pressure to stick to the interview schedule.

During the course of the fieldwork, I slightly changed my interview schedule to be able to follow up on emerging themes. One example of such a theme is the impact of the student sex workers' access to higher education on their experiences in the sex industry. To better understand how student sex workers benefit from their educational capital in sex work, I added the following questions to the interview schedule:

> What is the impact of your education on your work in the sex industry?
> Do you use your student identity for marketing purposes?
> Does your educational background give you access to particular markets?
> Would clients treat student sex workers differently? How do you feel about this?

Owing to the change in the interview schedule, I reached out to the four students I had interviewed at the beginning of my fieldwork. Two new face-to-face meetings took place and one study participant replied to the newly added questions via email. The fourth student said that she was willing to look at my questions but repeated attempts to get in touch failed.

4.3. Participatory Elements

As pointed out in the introduction, many sex workers are dissatisfied with existing research on sex work (Desiree Alliance, 2016; Jeffreys, 2009; Norberg, 2006; van der Meulen, 2011; Wahab, 2003). Bias and presumptions lead to the formulation of research questions that they experience as stigmatising, whilst issues that are more relevant for the sex worker community remain untouched (Norberg, 2006; van der Meulen, 2011). Another problem is the misinterpretation of data which may cause a "production of knowledge that many sex workers claim does not reflect their realities" (Wahab, 2003, p. 626). Whether caused intentionally by relying on radical feminist ideology or being the consequence of insufficient reflexion, research conclusions that do not properly represent the sex worker community can be harmful for sex workers. Policy-makers may develop counterproductive or even damageable laws upon them (Jeffreys, 2009; Norberg, 2006).

Knowledge production alien to sex workers' experiences and needs is less likely to occur in an inductive study inspired by grounded theory because of the primacy of the data within this approach. However, I aimed to further increase the usefulness of the study by enabling (student) sex workers to become involved in the study. Participatory action research (PAR), a study method in which the research participants contribute to all stages of a research, is an effective response to the dissatisfaction of sex workers with existing research on sex work (van der Meulen, 2011). Nonetheless, the full participation of study participants is beyond the scope of a PhD study as reaching a consensus with all the parties involved is very time consuming, which makes a PAR study more suitable for scholars with a long-term position (Dewey et al., 2019). Besides this, to involve student sex workers in laborious tasks without being able to compensate them for their time would be unethical (Ibid.). For this reason, I have chosen to include manageable 'participatory elements' in this study.

One past and one current student sex worker, along with a sex worker who entered the sex industry after studying gave feedback on the recruitment flyer and the interview schedule. In this thesis, I refer to the three women as my peer advisors. Feedback on the recruitment flyer was important because the information provided, the tone of voice and the language use in the document might give potential participants clues about my standpoint on sex work and my trustworthiness. If done properly, the flyer would contribute to the willingness of student sex workers to take part in the study. Moreover, peer feedback on the interview schedule increases the chance that the questions are relevant and suitable (Abel et al., 2010). Their view on the correct language use during the interview increases the researcher's ability to gain the participants' trust which then enhances the quality of the data (Abel et al, 2010; van der Meulen, 2011).

Whilst giving feedback, the peer advisors not only relied on their insider's perspective as (student) sex workers, but they also benefited from their current or past involvement with advocacy groups for sex workers' rights which gave them insight into the experiences, struggles and needs of a diverse group of sex workers in the Netherlands. Two of the three peer advisors were also able to use their experience in conducting research when they gave feedback on the interview questions.

The feedback that the peer advisors gave me then led to a number of changes. Whilst the peer advisors saw the language used in the flyer as suitable for the intended target group, they were less positive about the design of the document. To attract the attention of potential study participants, the peer advisors argued that the flyer should look more attractive. The first draft of the flyer was very plain to avoid the risk that Swansea Universities Ethics Committee would reject the document. Upon receiving permission to use a small illustration, I was able to create a document that looked more appealing. However, while conducting the fieldwork I learned that a flyer alone was not enough to encourage potential participants to take part. I will return to this issue later on.

Feedback on the interview schedule was more extensive. One peer advisor recommended starting the interview by asking the interviewee to tell me more about themselves. Whilst some

interviewees found it difficult to answer such a broad question, the question provided insight into what the study participants saw as important elements of their identity. Besides referring to their role as students, some study participants also explained what role sex work played in their lives. The opening question gave me pointers towards the follow-up questions during the rest of the interview.

A further question that I added to the interview schedule upon the recommendation of one of the peer advisors was whether the students were in a monogamous or a non-monogamous partner relationship or considered to be so. This proved to be a pertinent question as about a quarter of the study participants were in a non-monogamous relationship or saw this relationship type as a possibility. With regard to my question about whether the study participants also had other jobs next to sex work, one peer advisor advised me to question the interviewees about their other side activities alongside their studies, such as political activism, volunteering jobs and participation in sororities. These options made the multiple commitments of student sex workers in the Netherlands visible.

Another useful recommendation that I received was to ask study participants about the extent to which they had sought information regarding sex work legislation before they entered the sex industry. The interview schedule already included questions about what information in general, if any, the study participants had accessed to inform themselves about the occupation, prior to their entry and the time the study participants finally needed to make the decision to become a sex worker. Whilst this question showed that most students were well-informed about the advantages and challenges of working in the sex industry, the question of whether or not student sex workers had specifically sought information about sex work legislation revealed that some students were very uninformed about their labour rights. This phenomenon was most prominent among students who worked as escorts who solely relied on the owner of their agency for information regarding this.

The impact of the legislative framework for the sex industry in the Netherlands on sex workers and their knowledge regarding this subject will not be addressed in this study. Nevertheless, the data collected in relation to this theme provides a great recourse for further study.

Throughout the interview schedule, the peer advisors saw my language use as suitable for the intended target group. In my initial research design for this study, I also intended to ask a small group of student sex workers to give feedback on my data analysis and recommendations. As insiders they would have a greater ability to recognise possible biases and misinterpretations (Benoit, 2005; Dick, 2011) which would improve the validity of the analysis (Benoit, 2005; Cornish et al., 2013; Wahab, 2003). However, the financial and time limitations mentioned earlier made it impossible to do so. Alternatively, I gave the study participants the opportunity to give feedback on the sections in which their own interviews played a role, and which 5 of the study participants have managed to do.

4.4. Ethical Clearance

Alongside time and financial constraints, another challenge to my adoption of a participatory approach was the need to gain the ethical approval of the Ethics Committee of the College of Law and

Criminology at Swansea University. I was only allowed to get in touch with potential study participants and peer advisors after having received ethical clearance. This fact had consequences for my ability to enable the peer advisors to contribute to my study.

I attempted to gain ethical clearance with a detailed research proposal that gave insight into possible interview questions, although it did not include a fully-developed interview schedule. By leaving the development of the interview schedule open, I aimed to give the three peer advisors more space to use their expertise to contribute to my research. This strategy also aided my desire to use the constant comparative method of data analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Descombe, 2014) in which emerging concepts in the interview data can be further explored alongside additional data collected with the purpose to better understand these concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The further exploration of the conditions and limitations of the findings often requires a new set of questions, while themes that appear to be less relevant may be left behind (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Considering the likelihood that the interview questions would change over the course of the project, it seemed useless to present a detailed interview schedule to the ethics committee before my entry into the field. However, the committee was unwilling to grant ethical clearance without knowing in greater detail what questions the study participants would be asked. The committee recognised the value of the insights of the sex workers' community and was aware of the fact that interview schedules can change during the fieldwork process. Nevertheless, they obliged me to provide further insight into the nature of the subjects that I wanted to discuss with the study participants.

I developed a preliminary interview schedule without the input of the peer advisors, shared the document with the ethics committee and agreed with the members that I would submit the document again in case of fundamental changes. The interview schedule can be found in the appendices on page 230. The additional questions from the peer advisors did not radically change the interview schedule, and for this reason there was no need to present the document to the ethics committee for a second review.

4.4.1. A High-risk Project

In addition to a detailed research proposal and the interview schedule, I also submitted an information sheet, consent form and debrief form to the ethics committee. Although this was not asked for, I was advised by my supervisors to send the members the recruitment flyer. The respective documents can be found in the appendices on pages 222-234. Owing to the time pressure that comes along with a PhD trajectory, I hoped to be able to enter the field quickly. However, that proved to be difficult.

For reasons remaining unclear to me, my project was labelled as high risk. The issues identified during the review process were the method of data storage, the question whether or not I had to take particular legal aspects in the Netherlands into consideration and the consequences of my online presence during the field work. Regarding the storage of interview data, I agreed with the

ethics committee to minimise the use of USB-sticks as much as possible and to transfer interview data and other documents containing personal details of study participants to a password-protected computer upon the first possibility and to delete the data on the USB-stick.

To follow up on the request to verify whether or not there were any legal obligations I had to adhere to during the fieldwork, I got in touch with the chair of the AISSR Ethics Advisory Board of the University of Amsterdam. The only possible legal obligation identified was in the scenarios in which I would have to report the disclosure of criminal offences. The chair sought external advice on my behalf to find out in what kind of situations this would be applicable. The external advisor explained that in principle the same legislation applies to a researcher as to any citizen.

However, as a researcher, I was advised to consider the possible impact of the disclosure of criminal acts to the authorities on the academic community. In clear-cut situations in which study participants disclose information regarding future criminal offences that may be preventable, it is mandatory to report these offences. Examples of these kinds of offences are cases of domestic abuse and trafficking. In less clear-cut situations, the officer recommended peer consultations with other researchers. Fortunately, during the fieldwork I was not confronted with such cases.

The committee's concern with my online presence as a researcher focused on the fact that I would remain visible on the internet in relation to my research for an unknown period of time. As a solution, the members proposed a 'staged approach', which meant that I would not disclose any personal information online until I got in touch with potential study participants. Correspondence with potential study participants had to take place via a study email address provided by Swansea University.

The issues discussed above were relatively easy to solve. Nevertheless, the process to receive ethical clearance took seven months. This stood in sharp contrast with the straightforward procedure of the AISSR's Ethics Advisory Board of the University of Amsterdam. The AISSR gave permission to begin the research in only 24 hours.

4.4.2. UK Universities Fear Research on Student Sex Work

Whilst the members of Swansea University's ethics committee never mentioned that there were issues with the subject under study, the lengthy procedure fits well into the tradition of UK universities being wary of research on student sex work (Roberts, 2022). The unease of UK universities with this topic should not be seen in isolation of the process of marketisation that the countries' higher educational system has gone through in the past decade. Universities fear that the illumination of a subject like student sex work may adversely impact the status of the institution which would negatively impact the university's effort to make profit by attracting a large number of students (Ibid.). Dutch institutions of higher education are not completely unaffected by this process of marketisation either. Such a business-like approach is visible in the university's focus on output, their international ranking, the number of high-impact publications, the acquisition of funding and the

number of degrees awarded to students. These goals are prioritised over the ability to take time to reflect back on academic goals while considering the wider question of student and staff well-being (Bal et al., 2014).

However, the marketisation of higher education has not emerged in the Netherlands to the same extent as in the UK where universities are, for the main part, funded by the students. Moreover, the arguably more liberal attitude towards (student) sex work in Amsterdam and the legal status of the Dutch sex industry are also factors that may explain the difference in how Swansea University and how the University of Amsterdam deal with research on student sex work.

4.5. Sex Work Research Ethics and my own Ethical Considerations for This Study

As mentioned in the acknowledgments, I had the opportunity to attend the 2016 Desiree Alliance conference in New Orleans. Desiree Alliance is a coalition of current and former sex workers in the United States who work together with health professionals, social scientists and other network partners to enhance the position of sex workers. The conference consisted of an academic track where most of the workshops were devoted to sex work research ethics, demonstrating how concerned sex workers are with the subject. Several American and Canadian sex workers shared how they were negatively impacted by studies on sex work in which they or other sex workers had taken part. At the same time, participants also acknowledged the benefits of ethical research on sex work that addresses their concerns and leads to useful recommendations for change. Being introduced to the field of sex work research by sex workers with clear ideas of how research can better serve their communities aided me in setting up an ethical research design.

Besides the Desiree Alliance conference, the issue of sex work research ethics was frequently addressed during meetings of the UK Postgrad Sex Work Research network as well as during events of the Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM) and the European Sex Worker Alliance (ESWA). The information I gained during these meetings also deepened my thinking regarding the ethical aspects of this study. In the following sections then, I address how I sought to develop an ethical just research design. Before doing so, I will first position myself within the study.

4.5.1. Researcher Positionality

As mentioned in 4.2.2., I acknowledge that objective truths do not exist. My own values, beliefs, experiences and background have shaped the entire research process. I believe in transparency. Readers may know where the knowledge comes from in enabling them to evaluate the study's findings. For this reason, I provide a short introduction to my background as a researcher.

I have a background in gender studies, where the dominant perspectives on sex work were discussed without putting pressure upon students to take on any of the viewpoints. Like the several student sex workers in this study who were fearful to take out a student loan to finance their degrees, I

have undertaken a variety of jobs alongside my studies. Whilst I have had several good jobs, I have also learned what precarious labour entails and how important it is to stand up for your labour rights. I understood very well that sex workers can only stand up for their labour rights when their work is conceptualised *as* work, a standpoint that I have embraced ever since.

With this background, I was appointed for a position within Humanitas ESSM. My experiences as a policy officer have confirmed the importance of the labour approach to sex work. One of the many examples is that when sex workers who desire a career change have been able to work legally in the sex industry and have been able to pay their taxes, they are included in the formal economy which gives them several practical benefits that aid them in transitioning.

Besides viewpoints and experiences, identities also shape our perspectives. Similar to most students in this study, I enjoy levels of privilege in most contexts because of my educational background, my whiteness and being cisgender. At the same time, I experience subordination because of being female, being a single parent and currently living on a low income as a bursary PhD. Relating to the discrimination that student sex workers experience was not difficult for me. As a single parent, I regularly experience the impact of heteronormativity. Whilst the social exclusion I experience is by no means as severe as the stigma around sex work, I believe that my personal experience with discrimination has given me a better understanding of the workings of social oppression in this area.

4.5.2. Information Sheet

As for any study participant in any research, for (prospective) student sex workers, the benefits of taking part in the research should outweigh the potential risks (Bloomberg, 2008). To enable potential study participants to inform themselves about the goals of this study, I developed an information form. The form was approved by Swansea University's Research Ethic Board. To enable potential study participants to verify my identity and my research experiences in the field and to gain insight into my standpoint on sex work, I ensured that my multimedia accounts were open and accessible for verification temporarily. Detailed information about my research experience and interests could also be found at my staff profile at the website of the University of Amsterdam.

The information sheet that I prepared also gave a detailed description of how I protected the participants' data. To ensure that the students' participation was voluntary, I pointed out that they always had the right not to answer questions and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. To give participants enough time to read the information and to make a well-considered decision on whether or not to take part, I shared the information sheet with them prior to the interview. In case it appeared that they had not had the time to read the information, they were given the time to do so before the beginning of the interview.

4.5.3. Consent

Before each interview began, I discussed the information sheet with the study participants and found that all of the participants confirmed that they were willing to proceed. I recorded the participants' consent to take part in the study via audio recorder, while the participants signed a consent form that I had developed in agreement with Swansea Universities' ethics committee. The participants did not have to give their legal name in the study and for that reason they were also allowed to sign the consent form with a pseudonym. For their own records, the participants received a copy of the consent form with my signature.

I would note, however, that several participants were unwilling to take the document home as this would prove their participation in a study on student sex work where they desired to keep their occupation silent. Besides ensuring myself before the start of the study that the study participants consented to their participation, I also remained vigilant during the interviews that the participants continued to feel happy about taking part. If I had noticed possible signs of discomfort, I would have reiterated that participants were under no obligation to answer questions and that they had the right to cease their participation in the study. However, I did not notice any signs of unease in the participants during the interview process.

Not only did the participants' consent play a role during my fieldwork, it was also important in the analytic stage of the study and the writing-up stage. As far as possible I wanted to ensure that they also agreed with how I used data coming from their interviews. Ahead of the publication of a book chapter (D. Jones & Sanders, 2022) and the PhD dissertation, I enabled the study participants to read how I had used their interview in my analysis so that they could share possible disagreements with me and correct any errors or misunderstandings. During the interview stage, a group of 10 people indicated that they were interested in reading the parts of my work in which their interview played a role.

Unfortunately, the process of involving participants in my analysis was difficult. Firstly, it was difficult to finalise my writing early enough to give participants a reasonable time frame to provide their feedback and to still meet deadlines. Secondly, it was a challenge to reach all participants. Owing to the lengthy process of conducting PhD-trajectory research, some contact details such as student email addresses fell out of use. On occasions I was not able to get in touch with a study participant because I had stored her phone number on a phone that stopped working before I had the chance to copy the number. As some study participants did not respond to my emails, only a group of five students gave feedback on my writing.

In awareness that it can be a laborious task to read parts of a PhD thesis, I came to understand that not every study participant was eager to follow up on their interview. Unfortunately, I could not find a way to compensate for this element in the research. One lesson I learnt in the process of reaching out to the participants was to keep a better record of their contact details. If I had to design a similar study, then I would include these details in the consent form. Considering the temporariness of

student email addresses and (work) phone numbers, I would also discuss with the study participants the possibility of including alternative ways to contact them and what to do in case I failed to reach them.

4.5.4. The Power Dynamics Between the Researcher and the Study Participants

Feminist researchers on sex work are often concerned with the unequal power dynamic between themselves and their study participants (O'Neil & Pitcher, 2017; Sanders et al., 2017; Skeggs, 1994). Researchers may come from a more privileged societal position compared to their study participants, at least when it comes to education. Besides this, it is the researcher who designs the study, who leads the interviews, who interprets the data and who gets the rewards for the completion of the study. With the exception of participatory studies, the only role given to the study participants is to share their sometimes-intimate life stories with the researcher, whilst the researcher herself does not usually give away much personal information. Participants can only hope that their narrative is interpreted in line with their understanding of their reality, and hope that the outcome of the study will not impact negatively upon themselves and their community.

Whilst I did not discuss the possible unequal power difference with the study participants, in my own understanding the distance between myself as a researcher and the study participants was relatively small. Studying for a bachelor's or a master's degree is not the same as a PhD trajectory as the first categories are perceived as students whilst PhD researchers are usually employed by a university in the Netherlands and have a more senior status. The upshot is that both the study participants and I have had access to higher education. Moreover, I tried to give the study participants more power over their contribution to the study with the inclusion of participatory elements and, as described above, by enabling the study participants to read and comment on the parts of my analysis in which their interview plays a role.

The interviews were not a one-way dialogue. During the interviews that lasted longer than an hour, I would share personal information about myself. Whilst doing so, I was aware of the fact that I was bound by privacy legislation as well as the promises I made in the information sheet and consent form. As a consequence, I had to rely on the understanding and discretion of the participants to keep my personal information confidential.

4.5.5. Confidentiality

Considering the stigma attached to sex work and the often-illegal status of the occupation, the protection of study participants' anonymity is of the utmost importance (Dewey & Zheng, 2013). A potential breach of confidentiality could cause serious harm to study participants (Sanders et al., 2017). For this reason, I ensured that personally identifiable information was securely protected. I transferred interview data stored on the tape recorder to a password-protected computer upon the

earliest occasion and then deleted the data from the tape recorder. To inhibit anyone from hearing the participants speaking, I transcribed the interviews in isolation at home. The professional transcription services that I used to transcribe the interviews were bound by privacy legislation and signed a confidentiality agreement. The study participant who made one transcript confirmed orally that they would treat the interview data confidentially, while written transcripts were only shared with one of the supervisors.

My desire was to give all participants pseudonyms to avoid any unwanted disclosures, as there is no possibility to change the study once it is published. However, Swansea University's Ethics Committee disagreed with this practice and argued that participants should decide this for themselves. Indeed, two participants demanded that I use their legal names. Another participant objected to the use of the pseudonym that I had chosen for her because it too closely resembled her working name. In the end, I decided not to mention the student sex workers' course, nor the name of their university, nor the exact location of the institution in order to make their identification impossible.

4.5.6. Compensation for the Study Participants

Self-organisation for sex workers as well as several researchers into sex work insist that compensation must be made available for study participants (Jeffreys, 2009; Maher, 2000; Sanders et al., 2017). Participating in one of my interviews absorbed one or more hours of the (prospective) student sex workers' time that they were not able to spend on one of their other commitments, such as working as a sex worker, their jobs outside the sex industry and studying. Being dependent on the study participants for the successful completion of this PhD, I also thought that it was right to show them my appreciation.

The University of Amsterdam allowed me to use my research budget to present each participant with a gift card worth €25 from a retailer of their choice. Whilst I wished that I could double this sum, I did not aim to compensate the participants according to their hourly rate, as suggested by some sex workers. Taking part in an interview is not the same as working in the sex industry and I wanted to avoid the idea that I would be purchasing their participation (Padgett, 2008). Besides this, compensating the participants according to their usual earnings would lead to severe inequality as some students worked for rates above €300 by the hour (female escorts working for agencies), whilst others only charged €100 for one appointment (male independent escorts). With the exception of one participant who rejected the gift card because she felt that there was no need to compensate her for her time, the remainder of the participants were content with their compensation.

4.5.7. Other Ethical Concerns

At times in the Netherlands, a binary discourse pops up in which all sex workers are perceived as victims with the exception of those who work part-time in this industry alongside their studies. This

one-dimensional perspective not only ignores the agency of sex workers in the country who are not students, it also precludes the recognition that student sex workers can never be victims. Whilst I did not encounter such situations during my fieldwork, students can also be manipulated into sex work for the gain of someone else, or they may consent to sex work but end up in very poor labour conditions.

During the writing of my thesis, I remained vigilant that my work might confirm people's binary beliefs. Besides providing a nuanced inside in the diverse experiences of student sex workers that addresses their varying levels privilege while also illuminating the challenges they face, I aimed to address this problem by stressing the key principle that sex work is a legitimate form of labour, irrespective of who undertakes the job and why they do it.

A very different ethical concern was that students who considered sex work but had not yet entered the occupation would find affirmation of their choice to do so in what they learn about student sex work during their participation in my research. In a similar fashion, students who worked in indirect sex work might feel encouraged to move on to direct forms of sex work because of the insights they gain when taking part in my study. Several students indeed asked questions in relation to possible steps they wanted to take in this field.

My standpoint was that it is always better to be well-informed before taking such a decision instead of being void of information. At the same time, it also provided me with the opportunity to use my knowledge to give something back to the community. Whilst answering the students' questions, I ensured that I myself stressed the downsides as well as the risks involved with sex work. In agreement with my supervisors, I decided not to answer the question of whether I would recommend that students enter the industry or move on from indirect to direct sex work in case they involved me in their decision-making. However, none of the students asked me this question.

4.6. The Study Participants: Inclusion Criteria

In this study, student sex workers are those who exchange sexual acts, images, film or performances for money whilst studying in higher education. They work in direct sex work that includes physical contact with clients (Sagar et al., 2015a), in indirect sex work that does not include physical contact with clients (Ibid.), or in both sectors. Examples of direct sex work are escorting and working in a massage parlour or brothel. Examples of indirect sex work are webcam work, phone sex, stripping and acting in a porn movie. The students may work according to national and municipal regulations, they may work illegally or they may combine legal with illegal sex work. They may or may not be registered with the chamber of commerce and/or meet their tax obligations.

I choose to include both current and previous student sex workers in my research. However, previous student sex workers had to meet the additional criterion that the period in which they worked in the sex industry, whilst being a student did take place any longer than three years ago. As I could not find any literature exploring the extent to how long people's memories of events are still accurate, I decided to place an arbitrary boundary at a period of three years. One study participant completed

her degree almost three years before the interview took place and she was still able to recall many of her experiences. I found no potential study participants who had either stopped studying or stopped working in the sex industry longer ago. Therefore, I felt no need to extend this period.

The participants had to meet the national legal age for working in the sex industry in the Netherlands, which is 18 years old. Several municipalities have extended the legal age to work in particular parts of the sex industry to 21 years old. The point should be made that including students who work in these municipalities within the sectors concerned would not oblige me to report their activities as their occupation would be a municipal offence instead of a crime. At the same time, none of the study participants fell under this category.

I applied no maximum age limit and participants could be of any gender. Both national and international (EU and non-EU) students could take part but the participants had to understand written and spoken Dutch or English as the information form, the debrief form, the consent form and the interview questions are formulated in these two languages. The participants studied or had studied at one of the 18 universities (the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders, no year), or one of the 43 universities of applied science (Government of the Netherlands, no year) in the Netherlands. The level of their programme is a bachelor's degree or a master's degree, while PhD researchers were excluded from participation because they have an employee status in the Netherlands (Association of Universities in the Netherlands, 2015). Pupils attending secondary vocational training were excluded from participation because their studies were not yet categorised as higher education by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science when my fieldwork took place (Government of the Netherlands, 2017). The study participants could either study full-time or part-time.

Once I met two female students who deliberated on whether they wanted to work as a sex worker but who had not yet done so. I hence decided to include students who seriously consider becoming a sex worker in my study as well. I anticipated that this group would be equally capable of informing me about their motivations as the other study participants who had already been sex workers. During the interviews with the prospective student sex workers, this group indeed lengthy deliberated on the pros and cons of their choice. In falling under the 'seriously considering' category, I understand that the students have thought about the possibility to do sex work for the arbitrary period of at least a month to ensure that they were not acting on a whim. A second criterion was that they had already taken steps in relation to their possible entry into the sex industry; for example, by getting in touch with agencies or by searching online for information about sex work.

4.7. The Sampling Method

Owing to the stigma of sex work and limitations in their ability to work legally, sex workers often hide their occupation (Benoit et al., 2005; Koken, 2010). Consequently, they are a hard-to-reach group for researchers (Barros et al., 2015; Benoit et al., 2005; Boels, 2014), entailing that the recruitment of research participants for studies on sex work requires substantial effort (Benoit at al.,

2005; Weitzer, 2005). Besides the stigma that any sex worker may face in society, student sex workers are also at risk of institutional stigma within their university or university of applied science. Their fear of being outed unintentionally and the potential consequences of this for the continuation of their studies may pose extra barriers to their participation in a study on sex work.

Against this backdrop, I anticipated that it would be difficult to find sufficient study participants for this study. For this reason, I adopted a convenience sampling strategy which includes any student sex worker willing to take part in the study (et al., 2015). Ideally, in a grounded theory approach, the researcher moves on during the course of the fieldwork from a convenience sampling method to theoretical sampling. In absence of a large group of potential study participants, I sought the further development of emerging themes in the data that I was able to collect with my convenience sampling method.

4.8. Entering and Leaving the Field

I entered the field in June 2018 and continued recruiting and interviewing study participants until December 2019. In the years that followed, I stayed in touch informally with 9 student sex workers. We had occasional meetings and attended events related to sex work. A number of opportunities aided the recruitment process. The student society for international cooperation in Utrecht, which regularly organises debate evenings for students, asked if I would be willing to take part in a panel discussion on student sex work. After presenting the key findings of my literature review, I explained that I had just entered the field and that I was looking for more study participants.

In the weeks that followed, four students contacted me via email to ask if they could take part in the study. I had left recruitment flyers in the venue of the meeting, but as they explained during the interview, owing to the stigma of sex work none of the students had the courage to take a copy. Instead, they searched online for my staff profile at the University of Amsterdam.

Collaboration with community organisations can facilitate access to hidden populations such as sex workers (Benoit et al., 2005). In order to familiarise sex workers with their services, a community organisation provides free meeting space for gatherings and training organised by sex workers or third parties. I was given the opportunity to volunteer at an event hosted by an escort agency which enabled me to introduce my research for an audience of more than forty escorts of whom some were students. Six students were willing to take part in the study whilst four followed up on this and made an appointment for an interview. On this occasion, it proved insufficient simply to leave the study flyer in the venue. To motivate student sex workers to take part, it was necessary to personally explain the aims of the research and to provide insight in my standpoint on sex work. Informal one-on-one conversations with escorts also aided the recruitment process.

Staff members of PROUD, the Dutch self-organisation for sex workers, were also willing to assist me in the recruitment of participants. By means of exception, I was allowed to post my flyer in their newsletter; an opportunity that was rarely offered to researchers. I was very pleased with this

opportunity, as the endorsement of a peer organisation enhances the trustworthiness of researchers (Benoit et al., 2006; Ogendo, 2017; Shaver, 2005). The editor presented my call as a request from someone the staff of the organisation knows and trusts. When the newsletter came out, I anticipated that at least some people would reply to my call, but this was not the case.

Much more successful was my personal presence during meetings and events of the organisation. During introduction rounds at the start of meetings, I explained that I was a researcher conducting PhD research on student sex work. This explanation motivated two students who worked as sex workers and a student who considered doing so to ask if they could take part in the study. I was also given the opportunity to put my call for participants in the newsletter of the Association of Business owners of relax companies (VER, an organisation for licensed sex industry operators). Unfortunately, this attempt to reach participants was unsuccessful.

In places where sex work is regulated, researchers have been successful in getting into contact with student sex workers via licensed sex business owners (van der Wagen et al, 2010; Maher et al., 2012). Following this route, I got in touch with two study participants. However, to achieve this goal, I either had to know the business owner personally, or I required a gatekeeper to establish contact. The owner of an escort agency that I knew through my work was willing to share my call for participants with escorts who work for the agency. This led to the recruitment of one study participant. A gatekeeper then brought me into contact with the owner of another escort agency which allowed me to establish contact with the other participant.

Unfortunately, my attempt to use snowballing to find more student sex workers via the first two study participants failed. On other occasions, the use of snowballing was more successful. Both an independent escort and an escort who worked for an agency brought me into contact with one of their friends who also did sex work during their studies.

Similar to sex workers in countries elsewhere (Minichiello et al, 2013; Moorman & Harrison, 2015), many sex workers in the Netherlands recruit clients online (Biesma et al., 2006). I searched on the two most popular escort portals in the Netherlands, kinky.nl and sexjobs.nl, for sex workers who advertised as students and contacted them with a brief email about the study. However, after approaching 22 sex workers, only one sex worker responded that she was willing to take part. Considering that sex workers go online to find clients and not to receive unrequested calls to take part in a study, the low response rate did not surprise me. In addition, it may be the case that the sex workers only advertised as being a student to attract clients (J. Jones, 2019).

Once I had found 22 participants I ceased further recruitment in order to finish the PhD within the desired timeframe, rejecting new study participants who had been referred to me by gatekeepers after I had left the field. The students concerned were all white females who worked for high-end escort agencies. I had already interviewed 6 white female students who worked in this specific sector. During the last two interviews, I did not identify any new themes that might provide further insight in the motivations and experiences of student sex workers in the Netherlands. For this reason, it seemed

that my inability to interview additional student sex workers did not have an adverse impact on the richness of my data. Having said that, I recognised that "A statement about the unobserved based on the observed" (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1904) cannot be made with absolute certainty. The possibility exists that these new participants would have further enriched the study.

Should I have been able to continue recruiting and interviewing study participants, I would have adopted a purposeful recruitment strategy (Hoepfl, 1997) aimed at a greater racial diversity. Only 1 of the 22 study participants in this study was of colour. As stated in chapter two, I have not been the only researcher who struggled to recruit a larger group of student sex workers of colour. As suggested by J. Jones (2019), it may be that students who are already impacted by racism are less likely to do sex work to avoid multiple stigmas. For the same reason, students of colour involved in sex work may be less likely to be open about their work (Heineman, 2016).

The identity of the researcher also matters when reaching out to minority populations (Brown, 2018). Steward (2022) was able to recruit a sample of six student sex workers of colour in the USA while pointing out that his own African-American background contributed to his ability to recruit this relatively small study sample. It may indeed be the case that my whiteness posed a barrier in accessing student sex workers of colour. An African-American female student declined my request to do an interview with me while a male student with a mixed racial background responded enthusiastically to my request for an interview, but never followed up on this. People may have various reasons for either participating or not participating in a study and it is difficult to say for sure what their motivations are when no contact has been established.

Besides missing out student sex workers of colour, I may also have missed the experiences of student sex workers (with all possible racial backgrounds) who maintain a negative attitude towards their job or who feel that they are forced to do sex work. Other groups I was not able to include in the study were student sex workers with disabilities, and those with caring obligations. If I had had a larger time frame for data collection, then I would have paid special attention to the inclusion of these groups.

4.9. The Study Sample

A group of 19 students who worked as sex workers and 3 students who seriously considered doing so took part in my research. In all, 18 of the students identified as cisgender female, 3 as cisgender male, of whom one explored his feminine identity, while 1 study participant identified as transgender. The ages of the participants ranged from 19-44 years, with an average age of 26 years old and a median age of 24 years old. Only one student had children.

As mentioned, 21 students were white. The only student of colour had an Asian background, while 18 students were Dutch, of whom one was born in the EU and one outside the EU. Three students came from the EU and only one of these EU-students was born outside the EU. She had dual citizenship. One student lived outside the EU and came to the Netherlands for her studies. Whilst the

total sum of non-Dutch students with an EU or non-EU background cannot considered to be low, the number nevertheless falls below the average number of foreign students in higher education in the Netherlands in the years in which my fieldwork took place. Of this cohort, more than a quarter of all the students were foreign (CBS, 2022).

Of the participants, 16 students studied in cities within the 'Randstad' (the agglomeration of cities in the west of the Netherlands that includes, amongst others, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht). Most of these students studied in Amsterdam. A smaller group of six students studied in cities outside the Randstad. In my research, the high number of students studying in the Randstad can be explained by the fact that PROUD, an important gatekeeper in this study, is located in Amsterdam and that the student society inviting me to give a guest lecture was based in Utrecht.

A group of 15 students studied or had studied at a university, of whom 10 students were enrolled in a master's programme and 5 students studied towards a bachelor's degree. One bachelor student and a master student undertook two studies simultaneously. The remaining 7 students studied or had studied at a university of applied science and worked towards a bachelor's degree. The social sciences was the most dominant field of studies among the study participants. Seven students studied within this field, whilst four students studied arts. The other studies that the students undertook were journalism, physics, maths, social work, human resources, education, tourism, law and psychology. One student preferred not to disclose her field of study.

The majority of the students, 12 in total here, worked in direct forms of sex work. Three students were active in indirect forms of sex work while four students worked both in direct and indirect forms of sex work. The study included 13 escorts, of whom 8 worked via a licensed escort agency and the other 5 worked independently. Six students worked behind the webcam and two worked in a licensed brothel. One student worked as an erotic masseuse and one student received clients behind the windows. One student offered her services as a sugar baby, which meant that she engaged in encounters with clients that resemble a romantic relationship for which she received compensation in gifts or in money (Matolcsi, 2021). Another student worked as a financial dominatrix, also called a findom, which meant that she took part in a particular form of BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Masochism) in which she dominated clients who desired to be financially exploited (Durkin, 2007). Although most of her encounters took place online, she also met clients face-to-face.

Unlike most sex workers in the Netherlands (van der Most, 2022), most students in my research work legally in the sex industry. Only one student worked outside the legal framework where she operated as an independent escort in an area which required a licence that she did not have. The high prevalence of students who work legally can be explained by the fact that I was able to recruit a large group of escorts who work for an agency with a licence. Besides this, most of the independent escorts in this study live and work in Amsterdam where there is no obligation to apply

for a licence (Municipality of Amsterdam, n.d.). See the table on the next page for an overview of the study participants.

Overview of study participants

	Name/ pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Degree	Sector within the sex industry
1	Lauren	25	Female	Non-EU	Master	Windows and webcam
2	Veronique	22	Female	Dutch	Master	Escort, burlesque and webcam
3	Liam	24	Male	Dutch	Bachelor	Independent escort
4	Tobias	24	Male	EU	Master	Independent escort
5	Robin	33	Female	Dutch	Master	Escort via agency
6	Naomi	27	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Webcam
7	Paulina	26	Female	EU	Master	Considering different forms of sex work
8	Iris	19	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Considering escort
9	Yannick	21	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Financial domination
10	Luz	24	Female	Dutch	Master	Erotic massage
11	Ariane	34	Female	Dual citizenship (EU/non-EU)	Master	Considering escort
12	Enrique	22	Male – questioning gender identity	Dutch	Bachelor	Independent escort, brothel
13	Livia	21	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Sugaring
14	Daphne	34	Female	Dutch (born outside EU)	Bachelor	Escort via agency
15	Frida	24	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Escort via agency
16	Francis	26	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Escort via agency
17	Poppy	22	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Escort via agency
18	Eline	26	Female	Dutch	Master	Escort via agency
19	Lina	44	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Independent escort
20	Sophie	23	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Escort via agency
21	Lisette	29	Female	Dutch	Bachelor	Independent escort
22	Lea	23	Transfeminine	Dutch (born in EU)	Master	Webcam

4.10. Data Analysis

I conducted 22 interviews of which 21 were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. One interview was not audiotaped. For this interview, I had to rely on the notes that I had made whilst speaking with the participant. Both the transcripts and the notes were uploaded to software package NVivo to aid the data analysis. I initiated the coding of the data with what is often referred to as substantive coding or open coding, which constitutes a highly descriptive level of coding (Punch, 2005). By making comparisons and by asking questions such as 'What is the data about?' or 'What does the data tell me?', I put labels on words and interview parts (Punch, 2005). At this stage, I gained insight into what is central within the data (Holton, 2011).

In the second level of abstraction, I merged the codes into categories by searching for possible connections between the codes (Chun Tie et al., 2019). For example, they described different aspects of the same occurrences where they referred to the different stages of a particular phenomenon or to the different outcomes of an activity (Puch, 2005). As a final step, I then sought a link between the different categories. The memos that I wrote during the iterative process of data collection and analysis provided guidance in this process (Holton, 2011). To further aid my analysis, I asked a number of guiding questions that Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggest will stimulate analytical thinking:

> What is the main analytic idea presented by this research?
> If I had to conceptualise my finding in a few sentences, what would I say?
> What does all the action/interaction seem to be about?
> (Corbin & Strauss, 1990b, p. 424)

By following these steps I was able to gain insight into the motivations and experiences of the student sex workers who took part in this study.

4.11. Reflexion on Methodology: Validity and Generalisability

The internal validity of a study refers to the accuracy and the trustworthiness of the findings (Hoepfl, 1997). I undertook a number of activities to maximise the internal validity of my work. Throughout my PhD trajectory, I stayed in close connection with the sex workers' community in the Netherlands. Whenever possible, I attended public meetings that were organised about sex work, while I stayed in touch with 9 of the study participants beyond the interviews conducted for this research. My intense involvement with the community enhanced the quality of the interview data, as sex workers are more likely to respond honestly when they trust the researcher (Abel et al., 2010; van der Meulen, 2011). This is most likely to be the case when the researcher stands close to the community (Agustin, 2010).

Maintaining contact with sex workers also enhanced my theoretical sensitivity and made it easier to identify differences between my own meanings and those of the target population (Kirk &

Miller, 1986). For the study participants who desired to do so, I also gave them the opportunity to provide feedback on my use of their quotes and my analysis in order to draw attention to possible biases and misinterpretations of the interview data. Here, 5 of the study participants took the time to look at my writing, but none of them suggested corrections. I see the fact that none of the study participants desired to change the use of their quotes in my analysis as a confirmation of the accuracy of my analysis. What also enhanced the internal validity of the study is that I adopted a self-critical attitude by examining my own prejudices (Morris, 1997).

One disadvantage of studies that rely on interview data is that interviews are self-reported. Whilst self-reported data are needed to gain insight into the study participants' viewpoints and experiences, there is always the possibility that people frame their answers in a particular way different to their actual thoughts regarding the issue (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). The answers given by the student sex workers in this study may have been shaped, for instance, by their rejection of the dominant viewpoint of sex workers as victims. To avoid the reproduction of such a perspective, they may have de-emphasised what were possibly negative experiences in the sex industry.

Whilst I used follow up questions to also grasp the less positive aspects of the students' occupation, I cannot preclude with certainty the possibility that any of the student sex workers in this study have minimised the possible downsides associated with their occupation. Aside from this possibility, it may also be the case that some participants were inclined to give desirable answers or that they shaped their answers in a particular way to appear better. Although I invested much time in building up rapport, this may not have prevented participants from being dishonest. Lastly, interviews also depend on participants' recall. Most of the student sex workers did not enter the sex industry long ago, but the possibility was still present that their recall of some details was already lost when I interviewed them.

In section 4.2.2, I mentioned that I adopted a constructivist approach for this study. I acknowledge the impact of my role as a researcher and recognise that what I found significant in the data is subjective. Other researchers analysing the same data may code the same data differently and might come up with a different outcome.

The generalisability of the research findings over a larger population is limited in qualitative studies (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002), which is even more so in qualitative research on sex work. Due to stigma, marginalisation and the criminalisation of sex work in most countries over the world, sex workers are largely invisible, entailing that a sampling frame for research on sex work does not exist (Abel et al., 2010; Benoit et al., 2005; Shaver, 2005). As Wagenaar, Altink and Amesberger (2013) state, "A perfect sample, in the sense that it is representative of the complete population of sex workers in a country, is an impossible ideal" (p. 103). Despite the lifting of the ban on brothels in 2000, the Netherlands are no exception to this rule (van Wijk et al., 2014). To date, it is unknown how the sector looks like in terms of numbers, the identities of people involved, the geographical spread and the spread over sectors (ibid). This may be even more of the case among the understudied sub-

population of student sex workers in the country. It was thus my duty to remain cautious and not hold the outcome of this study as representative of the larger population of (prospective) student sex workers in the Netherlands.

As (student) sex workers are a hard-to-reach group (Barros et al., 2015; Benoit et al., 2005; Boels, 2014), I relied on a convenience sampling framework (Barros et al., 2015) for this study. Whilst this enabled me to interview a diverse group of student sex workers in terms of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age and sector within the sex industry, particular groups of student sex workers were either underrepresented or missing in the study. Only one study participant was of colour and whilst a number of foreign EU and non-EU students took part, their numbers were not representative of the total number of international students in higher education in the Netherlands.

None of the students had caring obligations or disabilities. Students with only negative experiences in the sex industry were not well represented in the study, although including these groups would have given a fuller picture.

4.12. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described how this study has sought insight into the motivations and experiences of student sex workers in the Netherlands. I have adopted a qualitative positivist oriented modified grounded theory approach where data collection took place via semi-structured interviews. As the development of a participatory action research (PAR) study was out of reach within the scope of a PhD trajectory, I included 'participatory elements' in this research. Three (previous) sex workers gave feedback on the recruitment flyer and the interview schedule. After a lengthy process, I received ethical clearance for this study.

A convenience sampling method was adopted that led to the inclusion of 22 study participants. Whilst 19 students had worked as sex workers during their studies, another 3 students considered entering the sex industry as they continued in higher education. Five study participants gave feedback on how I used their interview excerpts in the analysis. Although qualitative studies on sex work are limited in their generalisability, the internal validity of this study is presumed to be high owing to my close connection to the sex workers' community in the Netherlands and thanks to the small group of study participants who confirmed the accuracy of my analysis. The next three chapters will present the empirical findings of the study.

Chapter 5.
Motivations

Most studies on student sex work associate the phenomenon with the increased cost of higher education in a variety of western countries (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Betzer et al., 2014; J. Jones, 2019; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Lantz, 2005; Roberts et al., 2007a, 2007b, 2012, 2013; Sanders et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2014). Despite the introduction of the social loan system in 2016, higher education is relatively affordable in the Netherlands for Dutch and EU students. This made me wonder the extent to which a similar connection can be drawn between the financial needs of students in the Netherlands and their motivations to work in the sex industry.

Interview excerpts enabled me to identify the four distinguishable socio-economic groups that I will set out in this chapter. Each of these groups provide insight into the varying roles that financial pressure plays in the motivations for working in the sex industry of (prospective) student sex workers in the Netherlands. This overview demonstrates that the financial hardship lens used by most of the current studies on student sex work to understand why students work in the sex industry does no justice to the different socio-economic profiles involved and the varying financial needs existing amongst student sex workers in the Netherlands.

This chapter also shows that irrespective of the students' financial position, the intrinsic motivations for working in the sex industry for most students are at least as important as the financial incentive. Sanders and Hardy (2015) place the phenomenon of student sex work in the UK within a student culture of pleasure-seeking. Indeed, for the student sex workers in this study of the Netherlands, the desire to experience pleasure was an important driver for undertaking occupations in the sex industry. Several students reported that they like to spend time with clients and socialise with them, they experience sexual pleasure and the job enhances their confidence.

One motivation for working in the sex industry that may be seen as typical for students are the intellectual and political drivers that exist among a part of the students. Sex work also presents practical benefits to students. Most students undertake their studies alongside multiple other activities and obligations, experiencing pressure to thrive in higher education. The flexible nature of sex work aids them in generating an income alongside these multiple demands. For some students, sex work is an attractive alternative in view of the precarity of the general labour market for young people in the Netherlands. I end this chapter with an analysis of the decision-making process during which the students weighed these benefits against the anticipated challenges of the occupation.

One of the largest challenges of sex work is the stigma that sex workers face (Weitzer, 2022). As sex work stigma is omnipresent in society, stigmatising viewpoints on sex workers also existed among study participants. Before exploring the multiple reasons why students want to work in the sex industry and the decision-making process behind this choice of work, I will first explain how several

female students and one transgender student overcame stigmatising viewpoints of sex workers and learnt to look at the profession in a different light, which eventually made their own entry into the sex industry possible. A contrast emerged between the barriers these students had to overcome prior to their entry into the sex industry and the relative ease of the three male study participants in considering doing sex work. The difference points towards the gendered nature of the stigma of sex work.

I would also note that parts of the research and analysis presented in this chapter have been published in *Student Sex Work: International Perspectives and Implications for Policy and Practice* (D. Jones & Sanders, 2022).

5.1. Entrances: Access to a New Perspective

Whilst some studies measured attitudes of the general student population regarding student sex work (Roberts et al., 2010, 2013; Sagar et al., 2015a), none of the studies on student sex work discussed in chapter two have paid attention to how student sex workers themselves viewed people who work in the sex industry prior to their own entry into the sector. My exploration of the views that the student sex workers in this study had of sex workers before they themselves became a sex worker then exposes the role that higher education can play in overcoming stigma and provides insight into the gendered nature of the stigma of sex work.

Before they took on occupations in the sex industry, several of the female students and one transgender student had internalised stigmatised images of sex workers. They looked upon sex workers as outcasts and as victims deprived of agency. The participants could not imagine entering this line of work until they were confronted with a different perspective on sex work.

A key aspect of higher education is the stimulation of critical thinking (Silius, 2005) and as soon as the students gained a glimpse of a possible new perspective on the occupation, they were eager to take a closer look at it to re-evaluate their initial thoughts. Most of the students were able to view sex work through a new angle via their studies. Some students gained new insights into sex work when reading course literature about the subject, during extracurricular activities at their university, or via fellow students. Via her academic network, Veronique was made aware of conferences in which sex work was discussed. This impacted her view on the profession, as she said:

> I heard sex workers speaking at conferences. I did workshops with them. They were strong, capable activists who had chosen their profession. This was a whole new narrative for me.

Veronique's confrontation with the idea that sex workers can choose their job and can have agency in their work was a factor that stimulated her to consider her own entry into the sex industry. Lea had a similar experience. She initially looked at sex workers as victims, describing the sex industry as "a lot of misery". As soon as she embarked on a study of Amsterdam's red-light district for her thesis, she

realised that the picture she had in mind was inaccurate. From that point, she started to explore her own options as a webcam model.

The participants also developed new perspectives on sex work outside academia. It may be that their eagerness to question mainstream representations was also influenced by their access to higher education. Francis reconsidered her initial view of sex workers when she saw *Bruna Surfistinha, Confessions of a Brazilian Call Girl* (Baldini, 2010), a movie in which a successful escort ends up in a deplorable situation when she becomes addicted to drugs. As Francis explains:

> Like this, it is not for me. I am not into drugs. But at the same time, looking at the series, I realised that this job can be very powerful. Someone can make the choice to do this. I found that beautiful.

Looking at the movie, she realised that her initial idea that all sex workers are deprived of agency might not have been justified. This perception lowered the threshold for her to become an escort. Other students gained new ideas on sex work via their peers. This was the case for Iris and Livia. When I asked Iris how the idea emerged to become a sex worker, she said:

> She [her friend] told me about it. I thought, 'OK'. It took some time to cope with that knowledge. But that did not take long. I suddenly thought, 'Cool!'

Iris was prepared to move on from being flabbergasted by the disclosure to openness to a new viewpoint on sex work which eventually made her consider her own options in the sex industry. Livia shared a similar experience. When I asked her how she got involved with sex work, she explained that the idea of doing so emerged when she met another student who worked as a sugar baby. Regarding this student, she said:

> Before meeting her, I always thought that getting paid for sex is only for the absolute lowest of society.

Livia's confrontation with a sex worker who does not confirm the stereotypical image of sex workers as being socially inferior changed her perspective. In the long term, this change in attitude made it more acceptable for her to enter the sex industry herself.

5.1.1. A Lower Threshold Entry for Male Students?

Different to the female and transgender students mentioned above, the three male students who took part in this study did not need to be confronted with a new perspective on sex work before they envisioned entering the occupation themselves. The hypothesis thus presented itself that the impact of sex work stigma is less stringent for men. The idea of doing sex work came to the mind of the three students when they received a request from a potential client. When I asked Enrique to go back to his first steps into the sex industry, he pointed out the conversations that he has had on a gay chat site. As he said:

> I got the first proposal via Bullchat. It is a gay chat site, a bit of a sinister one, in which dubious things happen like people selling drugs. I look at it as the virtual equivalent of a park. At a certain point I thought, they are asking it again, I should have a look at it. From that point I decided that I wanted to have a closer look at my options.

The repeated requests made Eric curious how sex work would be like. Although he had some safety concerns, the stigma of sex work did not play a role in his decision whether or not to do sex work. When I asked him how his relative ease with the idea of working as a sex worker came about, he pointed out the impact of gender in his upbringing. As he said:

> I mean, it is not the case that my parents have taught me that I shouldn't slope down the pole or do anything like that. These are the kind of things they warn their daughters for, not their sons.

With 'sloping down the pole', Enrique referred to being engaged with commercial sex such as stripping or pole dancing. Enrique believed that the fact that he did not grow up with the idea that commercial sex is undesirable for men made it easier for him to consider sex work. He also connected this viewpoint with the greater acceptance of male sex work in society. As he put it:

> I have the idea that it is very different for men than for women.

Enrique exemplifies the idea that society is more permissive of male sex work than female sex work by pointing out how the first is looked upon within the Amsterdam gay scene. He said:

> Look, what I mean, for example, within the gay scene, they have a sauna, a place filled with naked gay men. It is not difficult to guess what happens there and that's completely normal. In that context, sex work actually makes a lot of sense.

I challenged Enrique by stating that the difference is that sex work is paid sex, to which he responded with:

> Yes, the same actions, only I was able to capitalise on them.

I asked Enrique whether capitalising on sex is not stigmatised. He then said:

> By some yes, [but] very [much] less in my opinion. Asking money for it, no, I don't think that that is stigmatised so much.

In addition to his experience of sex work as an occupation that raises less eyebrows when men are involved with it, the specific context of the Amsterdam gay scene in which sex work is perceived as a permissible variation of promiscuous sex then provided a low threshold for Enrique for becoming involved with sex work.

Tobias's first steps into the sex industry resemble how Enrique became involved with sex work. He also received requests to get paid for sex via online gay spaces and the fact that he proudly talked about these proposals gives the impression that he does not feel stigmatised by the suggestion

of accepting money in exchange for sex. When I asked Tobias to go back to how he came to the idea to become involved with sex work, he proudly said:

> Well, when you are 19 and you have the body of an athlete, then you get those kinds of inappropriate proposals.

The phenomenon that young men receive proposals to have sex for money when they enter gay spaces on the internet is also reported by other academics (Bimbi, 2007; Brennan, 2017; Morris, 2019). It is not unusual that those who receive the request consider it a compliment that other men are willing to pay for sex with them (Brennan, 2017; Morris, 2019). This is visible in Tobias's quote above in which he explains that he perceives invitations to have sex for money as a confirmation of his attractiveness. This should not only be seen in the light of the "physical-aesthetic-driven" nature of gay culture (Drummond, 2005, p. 270). As Enrique has pointed out, it is also connected to gender norms that permit or even encourage sexual promiscuity among men (Marlow, 1997; Pheterson, 1993; Pitcher, 2014; Scott & Kumar, 2022). Enrique's narrative gives the impression that this may be even more so within the context of the gay scene.

This stands in sharp contrast with how gender norms prohibit similar behaviour amongst women (Janssen, 2018; Pheterson, 1993; Pitcher, 2014). The difference between Tobias's quote above and Poppy's response to a complimentary remark made by someone that she "looks like a high-end escort" highlights this contrast. Poppy responded to the remark with:

> But hey, that is a hooker!

She did not want to be associated with this stigmatised role that she perceived as being detrimental to her identity as a woman. As I point out in chapter six, the fact that high-end escorts must meet stringent standards of beauty that are not attainable for most people essentially means that the remark might also be seen as a compliment. But in Poppy's case, that remark in no way compensated for the stigma of sex work.

Eventually, Poppy was able to put the stigma of sex work aside and indeed took a step towards becoming an escort. She decided that benefits such as the high income, time flexibility and the pleasure of working in this line of work outweighed the stigma. The next part of this chapter provides further insight into the varied motivations of Poppy and the other 21 (prospective) student sex workers for working in the sex industry.

5.2. Financial Motivations

Student sex work is seen in the light of the increased cost of education in the UK, Australia, the US and Canada in the last decade (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Betzer et al., 2014; J. Jones, 2019; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Lantz, 2005; Roberts et al., 2007a, 2012, 2013; Sanders et al., 2010; Sinacore

et al., 2014). In 2017, annual tuition fees were about 3,000 euro in Australia for domestic students (Universities Australia, 2020) around 5,000 euro in Canada (Shaker & MacDonald, 2013), approximately 9,000 euro at state universities in the US (The College Board, 2017) and above 10,000 euro in the United Kingdom (House of Commons Library, 2018). With tuition fees of about 2,000 euro a year, higher education is relatively affordable for Dutch and EU students in the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, 2017). Nevertheless, since the UK left the EU, the fees that Dutch institutions of higher education charge became the highest of all member states (Universities of Australia, 2020).

Moreover, with the introduction of the social loan system in September 2016, the government significantly reduced the financial aid provided to students who initiated their studies in this academic year and in the years thereafter. Besides tuition fees, students also have to cover maintenance costs, an obligatory private health insurance and study related expenses. Most universities are located in large cities where the cost of living is high (Roberts, 2010). The National Institute for Family Finance Information (2017) indicated that in 2017, national and European students need a budget of at least €1,082 when living independently. Non-European students need even more resources to be able to study because they have to cover the much higher institutional tuition fees. Considering the costs, higher education may not be easily affordable for every student in the Netherlands. Here, I analyse the extent to which the connection pointed out by studies on student sex work between the cost of education and the students' entry into the sex industry can also be made amongst (prospective) student sex workers in the Netherlands.

Six Dutch students entered higher education after the introduction of the social loan system. Considering that this group received significantly less government support to finance their studies compared to the previous generation, it seemed likely that they would feel greater pressure to earn money in sex work to make ends meet compared to earlier generations of students. The same could be said about the three European students who did not qualify for a bursary either. As for the study participant who was from outside Europe, on top of this she also had to cover her institutional tuition fees.

However, a more complex picture emerged. The students who took part in the study came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and some parents are more eager to support their children's education than others. Whilst taking out a loan is unpopular among most of the students, a minority of them did not experience this as a great problem. Several students also had other student jobs alongside sex work. The income from sex work is insecure and some students desired to have more stability. Others wanted to develop themselves in other areas, or they desired to build up a resume to enhance their future career.

Based on the interview excerpts, I was able to identify four groups of students with comparable economic profiles. Each of these groups provides insight into the role that the cost of education and the resources available to the students play in their motivation to work in the sex

industry or to consider doing so. Because of the sensitive nature of the topics I discussed with the students, I decided not to compromise their privacy further by questioning them on the income of their parents. It may be that this information is also unavailable to them. In the absence of detailed insight into income details, the interview excerpts aided me in categorising the students into different socio-economic groups.

5.2.1. Economically Privileged Students

The wealthiest group of student sex workers consisted of students with higher socio-economic backgrounds who received a significant amount of parental support. Sophie is one of them. Regarding the financial support she receives from her parents, she said:

> My parents don't have the same level of wealth as my rich clients. Nevertheless, they earn quite well. They built up savings to enable my sister and myself to study without getting into debts. I am super lucky. They ensured that I am always able to pay my rent and I could always pay for food.

Sophie acknowledges her financial privilege. In addition to her monthly budget, her parents also pay her tuition fees. She only has to cover what she refers to as “extra's” herself. Sophie can do so easily because she entered higher education before the introduction of the social loan system and qualifies for a basic bursary. She lives a comfortable lifestyle and studies without financial worries. Two other students found themselves in a similar financial situation. Veronique and Elina also received sufficient financial aid from their parents alongside governmental financial aid. After her divorce, Livia’s mother opened a court case to ensure that her father would pay her a generous monthly stipend until she turned 21. Now that she is above this age, she lives well off the money she receives from the tenants with whom she shares her apartment. She also makes a good living with her part-time job as a carer. On top of this, she receives a basic bursary.

At the time of the interview, Elina no longer received a basic bursary because she had studied for more than 4 years. She received parental aid and worked in retail where she had a relatively well-paid lower management position. Lauren describes her socioeconomic background as: “We are not super rich, but we're definitely comfortable”, did not receive a bursary as a non-European student. However, her parents paid both the institutional tuition fees and covered her maintenance costs. Whilst not being financially necessary, the students were eager to work as a sex worker. Regarding this, Sophie said:

> It was not like I needed the money, no. I presumed that I would like it [sex work] and that I would find it exciting.

When she became an escort, excitement was indeed one of the perks of the job for her. She said:

> Ordinary things are tiresome for me. I easily get bored, but not with this job. You meet a new man every time. Every time it is exciting. It remains very entertaining for me in a way that no other job would.

Beside the thrill of meeting new clients each time, Sophie was also eager to enter an occupation that others frowned upon. She said:

> I like everything that is a taboo.

Sophie felt excited about doing something that many people in society disapprove of. Sophie also enjoyed her ability to indulge herself in luxury:

> I like luxury. I like being treated as a princess. A man must give me enough money and take good care of me. Otherwise, I am not interested.

Whilst Sophie stressed that working as an escort was not as how it is represented in media where women receive jewels from their clients, she experiences a sense of luxury when she visits clients in expensive hotels and when she dines with them in fine restaurants. Elina had different reasons for liking her work as an escort. She said:

> I like meeting different people. They are mostly nice and often very interesting. I am attracted by the mysteriousness when I walk into a hotel. It also is a great ego boost. I was already happy with my appearance and now I also receive confirmation of that from others.

Elina likes the contact with her clients and the confirmation that she receives from them. The intrinsic motivations the students in this socio-economic group display fit within a student culture in which students are driven to experience pleasure, coined by Sanders and Hardy (2015) as the "pleasure dynamic" (p. 759). Both Sanders and Hardy (2015) and Simpson and Smith (2020) point out that students in the UK who work as strippers, experience pleasure by being able to work in the night-time economy in a job that resembles a students' night out. Unlike the study participants of Sanders and Hardy (2015) and Simpson and Smit (2020), the economically privileged student sex workers in this research (also) work during daytime and are involved with different types of sex work such as escorting. Owing to the different nature of their occupations, the type of pleasure they enjoy is also different. The one-on-one encounters that the students have with their clients without other people around enables them to get to know their clients and to enjoy being with them. Besides spending time with their clients, some students enjoy the air of luxury attached to the occupation.

Different from the other students in this socio-economic group, Livia was only to some extent intrinsically interested in her job as a sugar baby. She said:

> What I do like is to go out with them. Going for coffee. That way, you really get to know the clients. I feel that the sexual part is objectifying. I'm more interested in the human part.

Livia prefers to meet clients who only seek companionship and dislikes having sex with clients because this makes her feel objectified. Nevertheless, she offers both types of encounters because this enables her to earn more money. Whilst Livia does not need the income from sex work to sustain herself during her studies, the prospective of earning great sums of money triggered her into working as a sugar baby. She said:

> I feel the urge to earn great amounts of money. I want to add more money to my savings. That is really a big trigger for me to do this.

Livia constantly balances her desire to accumulate wealth with her negative feelings regarding having to have sex with clients.

Several other students chose sex work for practical reasons. For example, Lauren wanted to do sex work because of the flexible nature of the occupation. She said:

> It was really easy when I was writing my thesis. Like, write some and if I had time, I would just do some camming.

Similar to Lauren, Veronique also enjoyed the flexibility of her job. Besides this, the perspective of being able to earn a greater amount of money in a relatively short time-frame also attracted her. As she said:

> I could have chosen something else, but I was looking for something that would not cost me too much time, whilst it would still pay enough. It had to be something that I like. Besides this, it was important that I would still be able to undertake volunteering work. That is important for me, because this teaches me at least as much as what I learn at university.

Besides her desire to thrive in higher education, Veronique was eager to further develop herself and to contribute to society by undertaking volunteering work. The desire and/or the pressure to undertake extracurricular activities such as volunteering work alongside a demanding journey through higher education is widespread among students in the Netherlands (van Huisseling et al., 2018). Whilst Livia, Elina and Sophie made no reference to this in their interviews, the phenomenon that students manage multiple demands alongside their studies is prevalent across the rest of my study population. As Veronique explained, compared to traditional student jobs the greater money-to-time ratio and flexibility of sex work contributes to their ability to manage their very busy lifestyle.

The five students used their income from sex work to live comfortably during their studies. Regarding this, Elina said:

> Without sex work, I would have to reduce the luxurious things in my life. For example, I could also eat out less.

If Elina would not work as a sex worker, her income would be sufficient to cover her necessities as a student. If this would fall back, she would still be able to make ends meet by changing her high

consumption lifestyle. Besides living a more comfortable life, Sophie also used the money she earned in sex work to buy luxurious consumer goods that would otherwise be unattainable for her as a student. As she said:

> I find it very exciting that I am able to afford expensive bags and shoes, whilst I am just a young student. When you look into my bedroom, you see a bunch of expensive bags.

The ability to possess these expensive bags gave Sophie a sense of pride. Besides enjoying a greater purchasing power during their studies, Sophie, Livia, Veronique and Elina were also able to build up savings whilst they were in higher education. For example, as Livia explained:

> I have about 9,000 euros in my savings account and 3,000 in my checking's account.

The other students did not share precise details, but they all confirmed that their multiple sources of income enabled them to save for their future. This reality stands in sharp contrast with a substantial part of the students in this study whom, in the absence of income from sex work, would have to take out a loan to be able to study.

This section has showed that whilst the financial incentive did play a role in the motivations of economically privileged students for doing sex work, the money from sex work played a very different role in the lives of these students compared to the role it played in the lives of the other groups of students presented in the next sections. Different to the groups of students that I will discuss in the next sections, the economically privileged student sex workers did not need the income from sex work to be able to study without accumulating debts. Instead, their financial motive for working as a sex worker was to increase the enjoyment of their journey through higher education and to accumulate resources for their future. Besides this motivation, most of the students in this group also worked as sex workers to experience different forms of pleasure.

5.2.2. Middle-income Students Without a Bursary

The 6 Dutch students who entered higher education after the introduction of the social loan system found themselves in a less favourable financial position compared to the group of students discussed in the previous section. The students did not receive a basic bursary and because the income of their parents was above a certain threshold, they did not qualify for a top-up bursary. Two European students in the same socioeconomic group did not receive any non-repayable support from the Dutch government either because of their nationality. Fortunately, most parents were able to provide some contribution towards their child's education. They paid the tuition fees or they provided a small monthly allowance. Aside from this scenario, most students had to cover the largest part of their education themselves.

Only Lea found herself in a more favourable position. Her parents had built up savings to cover both her bachelor's and her master's degree. Because she still lived with her mother, these

savings enabled her to live a modest student life. The parents of Tobias had also saved money for his studies, but this only allowed him to cover his bachelor's degree. He financially relied on himself for his master's course. Before they entered the sex industry, most of the students in this socio-economic group had to borrow significant amounts of money. Most students were very unhappy with this. For example, Poppy said:

> I used to take out a loan, but I stopped doing so when I started to work as an escort. I hated it that I had to borrow money. My debts are as high as 20,000 euro. With three clients a month, I am unable to pay it off. I try to ease the pain by thinking that I will get a better paid job because of my education.

Sex work enabled Poppy and most other students in the same socio-economic group to stop further increasing their debts. However, despite the unpopularity of taking out a loan among most students, none of them felt pressured to do sex work to avoid having to borrow money. From a number of other options, the students made the choice to (partly) finance their studies this way. The quote below from Tobias illustrates this choice. When I asked whether he would have enrolled for his master's course without the income from sex work, he said:

> Well, then I would have done it differently. Taking out a loan or moving to part-time. Or maybe giving up my sports [Tobias was a semi-professional sports person. Giving this up would enable him to work elsewhere]. No, I never considered not doing the Master. But sex work did facilitate it.

As Tobias mentions here, besides taking out a loan the students can search for employment in other sectors simultaneous to their full-time or part-time studies. Amongst these different possibilities, the students saw sex work as the most attractive option to finance their studies. Similar to Veronique, most students in this socio-economic group referred to the flexibility and the high money-to-time ratio of the occupation as one of the main reasons why sex work suited them.

This perspective has much to do with the performance stress that the students experience. For the cohort of students to which the study participants in my research belong, the pressure to thrive in higher education is high (Dopmeijer et al., 2023; Expert Centre on Inclusive Education [ECIO] & Trimbos Institute, 2023). The factors that cause performance stress are, among other things, the pressure to study fast to avoid building up large debts under the social loan system, the fear of first year students of the *binding study advice* which means that students have to leave their course when their results are below a certain standard and expectations from peers, potential employers and the students themselves to be successful (Dopmeijer et al., 2023).

Considering that the generation of students the student sex workers in this research belong to have ample opportunities in life compared to earlier generations, the risk of being unable to take advantage of these opportunities is significant (Council of Public Health and Society [RVS], 2018; Spangenberg & Lampert, 2009). Being unsuccessful is often perceived as being the students' own

fault (Ibid.). Social media which enables students to compare their achievements with those of others also enhances performance stress (RVS, 2018). The ability to generate a high income in a short time frame in a way that does not compromise their studies as traditional student jobs would aids the students in their attempt to meet their own and others' demand to be successful.

Whilst it is likely that students in other countries also experience pressure to be successful within higher education, especially when considering the high financial investment the students have to make to be able to study, none of the studies on student sex work discussed in the literature review connected performance stress with students engagement with the sex industry. When I asked Enrique why he chose to work in the sex industry, he made a clear connection between the pressure he experiences as a students and how his involvement with sex work provided a solution for this problem. He stated that:

> Sex work is very flexible. It gives more flexibility than any other job. That suits me very well because I undertake two studies simultaneously. Maths and physics. I don't work every week. That is simply impossible. Sex work is ideal in this respect. I do it whenever I have time. And when I'm lucky, it leads to a generous amount of money. Considering the performance pressure I experience as a student, sex work suits me better than for example a job in a café.

Similar to Enrique, Lea also studies for two degrees at the same time and shared a similar viewpoint when she said:

> With this job, I choose when I want to work. It is not like working in the supermarket, a job in which you are expected to be there according to a certain schedule. I have deadlines and exams. I can only work when I have enough time for it. That is just perfect for me.

The flexibility of her job as a webcam model enables Lea to earn an additional income whenever her studies allow her to do so. Similar to Enrique and Lea, Paulina is also a very ambitious student. She has not worked in the sex industry but considered doing so because she believes that the flexibility and the higher earnings will contribute to her ability to be successful in higher education. In the quote below, she explains how her current squire job limits her ability to be succeed:

> The Master is demanding and I am not here to take education as whatever it comes. I have always been an excellent student. I don't like the perspective of not being able to have enough space and time to work towards the best I can. It is not about being excellent. It is about giving it the best you can in something that you like. I am not able to do that in the uni because I have to work. I have to pay the rent, otherwise I cannot live.

With 'taking education as whatever it comes', Paulina refers to the idea of not taking her education seriously while objecting to the idea. Paulina is eager to be her best self academically, but she finds it difficult to do so because she works for sixteen hours a week in retail. She considers becoming a sex worker in the hope that this will enable her to make a living in a way that better consolidates with her academic ambitions in terms of payment, hours and flexibility.

The high money-to-time ratio and the flexibility of sex work also enabled the students to dedicate time to extracurricular activities. For example, Tobias said:

> I was a member of a student society, well, actually, I was the member of two organisations. Yes, I was always busy. I did evening classes in Spanish. I studied full-time. I was also occupied with my athletics. And I did sex work. Besides this, I also had a boyfriend.

With a traditional student job, it would not be feasible for Tobias to be able to manage his multiple activities.

Alongside the practical benefits of the occupation, the students also experience different forms of pleasure in their work in the sex industry. For example, Frida said:

> The work is nice. They take you out for dinner. You have interesting conversations. People inspire me and I inspire people.

Besides enjoying the encounters with clients, Frida also enjoyed the attention she received from them. She said:

> I am very excited about the game of seduction. This is very interesting for me. You get so much confirmation from clients that they like you and that they find you beautiful. This really does me very well.

Similar to Elina, the confirmation of her attractiveness from clients enhances her self-confidence. For Enrique, the contact with his clients is the most rewarding aspect of his job. He explains:

> For me, it does not have to be sexually stimulating. It is all about the human aspect. For me, human beings are an interesting species. I'm interested in body language and subtle communication about desires.

After undertaking a part time job in IT, in which he worked in solitude at home, Enrique thought that it was better for him to be able to work with people.

Similar to students in a few other studies (Clouet, 2008; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; van der Wagen et al., 2010), Poppy and Paulina were attracted by the controversial nature of the occupation. For example, Poppy admitted that:

> I love special, non-mainstream things. I like to do things that are special and unique. What I like about this is that it stands outside of society. Everybody knows that the demand exists, but people nevertheless judge the people who work in this field.

Poppy experienced pleasure in going against the grain and taking on a job that society disapproves of. Paulina was interested in an occupation in the sex industry for the same reason. She said:

> I get bored easily. People do the same stuff all over again. I'm interested in things that don't follow the script. I like things that are not supposed to be done.

Earlier, I explained that Sophie was also attracted to sex work because of the controversial nature of the occupation. The students are not alone in this. According to Sanders and Brents (2010) and van der Wagen et al. (2010), the thrill of the violation of the taboo is an important part of the excitement of being involved in the sex industry for many sex workers. Poppy, Paulina and Sophie looked at society's rejection of sex work in a gender-neutral way. In contrast, a larger group of five students with different socio-economic backgrounds concur with Benoit et al. (2020), Koken (2010. 2012), Marlowe (1997) and Pheterson (1993) that the stigma of sex work is gendered in nature and is deemed to be much more controversial for women than for men. In section 5.4., I further elaborate on how their feminist viewpoint relates to their desire to work in the sex industry.

5.2.3. Students Who Re-enter Higher Education for a Second Degree

Francis and Ariane had obtained a degree in the past and re-entered higher education to realise a career change. Before becoming an escort, Francis was already able to pay for her part-time studies in education because she worked part time as a teacher. Regarding her income, Francis said:

> I already had a good income before I started working as an escort. I work in education for a few days a week and my expenses are low. I also have a few extra hours as a tutor. I was already able to make a living and go on holiday several times a year.

Students in the Netherlands who enrol for a second degree of the same level normally have to pay the much higher institutional tuition fees, but this was not the case for Francis. Because of staff shortage in the educational sector, her degree was excluded from this rule. Besides this, tuition fees for part time studies are lower. Her lower tuition fees, in combination with her low cost of living and the income from her two jobs enabled Francis to study comfortably. Instead of needing the income to be able to study, Francis was eager to work as an escort because she liked the job. She said:

> You sit on the couch with wine, talking with a nice man or woman. You go to fancy restaurants. I have also been to a spa with a client. It's very nice.

Nevertheless, she also enjoyed the financial rewards. She said:

> I do this job because I like it. But of course, the money is very nice. However, as soon as I'm paid, I spend it because I don't have a particular purpose for the money.

For Francis, the money she earned in sex work enabled her to live a comfortable lifestyle.

Ariane, who considered working in the sex industry when we met, anticipated that she would also derive pleasure from working as an escort. She is one of the students for whom an occupation in the sex industry aligns with her feminist viewpoints. Besides her political motivation for considering entering the sex industry, she also needed money to sustain herself. She migrated from Latin America for a second degree and whilst she brought a large amount of money with her, after staying in the

Netherlands for a while, she had reached the point that she had few savings left. With her European passport she qualified for statutory tuition fees and a tuition fee loan, but as a mature student she could not access a maintenance loan. She had undertaken a traditional student job in the Netherlands, but it had cost her some effort to find employment in the area in which she lived as few jobs were available for people who do not speak Dutch. In addition to these problems, as a mature student she faced age discrimination when she applied for part time low waged jobs that are normally undertaken by younger students. Ariane presumed that sex work would solve her financial problems and enable her to continue studying in the Netherlands. As she explains:

> I envisioned that this activity [working as a sex worker] could be a source of income and I need to find new resources because my savings are running out soon. Besides this, it can be something that I can conciliate with my studies and internship. It gives me flexibility that some other jobs wouldn't.

Besides enabling her to make a living, Ariane also anticipated that sex work would be easy to combine with her studies. Whilst Ariane had limited alternative options of being able to continue studying in the Netherlands without sex work, it would not be justified to claim that she was pressured to do sex work. Owing to her previous qualification and work experience, she was able to build up a career without an additional degree within and outside the Netherlands, entailing that she would experience no difficulties in sustaining herself. However, Ariane chose to remain in higher education and chose to enter the sex industry. This was both a pragmatic choice and a choice made out of the desire to become involved in the occupation.

5.2.4. Students Who Struggle Financially

A group of seven student sex workers found themselves in a financially more challenging situation compared to the students in the other groups. Five of the students in this group entered higher education before 2016 and received a basic bursary. Three also qualified for a top-up bursary as low-income students. One student studied at the Open University and covered all the expenses herself, while another student only qualified for a tuition fees loan because she was over 30 years of age. Luz was the only student who received a small amount of parental support. The parents of the other students had insufficient means to help their children financially.

In two cases, the roles were reversed. Daphne migrated from an Eastern European country that is not part of the EU to the Netherlands and supported her parents financially, whilst Lisa occasionally had to lend her parents money. The ability to earn a good income in a short period of time was one of the reasons why sex work attracted the students. As Luz said:

> I earn more than I would in the supermarket. It is about four to five times more.

Being able to earn greater sums of money in a shorter time-frame than in traditional student jobs aided her in her ability to successfully complete her degree. As she put it:

> I have to work less and can therefore spend more time on my studies.

Naomi shared a similar experience, stating that:

> I could cover most of my expenses by working as a sex worker now and then. It enabled me to focus on my studies. My situation was so different to the situation of other students who worked for twenty to thirty hours alongside their studies. I did that in one day. In one day I earned more than what others make in a week.

Different from other students in her network, Naomi was able to generate a high income in a very short time-frame which enabled her to have sufficient time left over to spend on her studies. She also enjoyed the fact that her job offered her a greater level of flexibility than most other jobs would. She said:

> For me, sex work was the best job. I have had more jobs during my studies, but sex work suites me better. It is very flexible.

The flexibility aided Naomi in completing her degree. This is also the case for Liam. He said:

> Sex work gives me a very flexible source of income. I can decide when I want to work, how much I work and how much money I want to make. That is very important for my studies. My job has to be flexible. I have no time.

Jobs other than sex work would be more difficult to combine with Liam's studies and the extracurricular activities he undertakes. He is active in advocacy work in different fields and he travelled a lot. He might also have further increased his existing debts by taking out another loan. However, similar to most students in his socio-economic group, he is very anxious about doing so. He said:

> My debts are already so large. I have studied for so long. I don't even want to talk about it. It got out of control.

Luz was also unwilling to borrow money. She said:

> I really don't like borrowing money. You create debts. You are spending money that is not yours.

Similarly, Naomi said:

> I have never borrowed money, and I never will. I am very afraid of doing that… I don't like the situation in which someone owes you money. I have always managed to avoid

> doing so. Borrowing money costs money. I saw people around me taking out loans, not only for their studies but also to spend on other things, which appeared strange to me.

Naomi relates her fear of taking out a loan to the fact that she grew up in a low-income family. As she noted:

> When I left my mum's house, I already had some savings. That was mandatory for me. I think that this is because I come from a poor background. I need to have resources to fall back on, in case something happens. I am only too familiar with living by very little means. That is why I'm very careful with my money.

The interview excerpts illustrate that most students in this socio-economic group are significantly more concerned about borrowing money compared to the students in the more prosperous groups. The phenomenon that less wealthy students are more fearful of taking out a loan is also evidenced elsewhere (Callander & Jackson, 2008; Sanders & Hardy 2015; van den Broek et al., 2019).

Unlike Sanders and Hardy (2015) and Lantz (2003) who feared that, at the time of their publications, student sex workers' degrees would not necessarily lead to a job in line with their qualification, none of the students in my research shared this concern. The students saw the possibility to start a career in their desired field upon graduation as a given. For example, Daphne said:

> This isn't a job in which people stay for a long period of time. Especially when they are highly educated. Sooner or later you will get your degree.

In other words, Daphne takes it for granted that the possession of a degree eventually enables students to make the transition into a mainstream job.

The students' trust in being able to find a job after graduation may be related to the prosperous Dutch labour market. Whilst the labour market for lower-educated and vocationally-trained people had not fully recovered from the 2008s Great Recession in the years in which my fieldwork took place (2018-2019), the number of jobs available for highly educated people was high in the Netherlands compared to other EU countries (CBS, 2018). Whilst concerns regarding the labour market upon graduation did not play a role in the students' fear of taking out a loan, the idea that the state owes the students' money was by itself enough reason for most of the students with a lower socio-economic background to experience stress. The fact that student debts can be discharged for people who live on insufficient means (Government of the Netherlands, 2023) did not lessen the students' worries.

The interview excerpts of the students in the less wealthy socio-economic group showed that students who are to a greater extent dependent on the income from sex work to be able to study than the students in the more prosperous groups, can also have intrinsic motivations for working in this sector. This was the case among six of the seven students. For example, as Daphne explained:

> When clients say, 'You really see me, you enjoy being with me and I like that', I realise why I'm so eager to do this job.

Daphne experienced pleasure in being appreciated by her clients. For Lisette, it is also important to be able to provide a valuable contribution to her clients' lives. As she put it:

> It makes me feel good to support others in feeling good about themselves.

Besides this, she also enjoys the sexual aspect of the job:

> Sometimes, I also like the sex and the game of seduction. But this very much depends on the client.

Depending on the customer, Lisette also experienced her work as sexually stimulating.

Unlike the six students who were also intrinsically motivated to work in the sex industry, Lina did not experience much pleasure in her work. Lina differs from the other students in this study in the sense that she is not a young student boosting her income whilst being at university. Instead, she is a mature student who, after a long career as a sex worker across a variety of sectors, studies in the hope that this will eventually enable her to leave the sex industry. Lina did not meet the required entrance qualifications for higher education but passed a test for people aged 21 years and over that also provides entrance to higher education. When I asked Lina why she became a student, she explained:

> Sex work is no longer a suitable job when you get older. I want to have more options when the time is there that I want to leave.

Besides desiring another career later in life, she was also motivated by the perspective of regaining custody over her children that were taken away by youth services. As she explained:

> I want to show child services that I am not an idiot.

Lina hoped that her degree will aid her in her child custody re-evaluation. What Lina disliked most about her job are clients who seek attention without making an actual booking, also referred to as *time wasters* (Sanders, 2005b, p. 55) and clients who do not turn up at their appointments, who are in the Netherlands often referred to as *fakers* (van Lier & van Gelder, 2009, p 95). I will further elaborate on the emotional impact of both phenomena in chapter seven.

For Lina it was not possible to sustain herself during her studies with a maintenance loan. As a student aged above 30 years old, Lina could only borrow money for tuition fees. Whilst the Dutch government generously supports organisations who assist sex workers in leaving the industry, this does not help Lina either because within these subsidies no money is allocated to make a career change possible via higher education.

Lina's alternative for remaining in higher education would be to enter the general labour market without a degree, but she saw this perspective as infeasible because she presumed that she would not be able to sustain herself with a minimum wage job. Research on career change for sex workers indeed report the difficulties that sex workers experience in adapting themselves to a

minimum income (Timmermans et al., 2019). Recognising that Lina could also choose to reduce her cost of living, I nevertheless argue that compared to the other student sex workers in this study, Lina's engagement with sex work comes into being in the context of having less choice.

5.2.5. What Can Be Learned from the Different Economic Profiles?

The overview presented above shows that student sex workers in the Netherlands with a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and varying levels of financial resources at their disposal work as sex workers or consider doing so. Therefore, different than suggested by existing studies on student sex work undertaken in other countries, this study about student sex work in the Netherlands points out that student sex work in this country cannot be solely understood through the lens of financial hardship.

Several students had plenty of resources available for their education without having to rely on their income from sex work. Students who had to finance their studies without parental and non-repayable governmental aid, who feared taking out a loan or who could only borrow money for tuition fees, found themselves in a different situation. For them, the money earned in sex work played a more important role in their ability to study. This does not necessarily have to be a cause for concern, as the interview excerpts showed that students being motivated to do sex work by greater financial necessity does not preclude enjoying their work.

The intrinsic motivations for working in the sex industry were widely present among most of the student sex workers, including those with fewer means to study. The students experienced different forms of pleasure, such as the ability to talk with clients, to spend time with them and to experience a sense of luxuriousness. The students also benefited greatly from the high money-to-time ratio of the occupation and its flexible nature. Such benefits enable the students to earn money without compromising their academic ambitions.

At the same time, most students were not solely dependent of sex work. The largest part of the students could also access one or more alternative sources of income to finance their studies. A loan for tuition fees was available to all EU and Dutch students and with the exception of the two students aged thirty and above, the students could also apply for a maintenance loan (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.-a). Any type of loan will be discharged for people who live on a minimum income for either 15 or 35 years, depending on the type of loan (Ibid.).

Ultimately, whilst studying in higher education can significantly improve the students' future lives in terms of income, job security and status amongst others, the students can also enter the labour market without it. With the exception of Lina and Lisette, all students possess what the government of the Netherlands refers to as an entrance qualification for the labour market (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.-b), i.e., the minimum required level of secondary or tertiary education to have a fair chance of being able to find a job. Finding a suitable job without possessing this educational level is not impossible, but it quite likely leads to a very modest income. In this light, it is important to

recognise that adjusting to a lower income may be challenging for student sex workers who are used to having a higher income through sex work.

In chapter two, I suggested that researchers on student sex work should pay extra attention to international student sex workers and student sex workers of colour (who may be of any nationality) because these groups may find themselves in a more vulnerable position; for example, because of greater financial hardship. However, the small group of international EU and non-EU students in this study were part of the middle- and high-income groups I presented in this chapter. Similar to many non-EU students in the Netherlands (Popescu et al., 2021), Lauren comes from a well-off family and received sufficient parental support to be able to study abroad. As middle-income students with an EU-background, Tobias and Paulina had both received parental support, but not to the same extent as Lauren. Ariane, who holds dual citizenship (EU and non-EU), has a middle-class background but as a mature student she had to depend upon herself to finance the additional degree she desired to obtain. Drawing conclusions based upon a group of only four people is difficult, but the overview supplied here points in the direction that not all foreign student sex workers in the Netherlands necessarily face financial hardship.

In the year in which the fieldwork for this study took place, 16% of all Dutch students in higher education had a non-Western migrant background (van den Broek et al., 2019). Citizens fall under this definition when at least one of their parents is born outside the EU, the USA, Oceania, Indonesia or Japan (Ibid.). Members of this ethnic group face a significant income gap in comparison to other citizens in the Netherlands (Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, 2019). I was not able to recruit Dutch student sex workers of non-Western descent, but if I would have been able to establish contact with members of this group, there is a likeliness that they would be overrepresented in the poorest socioeconomic profile I described in this chapter. However, different to international EU and non-EU students, Dutch students with a low-income background can access income-based non-repayable governmental aid which to some extent lessens their financial precariousness.

5.2.6. Implications of Sex Work from a Financially Privileged Starting-point

Most of the student sex workers who took part in this study find themselves in a relatively privileged position compared to sex workers who may work in this sector without having suitable alternative options to make a living. This finding has implications for the students' work experiences. Liam explains that his awareness of his ability to access other means to live enhances his well-being at work. As he said:

> This very much helps me to look critically at what clients I want to accept.

Similarly, Tobias explained:

> I do sex work from a very privileged starting point. I am so lucky that I am not financially dependent on the job and for this reason I can select my clients.

Existing research also confirms that choosing sex work from a privileged standpoint with alternative options besides sex work, correlates positively with the level of choice that sex workers have in terms of which clients they want to accept (Sanders, 2005b). Whilst the student sex workers in this study who work for third parties can also reject clients, this is quite likely easiest for independent student sex workers who recruit and select their own clients (Koken, 2012). Doing so in the absence of severe financial pressure makes it easier to be selective, as is suggested by Liam. In addition to being able to reject unpleasant or unsafe clients, less financial pressure also strengthens the students' negotiation power with customers and makes it less likely that clients will trespass their boundaries (van den Dries, 2021). The students' favourable position upon entering the occupation also gives them a better position vis à vis third parties. When they are unhappy with managerial practices, it does not put them in a financially difficult position to leave.

Van der Wagen et al (2010) and VanWesenbeeck (1994, 2011) also argue that sex workers entering the occupation from an advantageous position find it easier to create more favourable working conditions for themselves and are better equipped to stand up for their rights. In this context, they "may be less easily perceived as 'cheap'" (VanWesenbeeck, 2006, p. 637), which leads to more respectful treatment, enhancing their self-confidence and work experience as sex workers (Ibid.). Choosing sex work from a favourable starting point also enhances the ability of sex workers to manage the emotional demands of their occupation (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Sanders, 2005b). Westerik (2010) even points out that positive motivations for entry correlate positively with an increased self-confidence once sex workers have left the job.

In this section, I explained how the student sex workers' favourable position within what Benoit (2021), Bettio et al. (2017) and Sawicki et al. (2019) refer to as the continuum of choice, i.e. their position within a scale that ranges from being dependent of sex work for survival and the choice to do sex work amongst several feasible alternatives, leads to more positive experiences in sex work. However, this does not provide insight in the full picture. In chapter 6, I present an intersectional analysis of how in addition to different levels of financial need, different levels of privilege in other domains impact upon their experiences. These levels may apply to race, nationality, ability to speak Dutch, appearance, age, educational and cultural capital and the different sex work strata in which these students work.

5.3. Rejecting Precarious Labour in Traditional Student Jobs

The rejection of unjust labour practices in the general labour market has provided, alongside other motivations, an additional incentive for working in the sex industry for students across the different socio-economic groups. Across the EU, the labour market has become increasingly

precarious in a phenomenon that impacts young people disproportionately (Berry & McDaniel, 2022; Koukiadaki & Katsaroumpas, 2017) and is also gendered (Sanders & Hardy, 2013). Without further specifying the data on age and gender, the studies undertaken in the Netherlands show that Dutch citizens with a non-Western background are more likely to work under precarious conditions (de Winter-Koçak et al., 2023). Precarious labour consists of but is not limited to low payment, short-term contracts, zero-hours contracts, few guaranteed working hours, false self-employment and the absence of benefits such as sick leave (Koukiadaki & Katsaroumpas, 2017).

Neoliberal deregulation of the labour market is not a phenomenon unique to the EU. Indeed, a few other studies on student sex work undertaken elsewhere also pointed out a connection between poor labour conditions and earnings in mainstream occupations traditionally occupied by students and students involved with the sex industry (in Canada: Sinacore et al., 2014, in the UK: Hardy & Sanders, 2015 and Simson & Beer, 2022, in the US: J. Jones, 2022 and in Australia: Lantz, 2005).

For the 4 student sex workers and 2 students who considered entering the sex industry, the rejection of precarious labour in traditional student jobs in retail and hospitality is one of the reasons why sex work appealed to them. It may be that the critical thinking they developed within higher education plays a role in their critical assessment of their lived experiences in precarious labour. Five out of the six students who were eager to work as a sex worker in response to poor labour conditions elsewhere were social sciences students. Discussion of the neoliberal transformation of the labour market (and of other domains of life) is not alien to this field of studies.

Lauren is one of the students who was motivated to do sex work against the backdrop of precarious labour conditions in hospitality. She temporarily interrupted her work behind the windows to work in a restaurant because she felt stigmatised by her boyfriend because of her job. Once she started working, she learned that her labour rights were not respected. She explains:

> My manager lied about the contract. She gives the contract in Dutch. So, the people who don't speak Dutch cannot read them… She also lies about how we can terminate our contract. I have a zero-hour contract, so I can quit whenever I want. But she says that I have to give a month's notice.

Lauren relates the precarious labour conditions to the particular sector in which she works (hospitality). As she said:

> I have heard from everybody else who has worked in a restaurant that this work is hard and that all the employers would always try to exploit you… I have even heard from my manager that this is just the way it is, especially in the Netherlands. And that only very few people actually are fair and go behind their employees. Besides that, you are expendable.

Lauren found it unacceptable to be treated like this, which motivates her to restart her work in the sex industry. She revalued the autonomy she has behind the windows in saying that:

> In window prostitution I paid my taxes, I paid my room. Everything else I did for myself. It was so much better. Also, the hours were a lot better. Just healthier for me.

Whilst Lauren did not hide the downsides associated with her work behind the windows, this job suited her better on the whole. Luz shared a comparable narrative. For a while, she was fed up with her work as an erotic masseuse and wanted to be seen as "someone who is normal. Not someone who takes their clothes off". It could be argued that her choice to move to a traditional student job was mediated by internalised stigma. Similar to Lauren's case, her new job also resulted in disappointment. She said:

> I had to work very hard. I did not get much in return. It tired me… I don't want to do it again. It was hard work for little money.

For Luz, the hard work against a low remuneration was not worth it. However, this was not the only aspect of her job with which she was unhappy. She also disliked the fact that she could not undertake leisure activities during the weekend. She said:

> I had to be available every weekend. It was difficult to get a day off.

Luz did not know that her employer had no right to oblige her to work on her zero-hour contract. She returned to the massage parlour where she was in charge of her own working hours.

Iris considered becoming an escort because she desired to have enough money to move out of her parents' house and because she was excited about the idea of taking on this job. Her poor experiences of working in retail also contributed to her motivation to become an escort. She explains:

> They [the owners of the shoe shop in which she is employed] often send you home. There is not always much work, so then you work only 6 hours instead of 8, which lessens your pay. They can do that on a zero-hour contract.

Iris was very unhappy with this practice. But what also annoyed Iris was that her employer had no intention to provide a solution for the physical impact of her work:

> When I am on my feet for four hours, I start to feel it. But they would hardly allow me to sit for five minutes.

As she continued:

> When you are standing in the shoe shop again, having no break and being desperate to go to the toilet whilst being unable to, yes, that motivates me to seriously look at it [the possibility to work in the sex industry].

Iris's employer does not violate the labour law. Nevertheless, the little consideration that he or she has for her health and well-being contributed to Iris's motivation to explore her options as a sex worker. Similar to Iris, Paulina also considers working as a sex worker against the backdrop of negative

experiences in traditional student jobs. Regarding the impact on her health of a past job in a kitchen, she said that:

> I have been working in this restaurant for six months and I got burned here. And I have so many cuts. I was slicing ham; you know, the slicing machine. I sliced my finger. I also had problems with my back. You lift weights all the time… I was dirty all day.

Paulina's job had a negative impact on her health. She argued that if she would have to invest her body in her work anyway, then she would rather do that against a much better enumeration in a lesser amount of time such as in sex work. Paulina evaluated this benefit against the stigma attached to the occupation. As she said:

> The difference is how it is accepted. We accept that you burn yourself, cut yourself, have problems with your knees and back in a job in the kitchen. The idea is just how we have legitimised it.

Paulina disagreed with the fact that precarious jobs are more accepted in society compared to sex work, whilst people may have valid reasons why sex work suits them better. However, the stigma of sex work is a real problem and for this reason Paulina considered very carefully whether or not she would enter the profession.

Unlike the five students mentioned in this section, two of the students who worked in mainstream jobs alongside their studies and their job in the sex industry were very satisfied with their occupation. Frida and Elina worked in retail where they were paid above the law on minimum wage and where they were also able to acquire lower management roles. Regarding her job, Frida said:

> It pays less [compared to sex work], but I do have a permanent contract and I am a team lead. After all, it does not pay too badly. I am someone who thinks about everything that can go wrong. I am very scared that they no longer want to work with me when I do something they don't like such as being late for an appointment. I don't want to be left with nothing. In the store, I do have a permanent contract which gives me stability.

Frida is aware of the fact that her income from sex work is an insecure income that she can potentially loose. Whilst her job in retail pays less, the job gives her financial stability. Both Frida and Elina use the stable income from their mainstream job to compensate for the irregular and insecure nature of their earnings from sex work.

The preference of 6 (prospective) student sex workers for working in the sex industry rather than in the mainstream labour sector because of their negative experiences in the latter, challenges the idea that sex work is always a last resort and that mainstream occupations are *a priori* preferred. At the same time, sex work is associated with trade-offs such as the insecure and irregular nature of the occupation. To compensate for this shortfall, other students such as Frida and Elina manage both

occupations simultaneously. The phenomenon that sex workers are employed both within and outside of the sex industry, also referred to as duality (Bowen, 2021) exposes the precariousness of both options (Ibid). Several (prospective) student sex workers find their earnings too low in mainstream work, and argue that their labour rights are lacking, whilst in sex work, other student sex workers are worried about the financial insecurity associated with the occupation. The lack of social security under the fiscal opting-in scheme may also motivate sex workers to opt for duality, but none of the students who managed both occupations simultaneously indicated that they did so for this reason.

5.4. Political and Intellectual Drivers for Entering the Sex Industry

In section 5.2., I pointed out that similar to student sex workers in the UK (Sanders & Hardy, 2015; Simpson & Smith, 2020), the student sex workers in this study want to work in the sex industry because they want to derive pleasure from their work. Many of the students enjoyed the social aspect of their job and the contact with their clients.

A small group of students in this study also anticipated deriving pleasure from acting out their political beliefs in their work in the sex industry. Three of the student sex workers and two students who considered becoming a sex worker, were interested in working as a sex worker because this aligns with their feminist convictions. Two students did not frame their entry into the profession as being motivated by particular feminist beliefs, but once they were engaged with sex work they were eager to apply their feminist thoughts to their occupation, which was one of the aspects of the job they enjoyed.

The phenomenon that highly educated women who strive to change gender inequality chose for sex work because of their feminist convictions challenges the radical feminist framing of sex work as the exploitation of women discussed in chapter three. I have witnessed at conferences organised by sex workers' rights groups that feminist sentiments exist widely among sex workers and that they can also be drivers for working in the sex industry. However, the existence of such sentiments is rarely evidenced in research.

During my lengthy literature review on (student) sex work, I only found three studies who discuss the phenomenon. Chapkis (1997) and Lucas (2005) reported that in the late twentieth century, sex workers in the United States worked as sex workers because this suited their feminist viewpoints. Then, in the early twenty-first century, Haeger and Deil-Amen (2010) refer to an American student who (also) sought to work in the sex industry because it suited her feminist agenda. Different from the students in my research, this student was disappointed with the outcomes of her approach to her work. Her clients used the pornographic images to achieve arousal without taking on her emancipatory viewpoint on sexuality. In sharp contrast to this student, the women in this study felt very fulfilled by approaching their job from a feminist standpoint.

The five study participants who were interested in working in the sex industry because of their feminist convictions are all cisgender women, of whom three did a master in Gender Studies. One student studied artificial intelligence and considered enrolling for a minor in Gender Studies while another student studied journalism. Whilst their studies did, in most cases, not bring them directly to the idea to become a sex worker, the theoretical insights they gained at university, the critical thinking they developed during their studies and the networks they became part of as students did impact upon this decision. This was most visible among the students who studied Gender Studies. Similar to other students in this academic discipline (Griffin & Hanmer, 2005), the study participants became interested in this field of studies because of past experiences with social exclusion and discrimination and/or because of their own or their parents' involvement in advocacy work for social justice.

Ariane's history mainly exemplifies the first route of entry, whilst she also had a background in feminist activism before she became involved with Gender Studies. Before Ariane migrated to the Netherlands to re-enter higher education, she had a well-paid job in a male-dominated field. She faced several occasions of sexual harassment at work. Ariane had to travel a lot and during these trips she frequently had to deal with sexist comments. As Ariane explains:

> Most of the time I was the only woman in an event. I heard many patronising sexist comments. Some men were really aggressive. They said: 'I want to take you out'. I just tried to do my work, and then a stupid douchebag comes along who reduces you as if you were there to serve his sexual needs.

Ariane became very critical of the sexual harassment she had to endure at work, as well as with the normalisation of it. She also witnessed how men of high status, who were in heteronormative marriages, paid for sex when they travelled and observed how this practice was seemingly legitimised in the industry in which she worked. This observation sparked her interest in what Ariane refers to as the political role of sex work. As she said:

> I think that it is this interaction with men [the harassment], that helped me to understand something about sex work in a clearer way than other women would, who do not have my experiences.

Ariane's experiences with her male co-workers and business partners made her realise it would match her political agenda to get paid for sex by men who take it for granted that she would satisfy their desires without any returns. A student who would probably understand Ariane's motivations for exploring her options in the sex industry was Iris, a journalism student and self-defined feminist. Similar to Ariane, Iris has also endured workplace-related sexual harassment. As a shop assistant, men occasionally harassed her verbally or even touched her. Although she knows that sexual harassment at work is an offence, Iris received little support from her management. Similar to Ariane, her experiences at work made her wonder whether she should not take power into her own hands by

offering sex in an industry designed for this purpose, and for much higher fees under conditions of her own choosing.

Once Ariane had established herself in the Netherlands and enrolled on a Gender Studies programme, she was able to connect her experiences, and her reflection on her experiences with the theoretical insights that the programme had to offer her. Her studies further enhanced her critical thinking and aided her in the further development of her viewpoint regarding sex work. Ariane was very happy with how her perspective at sex work was received in her department. She said:

> I like how they're open to the ideas that I developed there about sex work, about the agency of colonial hyper-sexualized subjects.

As explained in chapter three, the existence of the sex industry is heavily debated in feminist circles. To Allina's pleasure, her faculty did not pressure the students to adopt the radical feminist viewpoint on sex work. This is one of the reasons why Ariane feels very much at home within Gender Studies. She said:

> I am really happy academically, intellectually speaking. I'm super fulfilled to tell you the truth. It's been really amazing. It's my thing to study, to be critical about things and to be able to engage in activism.

In the past, Ariane was speechless when she was confronted with an attack from radical feminist proponents when she organised a debate on feminist porn in her country of origin. Now that she had learned in higher education to formulate well supported arguments, she was well equipped to take part in the debate.

Whilst sex work in her homeland already appealed to her, various factors made her considering to enter the profession in a more serious way when she studied in the Netherlands. By dedicating a part of her master to the theme of sex work and by taking part in debates and discussions about the subject with peers, Ariane became further convinced of the political role of sex work. What also lowered the threshold to doing sex work herself was that she became involved in the sex workers' rights movement via her academic network. This gave her the opportunity to speak with other sex workers. Besides these motivations, Ariane also needed an income because her savings were running out.

Lauren had an Asian ethnic background and lived in a Western, non-EU country. Throughout her childhood, she experienced racism as an Asian person living in a predominantly white environment. She stresses that whilst racism against Asian people in the West often goes unrecognised, it is very prevalent. For Asian women, racism often emerges simultaneously with sexism. When Lauren grew up, she became increasingly aware of this. Remarks from men such as 'I have never slept with an Asian woman' were not uncommon to her, implying that sex with an Asian

woman would be fundamentally different compared to sex with a woman with another ethnic background.

The specific form of racism that women with an Eastern or South-east Asian background experience in the West has roots in the colonial and military domination of Western countries in East and Southeast Asia (Pires, 2024; Woan, 2008). Western imperialists and military build Orientalist fantasies around the local women they encountered as being hyper-feminine, hyper-sexual and submissive. These Western male fantasies did not only result in the sexual abuse of local women, but they also formed the basis of the emergence of stereotypes around East and South-east Asian women that still exist today. Dutch and other Western media representation of Asian women reinforce these stereotypes (Broekroelofs & Poerwoatmodjo, 2021; Oishi, 2022; Pires, 2024). The following quotation illustrates this point, in which Lauren elaborates upon an incident that happened to her when she moved into the Netherlands. As she said:

> When I first moved here, someone wrote 'whore China' next to my apartment number in the elevator. I could not do anything. It was in the public elevator, but there was no camera. Chinese girls lived on the same floor but it wasn't them.

As the perpetrator was not found, Lauren was unable to hold this person accountable for the abuse.

Her ongoing experiences with both racism and sexism evoked her desire to address issues of inequality on a theoretical level. For this reason she enrolled for a master's in Gender Studies. Lauren's main research interest within this field of studies was the study of sex work. Whilst doing so, she hoped to better understand the meaning of the sexualisation of Asian women as sex workers. Another aspect she desired to investigate is how the stigma of sex work impacts women in general. As she said:

> I am just a very big sex-positive feminist and for me sex work is the core of women's issues and the core of feminism. It all boils down to whore stigma. So, that is why I wanted to study it.

Lauren self-defines as a sex-positive feminist. Sex-positive feminists, or sex-radical feminists as I refer to them in chapter three, look at sexual freedom for women as a vehicle for the freedom of women in general. In her studies, Lauren hoped to be able to take a closer look at this standpoint. Her master's in the Netherlands gave her the opportunity to search for answers to her questions. When she dedicated herself to this task, a vital moment made her decide that she did not only wanted to study the subject, but she also wanted to explore how it would be for herself to work as a sex worker. As Lauren explains:

> It [the idea to work as a sex worker] sparked more seriously during my studies [her master's course in the Netherlands]. But the specific moment that really pushed me to it was when I searched for participants during my research master. My thesis was on Dutch prostitution. So, I was trying to talk to sex workers. I reached out to one woman.

> She was an independent escort. What I did was probably not ethically at all. But I did not know how to go about it at the time. So, I just kind of answered her ad and said 'Hi, my name is so and so, this is my research. Would you be willing to talk? If not, that's fine. She responded to me. 'You doing research on prostitution is the biggest form of exploitation'. And that freaked me out. I had a huge talk with my lecturer. What am I doing? This is the opposite of what I want to do. It had a huge impact on me, to hear from a sex worker that I am exploiting her.

Lauren strongly believed in the political role of sex work. For this reason, she was devastated when she heard that her intentions were interpreted as exploitative by a sex worker. This made her question her own ethical approach to the study of sex work. This perspective also made her reconsider her position as an academic. She said:

> It made me rethink my position as a researcher. And it made me reflect on my privileges in academia. It made me think about the research that has been done so far in the sex industry. A lot of it has not been inclusive of sex workers in the process.

Lauren recognised her privilege as a student with her access to higher education. The incident was the final push for her to enter the sex industry. Her thinking was that with her own work experience in the sex industry in combination with her access to higher education, she would be able to develop inclusive research. As she further explains:

> It was at this moment that I was like OK, maybe I should really try it [to enter the sex industry herself] and not be that researcher that does not really know what she is talking about. I want to switch it. Instead of just being the researcher doing research on sex work, I want to be a sex working researcher. And I want other sex workers to collaborate. That is why I started, besides for the money stuff.

Besides undertaking ethical research on sex work from an insider's perspective in co-construction with other sex workers, she also wanted to achieve change within academia. As Lauren explains:

> That I really, really want to get more sex workers in academia. Or just get more sex workers doing research themselves, even if it is outside of academia. We really need to be part of the solutions for things. Sex workers know the community best. We can conduct the best research without ethical dilemmas. I want to change academia to be more like that.

Whilst there is no guarantee that there are no ethical dilemmas when sex workers undertake their own research, Lauren's drive to have more sex workers undertaking research may be an effective response to the reality that much sex work research fails to address sex workers' needs (Wahab, 2003). I have discussed this problem in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, as shown in the quotes above, Lauren's ability to adopt the feminist practice of reflexivity (Hammond & Kingston) may aid in solving possible emerging ethical concerns.

Lauren's involvement in sex work also came with another benefit. Before she became a sex worker, she was not able to take part in sex workers' rights activism in the Netherlands, even though she was passionate about doing so. This changed when she became a sex worker herself. She said:

> I wanted to become part of the community. I wanted to do more activism in this field and I tried to become a volunteer twice. But I was rejected because I wasn't a sex worker. So, that is also why I wanted to do sex work. I was like, 'OK, let's do camming then I can actually volunteer'. It is just such a closed community and I wanted to be part of it.

Now that Lauren had become a webcam model, sex workers' rights groups became accessible to her. The phenomenon that Gender Studies students are highly driven to take part in advocacy work to achieve change, as in Lauren's case, is a common feature within this field of studies (Griffin & Hanmer, 2005).

Sex radical feminists see sex work as a site of subversion that may be used to challenge patriarchal norms imposed on women (Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2007). Whilst this tendency may be part of Lauren's motivation for undertaking her job, it did not become apparent in the interview excerpts. This was different for Yannick. Yannick studied artificial intelligence and was interested in further developing herself within the domain of Gender Studies. She self-defined as a feminist but did not further specify her feminist perspective, which may be caused by the fact that she was not yet very familiar with the terrain. In the quote below, Yannick explains how she looks at the political role of charging money for sex:

> For me it is a political statement to do sex work. You earn money with your sexuality which you are not supposed to do as a woman. Your sexuality is suppressed in society. Men think that they are entitled to get sex for free. They get angry when you ask for money: 'How dare you!'

Yannick likes the idea of charging money for sex because this enables her to challenge societal ideas of female chastity, passivity, and obedience. She gains pleasure from letting men know that they are not entitled to get sex for free. In addition to the fact that Yannick enjoyed her work as a financial dominatrix, her ability to make a political statement by undertaking her job played a great role in her motivation for working in the sex industry.

Luz and Lisette, two students with feminist sympathies, did not frame their motivation to work as a sex worker as being related to their political viewpoints. Nevertheless, their job gave them the opportunity to apply their feminist insights to their work. Lisette, who studied psychology, was not sure whether she should self-identify as a feminist because she thought that that would limit herself in remaining open to other perspectives. However, she did enjoy putting some of her feminist sentiments in practice at work. As she said:

> I very often confronted my clients with my feminist ideas. I am quite obstinate in this respect. And this actually worked out well. I am amazed by it. Now they address the escorts they book appropriately. And they now longer send women dick pics [pictures of male genitals, in this context unrequested by the receiver of the pictures]. But it is also in the way I undertake my job. When I started, I often pretended that I liked the sex to be done with it quickly. Now, when I notice that clients are willing to learn, I

> take my time to give information on the physical aspects of female sexuality. In my view, women have the right to have enjoyable sex, and men must get their education from somewhere.

Lisette was able to teach clients how they could better communicate with their service provider and how they could become better lovers. She was pleased with the fact that her feedback was well-received by a part of her clients. Luz used the theoretical insights that she had gained during her master's in Gender Studies to better understand some of her clients tendency to misbehave. As she put it:

> Some men think that they can get away with all sorts of misbehaviour. These men trespass your boundaries. I cannot see that separately from the patriarchal world we live in. It is interesting to observe it, male dominance.

Luz blamed the unpleasant behaviour of some of her clients on the patriarchal society in which she lives. She explained that it was not difficult for her to be resilient in situations like these. Perhaps her feminist beliefs aided her in standing up for herself before these men.

5.4.1 Sex Work Experience as a Form of Knowledge in Higher Education

The access of these students to higher education not only impacted upon the decision of some students to become a sex worker or to consider doing so. For some of the student sex workers, their occupation also had an impact on their studies. This phenomenon was both visible among student sex workers with feminist motivations and among students who did not relate their work to any political perspective. In addition to making higher education more accessible financially, several students were able to use the insights and knowledge they have gained whilst working in the sex industry in their studies. For example, gender and sexuality studies student Veronique, who works for an escort agency that only targets women and trans people, was able to observe and analyse patterns in her clients' sexual preferences. As she explains:

> Lesbian women choose their sexual partner based on what they find attractive, whilst straight women rather look for someone who has a similar physical appearance as themselves. For my studies, this is really exciting.

Veronique points out that, in her experience, women who self-identify as lesbian have developed a taste of their own regarding who they find sexually attractive, whilst women who self-define as heterosexual feel most comfortable meeting someone who looks like themselves. Observations like these have given her insights that she explores and analyses in papers. Sometimes Veronique also includes herself in her analysis. As she explains:

> Considering the course I am doing right now [a master in gender and sexuality studies], having my own experiences in the sex industry is a great benefit. I can use autoethnography.

In autoethnography, researchers describe and analyse their own experiences to better understand cultural phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). The fact that Veronique's lecturers were supportive of her choice to work in this field enabled her to write essays and papers about sex work from an insiders' perspective.

For Lauren, her negative experiences with being studied by students undertaking fieldwork observations during her work behind the windows had an impact on how she wanted to undertake her own research. She explained how she initially observed sex workers in Amsterdam's red-light district as a student herself and then changed her mind about this practice:

> We did an observation assignment for the methodology class. And a lot of the time you end up going to the red-light district and sit on the canal to stare at the sex workers for hours. I didn't think anything of that. And then once I became a sex worker I was like 'it is really weird that they are just staring and writing in their notebooks without saying anything to me'.

Now that Lauren worked in the sex industry herself, she gained a greater understanding of the possible harms of sex work research.

Despite the severance of the sex work stigma, 5 out of the 19 students with work experience in the sex industry were open about their work within their university. For some of these students, their disclosure depended upon the context. For example, Veronique, who was open about her sex work experiences in written assignments, only spoke about her occupation when she felt herself at ease in a particular class. As she explained:

> I did not disclose my work during courses in which people from other tracks took part. I was only open about it with my own group. The positive atmosphere made me feel that that was OK.

The phenomenon that student sex workers only disclose their occupation under particular circumstances in which they feel safe enough to do so is also evidenced by Rosenbloom and Fetner (2001). The fact that Veronique was prepared to be open about her work in her own track enabled her to educate the students in this group about sex work.

Liam, who was open about his job in all of his classes and spoke about sex work in the media, also taught fellow students about sex work. When I asked Liam what his experiences were with being 'out' as a sex worker within higher education, he said:

> My experiences with the university were always positive. It also occurred that a lecturer asked me to attend a class to tell the students more about my job.

Despite the fact that his sex work experiences were mostly well received, Liam's enthusiasm to teach fellow students did not always lead to the desired outcome. Liam explains:

> What happens is this: it is a sort of political correctness. You know Amsterdam. You know how students are in this university. Everything is acceptable, and yes that is a good thing. But it does not always come from within. Some people get it. But other people seemingly think: 'I cannot cause trouble with this guy, because it is not acceptable to criticise him.'

Whilst some students were eager to listen to Liam and to learn from how he sees and experiences his occupation within the sex industry, others disapproved of his job. Because of the liberal climate at Liam's university in Amsterdam, the latter group does not always feel free to discuss their disapproval of his job openly. Following upon Goffman (1963), I coded this phenomenon as *fake tolerance*.

With the concept of fake tolerance, I refer to the idea that people feel forced to tolerate something that contradicts their morals. Several subsequent interviewees clicked with this concept because they have gone through a similar experience. Lauren was also open about her occupation in academic spaces in which she felt safe. As she remarked, a downside associated with the phenomenon is that it is harder to challenge the assumptions and stereotypes that may lay underneath people's moral concerns when people are not willing to discuss them openly.

Law student Naomi and a social work student Daphne could also make their sex work experience relevant for their course work. However, different from the small group of students who used their experiences in the sex industry within their studies, they were very anxious to do so. When I asked Naomi whether she ever considered using her sex work experience in her studies, she said:

> Not at all. Instead, I avoided the subject whenever I could. I had no idea how to talk about it. I feared that I would say too much.

Out of fear for unintended outings, Naomi tried to avoid having to deal with the subject.

Heineman (2016) points out that students (and academic staff) with privileged societal positions in terms of race and class are more likely to disclose their involvement in sex work within higher education, whilst students (and staff) who are yet marginalised are more likely to keep their sex work identity secret. This theory is only sustained to some extent by this study. The group of students who were open about their work included the one study participant of colour in this study. However, it is the case that most of these students had a relatively privileged socioeconomic background.

The students who were fearful of disclosing their work, Naomi and Daphne, indeed come from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds. Besides this, Daphne is a migrant from an Eastern European non-EU country which is noticeable because of her accent. Neither Naomi nor Daphne pointed out a connection between their fear of disclosure and their lower socioeconomic position and in the case of Daphne, her migrant status. Nevertheless, the possibility exists that this factor indeed played a part in why they were anxious that their occupation would become known.

What Naomi did mention was the impact of gender in relation to sex work disclosure in the academic setting. Naomi stated:

> It is more severely stigmatised for women. As a woman you are easily called a hooker, whilst as a man it is more like 'that is funny', or something along that line.

What did not play a part in Naomi and Daphne's desire to keep their work secret was the possibility of facing institutional repercussions. Whilst student sex workers in other countries risk being expelled from their course because of their involvement in sex work (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Simpson & Beer, 2022; Simpson & Smith, 2020), this was not a concern for Naomi and Daphne. Regarding this issue, Daphne said:

> I don't think it would be a problem [disclosing her occupation as an escort] for the institution. The problem is that people may start looking at me differently.

Similar to Naomi and Daphne, none of the other student sex workers in this study were fearful of sanctions within higher education because of their work. Daphne had a clear view of why the university would never undertake any steps against her because of her work. She said:

> It is a legal occupation. It is allowed here. That cannot be the problem.

Most student sex workers in this study indeed work legally in the sex industry. However, they are an exception to the rule. As I explained in the introduction, most sex workers in the Netherlands work outside of the legal framework which means that de facto, sex work is often illegal. Nevertheless, people who are not aware of this reality will quite likely rest assured that sex work is a legal occupation in the country. This makes it unlikely that student sex workers will face sanctions within higher education.

In summary, this section pointed out that a group of student sex workers in this study experienced pleasure working as sex workers because of their intellectual interest in the occupation and because the job aligns with their feminist beliefs. Several of the students who self-identified as feminists and others who did not self-identify as such, used the insights gained in sex work within their studies to advance their own academic work and to educate others. The fact that a minor group of students was open about their work within higher education may have been facilitated by their relative privilege in terms of race, class and gender and the taken for granted assumption that sex work is a legal profession in the Netherlands. Among the students, a strong connection became visible between their studies, their political beliefs, their occupation in sex work and their activism for sex workers' rights.

Sagar et al. (2016) pointed out that sex work would quite likely play a smaller role in the lives of student sex workers compared to the role the occupation would play in the lives of full-time sex workers. Keeping in mind the students discussed in this section, this observation could not be further from the truth. For the students discussed in this section, sex work was much more than a job. It also stimulated them intellectually, helping them to further develop their political standpoint in relation to gender inequality and it encouraged political activism.

5.5. A Well-considered and Well-informed Choice

Whilst many studies on student sex work have looked at the motivations for working in the sex industry (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Lantz, 2005; Sagar et al., 2016; Sinacore et al., 2014; van der Wagen et al., 2010), only this study has paid attention to the decision-making process that took place prior to the students' entry into the sex industry and analysed the information sources the students accessed to inform themselves about the occupation. Most but not all of the students who took part in this study made a well-considered and a well-informed choice to work in the sex industry. Of the 19 students with work experience in the sex industry, 14 gave insight into how much time they had spent deliberating whether or not they wanted to become a sex worker.

The time that the students needed to make this decision varied from person to person, but most but not all students took a significant amount of time to consider the advantages and the disadvantages of the occupation. Two students almost instantly took steps to enter the sex industry when the idea of doing so came to their mind. Three students spent a couple of weeks considering whether or not they would want to do sex work. Four students took several months to make this decision and the largest group of five students took half a year to several years before they were certain that they wanted to do sex work.

The students accessed a variety of sources of information to enhance the decision-making process whether or not they eventually decided to enter the sex industry. Most students searched for information about the occupation on the internet. Several students also read blogs written by sex workers, interviews with sex workers and they watched a TV series about sex work. Iris was one of the students who did the latter. She said:

> When I became interested in it [in sex work], I started to follow a series about it, but I knew that they quite likely present a romanticised version of it.

Iris realised that the TV series may misrepresent the profession but she nevertheless considered it a useful source of information she wanted to consider. It enabled her to visualise how a working day in the sex industry could be like. What can be considered an unique feature of student sex work is that some students were able to inform themselves about working in the sex industry via their studies. This was the case for six students. For Veronique and Lauren, a module about sex work was part of their curriculum. Paulina got indirect access to information about sex work via her studies. She attended a seminar about care for transgender people. The spokesperson explained that the so-called trans clinic was part of a self-led organisation for sex workers. Paulina explains:

> The woman said that they also had a self-organisation for sex workers for people who want to know how to enter the industry. They give them advice. I made a mental note

> of that. I thought, 'So, if I actually decide to start to do it, here is the place to come to ask.'

Paulina indeed took the step to get in touch with the self-led organisation for sex workers, which is where I met her and where she offered to take part in my study. Lea, Iris and Ariane chose sex work as a subject for a project, paper or thesis. Iris set up a journalistic study around her idea to become a sex worker. As she explained:

> I got the chance to develop a project around an original theme, so I chose sex work. It gave me the opportunity to speak about it with a lot of people.

The variety of sources that she accessed gave her a good insight into the nature of the occupation and the advantages and disadvantages that come with it. As a journalist-to-be, she studied the subject thoroughly and confirmed that:

> When you want to do this kind of work, you have to inform yourself about it. You have to access sources of information, not any different as you would do in journalism with any subject.

As a journalism student, it was normal for Iris to get to the bottom of things. This attitude aided her in making the decision whether or not she wanted to do sex work herself.

A group of eight students consulted current or previous sex workers to gather information about the job. The openness of the students regarding their intention to become a sex worker made it possible to have an open dialogue with their informants. When Lauren considered moving on from webcam work to the windows, she spoke lengthy about it with a sex worker who works in Amsterdam's red-light district. Regarding these conversations, she said:

> I spoke with this woman regularly for a period of three to four months. I asked her what the work was like. I also asked for advice on how to have safe sex and how to maintain your personal hygiene behind the windows. I wanted to be informed about all the practicalities. Besides this, I wanted to know how to work legally.

The conversations with the woman gave Lauren a clear picture of how window-based sex work would be like. Similar to Lauren, the other seven students saw the first-hand experiences of people who work or have worked in the sex industry themselves as one of the most valuable sources of information to facilitate their decision-making process. Regarding the difference between speaking with people with and without work experience in the sex industry, Lauren said:

> I don't like it when people think that they know how it is to be a sex worker when they haven't worked in the industry themselves, when they have just read about it and studied it. I studied sex work for about 5 years and I still did not really understood it until I did it.

According to Lauren, in order to understand what sex work is really like, people must have work experience in this sector. In her viewpoint, sex workers are best-equipped to inform others about the occupation.

Besides Humanitas ESSM, a variety of specialised service providers for sex workers exist in the Netherlands. During the interviews, I learnt that none of the students have consulted these organisations to acquire information about starting to work as a sex worker. Paulina explains why she was not inclined to do so:

> I need someone who can help me to clear my head about it. It must be someone who is knowledgeable about it. Sometimes a public office is not the best place to go because the people there may have to support a public agenda.

Paulina needed someone to talk with to make up her mind whether or not she wanted to do sex work, but she did not reach out to aid providers for sex workers because she anticipated that government-funded programmes would have to support an anti-sex-work agenda. She argued that a biased starting point would not help her any further in her decision-making process. Lauren shared Paulina's viewpoint. Elina had another reason why she was not inclined to consult specialised service providers for sex workers. As she put it:

> I have the impression that most of these organisations focus on people who work under force, or who make the choice to do sex work under severe financial pressure. In my understanding, their services are not aimed at people who just do this job. I may be wrong, but this is my impression.

With 'people who just do this job', Elina refers to sex workers who choose to work in the sex industry in a context in which force by a third party or severe financial pressure does not play a role. She presumed that aid providers for sex workers would primarily focus on sex workers who find themselves in a very difficult position. Other students did not disclose why they had not accessed specialised services for sex workers. It may be that they, similar to Paulina and Lauren, distrust organisations who receive government funding or it may be, as Elina mentioned, that they presume that they do not belong to the intended target group of the programmes. It may also be that they were not aware of the existence of specialised aid programmes. For male sex workers or gender non-conforming sex workers, the latter would be unsurprising as there were very few services available for them in the years in which my fieldwork took place.

Nine of the ten students who worked for brothel, massage parlour or escort agency owners (also) informed themselves about the job via their employer. Luz experienced the instructions she received from the management of her massage parlour as very helpful. As she explained:

> They take the time to talk with you. They took me to a separate room and explained what the job is like. They said: 'You will get all sorts of clients, including old and smelly men'. It was clear to me that I should not look at the job through rose coloured glasses. They connect you with an experienced masseuse. You can watch when the

> masseuse is with a client. Then, you can decide whether you want to do it or not. I felt that they informed me very well.

Similar to Luz, most students experienced the information provided by third parties as useful. Different from the 9 students who (also) relied on the instructions provided by the third party, Enrique decided that he did not want to be dependent on the brothel owner for information regarding his job. As he said:

> I made sure that I was well informed about my labour rights before I met the owner. I feared that he would convince me of things that are not true. Or that he would withhold information. For this reason, I ensured myself that I was well informed. Once I met the owner, I could actually fill in gaps in his knowledge.

At the other end of the spectrum, three students solely relied on the instructions provided by their third party and made no effort to verify the information they had received. When I asked Francis how she felt about the labour conditions of her job as an escort, she said:

> It is a completely legal business. Besides this, I must say that I don't know much about it.

For Francis, the fact that her escort agency operates with a licence issued by the municipality gives the owner credibility. It is indeed the case that sex industry operators go through thorough checks when they apply for a licence (Biesma et al., 2006), but this by no means guarantees that the labour rights of the sex workers are respected by sex industry operators who are given the permission to operate legally. It is a dangerous consequence of the Dutch regulated system when sex workers a priori presume that they will face a just treatment just because the local government has approved their workplace. When I further asked whether Francis was interested in her labour rights at all, she answered:

> Not really. But I believe that the owner does it very well. The agency is one of the market leaders of the country, so I rest assured that everything is ok.

Alongside the approval of the municipality, Francis believes that the position of the agency within the high-end escort industry also shows that the owner must be reliable.

The argument outlined above was also visible in the narrative of Frida and Poppy, who did not verify the information given by the owner of their escort agency either. It may indeed be the case that a market leader in the sex industry is likely to treat sex workers well to maintain his favourable position. Escorts who are dissatisfied with the conditions under which they work may not perform well which adversely impacts their business. However, it does not *a priori* have to be the case. As I will explain in the next chapter, the lucrative jobs in the highest strata of the sex industry are high in demand and difficult to access. This phenomenon may lead to an unequal power balance between the owner of the escort agency and the sex workers which can negatively impact the working conditions of the latter.

5.5.1. Balancing the Advantages and the Disadvantages

The afore-mentioned sources of information aided the students in evaluating the advantages and the disadvantages of the occupation. In the first part of this chapter, I described what the students gained and expected to gain from working in the sex industry. I will now proceed to discuss the downsides the students anticipated. Similar to other studies on student sex work (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Jansen, 2018; Lantz, 2005; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sinacore & Rezazadeh, 2014; van der Wagen et al, 2010), the students' greatest concern was the stigma of sex work. With only very few exceptions, all of the students were worried that the stigma of sex work would have a significant impact upon them.

Before entering the sex industry, most students presumed that the stigma of sex work would inhibit them from disclosing their job to others. For example, Veronique said that:

> I thought that I would never be able to share this experience with anyone.

Veronique eventually became involved with advocacy for sex workers' rights and widely spoke about her occupation, but she had not imagined doing so upon her entry into the sex industry. Upon making the decision to become an escort, Robin said that:

> OK, this will be something I will never be able to disclose.

Similar to Veronique, Robin did disclose her occupation to others over the course of time. The idea of not being able to share experiences at work weighed heavy on the mind of the students. Regarding this, Sophie admitted that:

> The downsides I considered were the taboo around the job and having to keep the job a secret, which means that I have to lie to the people around me.

For Sophie and for many of the students, the non-disclosure of their occupation obliged them to live a so-called double life (Goffman, 1963) and lie to people who were close to them. The students also considered the risk of unwanted outings. In this light, the online presence of students on the website of escort agencies or in their own advertisement when they are self-employed was one of the students' main concerns. Regarding this, Poppy said: "I did not really like having my pictures online". Whilst the owner of the escort agency blurred Poppy's face in her pictures, she nevertheless feared that someone would recognise her. Although Iris considered webcam work, the online visibility that comes along with this type of sex work worried her. As she said:

> For a long time, I considered webcamming, but the downside of this line of work is that people can find you online. That really bothers me.

Because of the risk of being discovered, Iris was not sure whether this type of sex work would suit her. Unwanted discoveries can also occur in offline situations. Regarding this issue, Elina then admitted that:

> I feared that I would constantly have to deal with the stress that someone would see me.

Elina anticipated that the stress caused by the possibility that someone would witness her working as a sex worker would negatively impact upon her well-being.

The second largest concern for the students was their safety at work which has also been identified as a major concern in other studies on student sex work (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Lantz, 2005; Sagar et al., 2015a; Sinacore et al., 2014). Besides webcamming, Iris also considered working as an escort. However, the safety risks involved with this line of work made her hesitate. As she put it:

> I am still young; on a date I am only by myself and I am vulnerable. Things can go wrong. Clients may be disappointed and become aggressive because of that.

Sophie shares Iris's safety worries regarding escort work. As she said:

> It is dangerous. When an agency is involved you obviously feel much safer, but it is still risky.

Similar to Sophie, most students who work for escort agencies experience the mediation of a third party who selects clients for them and who keeps track of their appointments as a protection against potential harm from clients. Some students, such as Frida, thought that that is enough to keep them safe. As Frida said:

> The owner checks everything on the forehand and does the screenings. It really is safe.

Others, such as Sophie and Iris, anticipated that the job nevertheless remains risky. The interview excerpts showed that most students who worked as self-employed escorts were aware of the risks associated with their isolated occupation. In the absence of a mediator, nobody knows where they are when they have a booking. To enhance their safety, most self-employed escorts considered on forehand what kind of clients they wanted to accept and under what conditions. Liam described his safety procedure in a protocol. Tobias spoke to Liam before he started working as an escort, but he decided not to formalise his occupation to the same extent as Liam did. He explains:

> With clients I don't know, I wonder, 'Should I not inform someone of the encounter or leave a note somewhere stating where I am? Do I feel sufficiently at ease with a new client?' These are the things that I discussed on forehand with Liam. Liam informed me of the rules he has adopted pertaining to his work, but I decided not to copy them. I prefer to rely on the relationship of trust with my clients.

Tobias anticipated that his good relationship with his clients would suffice to keep him safe. Enrique wanted to see for himself whether independent escort is actually as dangerous as is commonly thought. He said:

> Initially I was very occupied with my safety. But I tried it to find out for myself what the real risks would be. When I accepted my first client and allowed him to make a repeat booking, I started to feel at ease in my job. Before I started to work, I had the image in my head that prostitution is very scary and criminal. In fact, this assumption was mediated by stigma.

Enrique interprets his initial safety concerns as a manifestation of stigma. The representation of sex work as a priori criminal indeed seems to be mediated by stigma. After all, it is a legal occupation in the Netherlands. However, a multitude of studies point out that sex work is a relatively unsafe occupation. Sex workers are at risk of different forms of violence (Aidsfonds, 2018; Sanders, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Whittaker & Hart, 1996). A study undertaken in the Netherlands of 299 sex workers points out that male sex workers and sex workers who define their gender identity as 'other' face the greatest safety risks (Aidsfonds, 2018).

On the other hand, when taking Enrique's societal position as a white and highly-educated man into account, a more nuanced picture emerges. The likelihood that sex workers encounter violence is mediated by identity (Brents & Hausebeck, 2010; J. Jones, 2019; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; van der Meulen et al. 2012; Weitzer, 2022). Sex workers who face intersectional stigma due to being of colour, transgender or using drugs, amongst others, are devalued in society which makes them more prone to encountering harm (J. Jones, 2019). In this respect, Enrique would be safer when presenting himself to clients as a cisgender escort compared to as a "crossdresser pay boy", as he also did at times.

What further enhances Enrique's safety is that he works legally in the sex industry (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Oliveira et al., 2023; Read, 2013). In case any harm occurs, he can request assistance from the authorities provided that he discloses his occupation. Besides this safeguard, as pointed out in 5.3., his favourable economic situation enables him to adopt a strict selection procedure for clients and enhances his ability to set boundaries.

Two students were fearful that sex work would have a negative impact on their mental health. Luz was very eager to work as a sex worker, but her idea that the job would adversely impact her psychological well-being held her back. Her friend's disclosure of her job as an erotic masseuse opened her eyes to the possibility of working in the sex industry in such a way that no penetrative sex was involved nor that clients would be allowed to touch her. As Luz explained:

> I never wanted to be an escort. When my friend told me about the massage parlour, I thought: 'OK, that looks like a good solution. I will not have to give everything away.' I want to keep something to myself. It aids me in protecting my body and my mind. I think that sex work can be harmful for people.

In her massage parlour, the masseuses only stimulate the client and not vice versa. Clients are not allowed to touch their service provider. Luz found it important to keep these sexual activities private because she thought that offering these on a commercial basis could harm her mental health. This was what she had learned about sex work in her undergrad course in psychology. She said:

> It is probably a bit biased, the books I had to read about it. But I think that there can be an element of truth in it.

Luz did not provide further insight in the material she had studied, but it may be that the literature she was offered was influenced by the radical feminist framing of sex work as violence discussed in chapter three. It may also be that her course work consisted of studies of underprivileged groups of sex workers such as street workers, whilst these findings cannot be held representative of the total population of sex workers (VanWesenbeeck, 2001). When Luz entered her master in Gender Studies, she learned that the focus of a study should not be seen in isolation of the author's positionality. When I asked Luz to further elaborate on the approach to sex work within her psychology course, she said:

> I had lectures given by men who think that they know how it feels for escorts.

Being confronted with standpoint feminism in Gender Studies, Luz became critical of the way sex work was discussed within her undergrad course in psychology. Nevertheless, to avoid any risk she maintained her standpoint that it would be mentally safer to continue working in her massage parlour.

Livia, who worked as a sugar baby, also hesitated to do sex work because she anticipated that the job would negatively impact her mental health. As she put it:

> I feared that I would ruin myself. You have your boundaries, but once you cross them, it will be very easy to continue doing so. It will not be a single occasion; you will repeatedly do this.

As an example of crossing boundaries, Livia referred to having sex with her sugar daddy. She feared that having done so once it would lower her threshold for doing it more frequently, which was indeed the case. As she had anticipated, her awareness of the amount of money she was able to make as a sugar baby kept her in the industry. Livia did report disliking having sex with clients, but during the interview it remained unclear whether or not this indeed had an adverse impact on her mental health.

Other concerns held by study participants were the possible adverse impact on their (sexual) health. They also mentioned the difficulties that sex workers experience in attempting to work legally as an independent sex worker in the Dutch regulated sex industry.

In summary, most student sex workers in this study took a significant period of time to make a well-considered and well-informed choice to undertake occupations in the sex industry. Besides searching online and studying blogs and series, the students spoke to current and past sex workers and with third parties such as brothel, massage parlour and escort agency owners. What can be considered

an unique feature of this group of student sex workers is that a part of them informed themselves about sex work via their studies. This enabled these students to gain in-depth knowledge of the profession. None of the students accessed specialised aid programmes for sex workers to gather information about working in the sex industry.

When making the decision to enter the sex industry or not, the students considered a number of disadvantages associated with the occupation, of which the stigma of sex work and the lack of safety were the most prominent concerns. In this context, two of the students also anticipated that their occupation could adversely impact their mental health.

5.6. Conclusion

It goes without saying that financial reward is a significant reason why the student sex workers who took part in this study want to work in the sex industry. Despite this, I would not do justice to their motivations and experiences by explaining them through the lens of financial hardship. I have thus identified four distinct socio-economic groups of (prospective) student sex workers for whom the financial benefits associated with sex work played different roles in their ability to succeed in higher education.

For economically privileged students, the income from sex work largely functioned to acquire luxuries and/or to live a comfortable life whilst still being able to build up savings for the future. For students from middle-income families who received no state funding and of whom most did not receive much parental financial aid, the money from sex work made it possible to study without being worried about building up their debt or further increasing it. Two part-time students who studied for an additional qualification had different financial needs, but neither experienced pressure to do sex work to finance their studies because they knew that they could also secure a mainstream job with the degree they already possessed. For the students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, of whom most were in receipt of bursaries but who received no or very little parental support, or even had to provide financial aid to their parents, sex work played a greater role in their ability to study. Taking out a student loan was not a suitable alternative for these students.

Following up on the suggestions of Benoit (2021), Bettio et al. (2017) and Sawicki et al. (2019), I view the different socio-economic profiles as a continuum of choice along which the economically most advanced students find themselves in the most privileged position and students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds in a lesser privileged position.

However, none of the students in this study find themselves at the poorest end of the continuum. Several alternatives for working in the sex industry existed for most of the students, such as taking out a maintenance and/or tuition fees loan or acquiring a part-time or full-time mainstream job in combination with part-time studies, for example. Ultimately, most students could also discontinue their studies and enter the labour market with the start qualification that all but two

students already possessed. It is not impossible for the two students without a start qualification to find alternative employment, although this may bring them into a precarious financial position.

Considering the alternatives possessed by the students in this study for working in the sex industry, I would argue that they find themselves in a privileged position compared to sex workers at the poorer end of the continuum who have little choice. This privilege enhances the student sex workers' work experience in a variety of different ways. For example, it enables them to be selective in which clients to accept (Sanders, 2005b), it enhances their negotiating power with clients (van den Dries et al., 2021) and third parties and it supports their ability to create good working conditions (van der Wagen et al., 2010; VanWesenbeeck, 1994, 2011).

Across the different socio-economic groups, intrinsic motivations for working in the sex industry also loomed large. All but two student sex workers in this study wanted to be involved in sex work to derive pleasure from their work. For many study participants, getting to know their clients and spending time with them was a source of great enjoyment. Some student sex workers also greatly enjoyed their ability to experience a sense of luxuriousness.

A phenomenon that is rarely evidenced in research on (student) sex work is that some students in this study derive pleasure from, or anticipate deriving pleasure from, acting out their political beliefs by being involved in sex work. The female cisgender students this concerns wanted to challenge societal norms regarding chastity and obedience for women or they saw sex work as a response to sexual harassment they had experienced in mainstream occupations.

For these and for other students in this study, their involvement in sex work was also connected to their intellectual interest in the subject of sex work. The few students who were open about their occupation within higher education were able to feed back their experiences in the sex industry into their studies, which enabled them to further reflect upon their work and to educate others about it. That some students were open within an academic setting about their involvement in sex work may be related to their relative privilege in terms of race, class and gender and the legal status of their occupation.

The largest part of the student sex workers in this study also work or want to work in the sex industry because of the practical benefits associated with the occupation. With its positive time-money ratio and its flexible nature, sex work aids students in managing their work around their studies, whilst still enabling them to meet their financial goals. For some, this also helped them dealing with performance stress, i.e. the stress caused by their own drive to be a good student and external pressure to achieve in higher education (Dopmeijer et al., 2023). The ability to generate a high income in a short time frame in a way that does not compromise their studies aids the students in their attempt to meet their own demands and realise the demands of others.

A small group of students in the current study (also) choose sex work against a backdrop of negative experiences in precarious mainstream student jobs in retail and hospitality. These so-called service industry jobs have become increasingly precarious lately, and this phenomenon impacts young

people and women disproportionally (Berry & McDaniel, 2022; Koukiadaki & Katsaroumpas, 2017; Sanders & Hardy, 2013). However, the students did not only point out the trade-offs associated with mainstream student jobs for sex work also has its drawbacks, such as irregular earnings. For this reason, a minority group of students work in both mainstream occupations and the sex industry.

In absence of dire financial needs, the student sex workers in this study were able to take time to make a well-informed and well-considered choice of whether or not to enter the sex industry. To underpin their decision-making process, most students accessed a variety of sources of information. As students in higher education, they knew how to find suitable sources and they had the skills to assess their reliability. This capacity may not always be present among sex workers who do not have access to higher education and/or who do not speak Dutch or English. What can be considered typical of student sex workers is that some students also informed themselves about the occupation via their studies; for example, by choosing the subject for course-work.

What several students had not anticipated when they deliberated over whether or not they wanted to enter the sex industry is that not every part of the sex industry is easily accessible for every student. The sex industry is a hierarchical industry. Whilst most study participants experienced few difficulties in accessing jobs in the middle market, the occupations in the higher strata that carry the greatest prestige, provide the highest earning potential and, on the whole, offer better labour conditions were not readily accessible to all students.

In the next chapter, I will explain how Western beauty norms, such as having a white and slim body, nationality, the possession of linguistic capital and a relatively young age, enable some students to access the highest and most popular echelons of the sex industry, and raise barriers to others. Some of the students who have access to the most prestigious occupations then use their standing to navigate the stigma of sex work. By doing so, they not only further stigmatise less privileged sex workers but also reinforce the stigma surrounding the profession.

Chapter 6.
Experiences: Finding One's Place Within the Industry

In chapter five, I explained how this study has shown that students with a variety of socio-economic backgrounds are employed as sex workers in the Netherlands. Some of the student sex workers who took part in this study enjoy a comfortable lifestyle with their income generated from sex work, whilst other study participants experience a greater dependency on the money from their work to complete their degree. However, other alternatives to this work were available for all but one student sex worker. Considering that this may not be the case for all sex workers in the Netherlands, the student sex workers participating in this study find themselves in a privileged position.

Besides financial motivations, the students who took part in this study have practical and intrinsic reasons for working in the sex industry. The high money-to-time ratio enables them to put aside enough time to study and to undertake extracurricular activities, while the flexible nature of the occupation enables the students to arrange their work around their studies. Some students who took part in this research chose sex work against the backdrop of precarious labour conditions elsewhere. Most of the study participants are also passionate about working in the sex industry. They like spending time with clients and they experience their work as valuable. A select group of students were interested in sex work because this aligns with their feminist convictions. Before the students entered the sex industry, most of them took a significant period of time to think about whether or not they wanted to do sex work.

Both this chapter and chapter seven are centred around the students' experiences in the sex industry. This chapter starts with the students' search for their desired form of sex work. As the chapter will show, this was more difficult for some students than for others.

The sex industry is a very diverse sector that offers a variety of different types of employment. As pointed out in chapter three, these different sectors are positioned hierarchically in the whorearchy (Mellor & Benoit, 2023; Witt, 2020). The status of a given type of sex work is dependent upon a variety of factors. These are, amongst others, the identities of the workers and their clients within a particular sector; for example, in terms of race, class and educational level the location where the work takes place and its visibility, the nature of the services on offer, the number of clients that a sex worker serves, the corresponding fees and the labour conditions under which sex workers operate.

Most study participants prefer to work in the middle and higher echelons of the sex industry. Besides having a higher status, the middle and higher strata offer sex workers a number of benefits. The labour conditions are often better (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Petro, 2010) and the sex workers experience a greater level of safety (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; van der Meulen et al., 2013; Wahab, 2004). In addition, the remuneration is significantly higher for this work which is not unimportant for

students who deal with time pressure, (Petro, 2010, van der Meulen et al., 2013; Wahab, 2004). The middle and higher strata of the sex industry are also known for offering more autonomy and control over the work (Bettio et al., 2017; Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Kong, 2006), but as chapter seven will show, this is to a lesser extent the case for sex workers who work for third parties.

Whilst sex work is often seen as a low-threshold job that requires few qualities or skills (Edlund, et al., 2009; Sohn, 2019), not every stratum within the sex industry is easily accessible for every sex worker (Brooks, 2010). The possession of Western hegemonic beauty norms such as being young and having a white, slim body in combination with aspects related to class such as being highly educated and having an elevated level of cultural capital, impact the type of jobs that people can access (Bowen, 2021; Brooks, 2010; Hope Ditmore, 2010; J. Jones, 2019; van der Meulen et al., 2013; Wahab, 2004). In addition to these criteria, male sex workers also have to meet markers of hegemonic masculinity such as being muscular (Logan, 2010).

Interview excerpts showed that these stringent norms also impact upon student sex workers. The largest part of the study participants were very eager to talk about their (in)ability to meet the requirements of third parties and clients in the higher strata of the sex industry. In this chapter, I discuss how the students perceive and manage these norms and how they relate to their (relative) privilege or exclusion within the sex industry.

Similar to the general population of sex workers, most student sex workers experience the stigma of sex work as the most prominent challenge of their occupation. However, the strata that some of the student sex workers have access to provides an unique way to navigate this major challenge. A small group of students uses their distinct position to ward off stigma. By so doing, they may be able to uplift their own status to some extent, but they also run the risk of further stigmatising other sex workers.

The students who want to work for third parties in the middle and upper parts of the sex industry have to meet the expectations of both facilitators and their (potential) clients. Meanwhile, the independent student sex workers only have to satisfy the latter. Hence, I will discuss both groups separately which will also enable me to reflect on differences between the two groups.

I start my analysis with the twelve students who successfully or unsuccessfully attempted to get hired by a third party in the middle and upper strata of the sex industry. Then I will focus on the ten students who (also) work independently. Whilst this group does not have to meet the selection criteria of third parties, they do have to engage with their customers' demands.

6.1. Meeting the Stringent Aesthetic Demands of Third Parties

Whilst there are few employment possibilities within high-end escort agencies due to the small size of this substratum (van Wijk et al., 2010) and the large demand for these lucrative jobs (Intermediair, 2014), study participants Frida, Elina, Francis, Sophie, Poppy and Robin experienced

no difficulties getting hired within this sector. Nonetheless, Sophie initially faced a number of rejections, stating that:

> I was only 21, and I think that agencies found that too young. Besides this, my location outside the main cities in the Netherlands was not convenient.

Eventually she was able to find her preferred job. Veronique worked in a specific niche that focuses on transgender and female clients which, according to the fees they charge, may be part of the higher-mid stratum. Similar to the six other students, it was not difficult for her to get hired.

The seven female students share a number of physical characteristics. They are all young, white, slender and physically fit. They have a high *erotic capital* (Hakim, 2010). Being sex workers' primary currency (Hoffman, 2010), the possession of erotic capital is of great value for students who wish to work in the sex industry.

However, erotic capital is unequally distributed among student sex workers because what is perceived as attractive in the Western world is *"*very much mediated by class, race and age" (Green; 2012, p. 149). Alongside a slim body, elements such as youthfulness, whiteness and a middle-class appearance play a significant role in this unequal distribution (Kozee, 2016). These inequalities explain why the eight young, white and slim women had access to the highest strata of the Dutch sex industry, whilst other students who only possessed some of these characteristics had not.

Several students shared with me how they relate to the stringent beauty norms of the high-end industry. Elina and Frida were mainly interested in evaluating their own ability to meet the strict demands without challenging the exclusionary nature of it. Elina explained:

> I already had some confidence before I started working. I knew that I looked all right.

Her ability to get the job further supported her awareness of her beauty. She said:

> The fact that I was able to do this [getting hired for a high-class escort agency] further supported my confidence.

Similar to Elina, Frida also experiences her occupation as a high-end escort as a confirmation of her attractiveness. She said:

> It is incredible how much confirmation you get that you're beautiful and nice. It does me very well.

It is not surprising that the two women are content with the appraisal of their appearance. Women are more fiercely judged on their aesthetics compared to men (Kuipers, 2015), while Hakim is probably right when she argues that women who meet mainstream beauty norms are socially and economically

more successful (2010).

However, Frida is also aware of the temporariness of her ability to meet hegemonic beauty standards. When I asked her if she would consider continuing to work as an escort upon getting her degree, she replied:

> Not like a proper career. At a certain moment you age, you become less attractive. You get uglier.

As Green (2012) points out, erotic capital is not only available to a limited number of women, whilst the women who possess it do so within a limited timeframe. Frida acknowledges this. It is within this period of relative youthfulness that sex workers experience their greatest earning potential (Edlund et al., 2009; Kong, 2006; Nelson et al., 2020). Therefore, a relatively young age is often part of the stringent hiring criteria within the higher strata of the sex industry (Courtesan Club, n.d.; Vialet escort service, n.d.). Without criticising that she would be no longer 'good enough' once she was older, Frida submits herself to the stringent norms of her industry and takes advantage of her ability to meet them as long as possible.

In contrast with Elina and Frida, students Francis, Veronique and Robin were less interested in evaluating their ability to meet the required aesthetic demands of their sector. Francis was more concerned with the ethical question of whether it is right to be able to be successful in life just because of your beauty, a standpoint that places her in opposition to Hakim (2010). As she said:

> When you are good looking and you make it in the world just with your body... I am critical of that because I feel that you must also contribute to society.

With the phrase 'making it with your body', Francis does not refer to the performance of sexual acts. Instead, she argues that her job should rather be named 'date work' than 'sex work' because she spends most of her time doing other things than having sex. What Francis refers to here is her ability to have access to a privileged job just because of her beauty; an aspect of herself that she does not see as a personal achievement. In addition to this fact, she feels that her job does not significantly contribute to society. She would rather want to use her time in a more useful way by addressing existing societal problems. As an escort, Francis only provides entertainment.

What Francis did not challenge was the reality that Western beauty norms are at the heart of the selection criteria of many high-end escort agencies, nor the fact that her agency sustains these standards. This reality was very different for Veronique who strongly disagreed with the exclusionary nature of the hiring practice of high-end escort businesses. She referred instead to:

> Those high-end escort agencies that demand that you cannot have piercings and tattoos; they want you to have particular sizes. I don't want to be part of that.

Veronique hence objected to the stringent hiring criteria of the high-end escort industry and successfully secured a job for herself with an agency that accepts a wider variety of workers.

Ariane did attempt to find employment with a high-end escort agency, but faced rejection because she did not meet the agencies' aesthetic demands. As she explained:

> I've been banging against the wall because sex work has shown to be much harder to start with than I thought it would be. My initial idea was to do escorting but the agencies here have some selection criteria which actually don't match my qualifications. Actually, an agency just told me: 'You look lovely, you sound amazing but you don't look typically what our customers look for'. They look for girls with specifical beauty standard blah blah blah'

Similar to Veronique, Ariane disapproved of the strict beauty norms that agencies enforce upon women. As she said:

> The sex industry is very normative and sexist by demanding women to embody a certain beauty standard.

Being unable to change the hiring criteria of escort agencies in the higher strata, Ariane looked for other options. Eventually, she found an agency that was less focused at appearance, but here she faced barriers because as an international student she did not possess the required linguistic capital. Regarding the outcome of her job application, she said:

> They said: 'You look lovely. You sound lovely. Your education totally matches our profile but we need Dutch speakers'. 'I think it's very frustrating that there's such a strong barrier for migrant sex work, which I'm not even like. I cannot even be considered a migrant because I have a European passport.

The owner of the escort agency was positive about Ariane's physical appearance and recognised the value of her educational background. Nevertheless, she rejected her because of her inability to speak Dutch. The owner argued that clients want to talk about intimacy in their native language. Ariane was sceptical of this and sensed that the argument was used to reject applications from migrant sex workers. Considering that possibility, the whole situation appeared strange to her because she self-identified as a privileged white and highly educated woman.

Paulina, who had not worked as a sex worker but considered doing so when I interviewed her, also criticised the stringent beauty norms of high-end escort agencies. Because she had spoken with several sex workers, she was well-informed about the hiring criteria of the higher sub-strata of the sex industry. She anticipated the possibility that she would be rejected in case she would seek employment as a high-end escort. Paulina said:

> If an agency tells me, 'Actually you should work out a bit more,' I would say: 'OK, I am not good enough for you'. But that doesn't mean I am not good enough as a person. I mean I can understand that you have this standard of beauty. I may not agree with that. This is your business; I would love to change society's mind. But I will not argue with you.

Paulina sees commonly-held attitudes in society as the cause of the stringent beauty norms that in turn influence the hiring practices of the escort agencies. In contrast, Ariane directly blames the agencies for upholding them.

Obviously, the sector could loosen their hiring policy, but such a change is unlikely to happen. Their ability to match clients with women (and in some cases men) who meet hegemonic beauty norms that are not accessible to most people makes their business exclusive which enables them to charge high fees. Besides that, the escorts' ability to meet stringent beauty demands is strongly associated with an elevated class position (Kozee, 2016; Trautner, 2005) which strengthens the agencies' high-end image. The consumption of services of this standing appeals to some clients because it confirms their privileged socioeconomic status (Love, 2013; Trautner, 2005). This phenomenon is not dissimilar to the consumption of goods and services outside the sex industry because all kinds of goods and services are consumed to enhance a particular class position (Love, 2013). This is not only related to the visibility of the consumers' ability to afford their purchase. As Kuipers (2015) points out: "What people find beautiful provides information – consciously or unconsciously – about their social position" (p. 50).

Demonstrating good taste is also a means to distinguish yourself from others as it requires a certain level of cultural capital to know what aesthetics are desired by the leading classes. However, I would note here that although these factors come into play because of the secrecy around the consumption of paid sex, arguably the consumer will only experience a feeling of upwards mobility silently without being able to derive status upon it in the outside world.

Irrespective of why high-end agencies uphold strict beauty norms, Ariane and Paulina had no intention to put the blame on themselves for (the possibility of) being rejected. Especially Paulina expressed this very clearly:

> I think the important point here is that I [stressed] own my body. I own the evaluation of my body. And the value of my body. No one else does.

Veronique, Ariane and Paulina did a master's degree in Gender Studies. It may be that their curriculum (further) stimulated their critical thinking regarding the stringent beauty norms forced upon women by the sex industry business.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Robin experienced no difficulties finding employment as a high-end escort. Nevertheless, she was aware of how difficult being hired can be for others. Similar to Veronique, Ariane and Paulina, she disagreed with the exclusionary hiring practices of escort agencies in the higher strata. Her main criticism centred upon the lack of racial diversity within this line of work. As Robin stated:

> The high-class escort industry is very much a white business. With my agency there are very few women of colour.

Robin's observation that escort agencies in the higher strata hire very few sex workers of colour confirms earlier studies that point out how difficult it is for racialised female sex workers to find employment in this part of the sex industry (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Brooks, 2020; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; Raguparan, 2017). This impacts male and transgender sex workers to a lesser extent as these groups are less likely to work for third parties (Brouwers, 2022; Minichiello et al., 2013). The racial bias of the business owners in the higher strata may explain why Lauren, who did meet the weight and age criteria of the higher strata, was rejected by a high-end escort agency. Regarding the outcome of her job application, she said:

> I think that they rejected me because of my tattoos and because of my appearance.

Whilst some third parties are open about their exclusionary hiring practices, which they often defend by stating that they are dependent on their customers' racial preferences (J. Jones, 2019), the owner of the agency for which Lauren tried to work did not disclose why she was unwilling to hire her. For this reason, Lauren can only assume that her racial background played a role in this decision.

Several studies point out how racism adversely impacts the work experiences of female sex workers. Besides the earlier mentioned inaccessibility of certain jobs, female sex workers of colour (who may also be disadvantaged by other identities) face increased safety risks, receive lower wages, and face a less favourable treatment by clients (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Brooks, 2010; Curtis & Boe, 2023; Fuentes, 2024; Miller-Young, 2010; Paul, 2021; Petro, 2010; Raguparan, 2017; Steward, 2022; Wahab, 2004). Capitalising on racial stereotypes can be lucrative for male and female sex workers (Logan, 2010; Paul, 2021; Walby, 2012), and for some sex workers it is empowering (Paul, 2021; Raguparan, 2017), but the reproduction of these images can also be a painful experience for the worker (Raguparan, 2017). The impact of racism on male and transgender sex workers is to date understudied (Minichiello et al., 2013; Sausa et al., 2007).

Despite the significant impact of race on mainly female sex workers' experiences, as pointed out in the literature above, very few student sex workers referred to the privilege they derive from their whiteness. One explanation for this may be that it is difficult for white people to identify their own racial privilege because they grew up with it. Inequality is much easier to see from a subordinated position in the margin, rather than from the powerful position in the centre (Hooks, 1984).

Besides her appearance, Lauren also mentioned the possibility of being rejected because of her tattoos. Earlier, I also pointed out that Veronique pointed to the unwillingness of third parties in the sex industry to work with sex workers with tattoos. Studies indeed indicate that tattoos diminish the opportunity for female sex workers to find positions within the higher strata of the sex industry (Brooks, 2006; Nelson et al., 2020; Wood, 2000). The reason for this perception may lay with the

association of tattoos with a lower-class type of femininity (Dann et al., 2016) which disrupts the elite status of the higher strata. Being that tattoos can also function as indicators of masculinity (Molloy & Wagstaff, 2021), it is conceivable that male sex workers experience this differently. However, none of the three male sex workers spoke about this subject.

6.1.1. Educational and Cultural Capital: Having More to Offer than Beauty and Sex

In addition to stringent aesthetic norms, business owners in the higher strata of the sex industry look more critically at the educational background of their workers compared to business owners in the lower parts of the pyramid (Bouclin, 2006; Buck et al., 2010; Hoang, 2010; Koken, 2020; Ridder-Wiskerke, 2021). The owners of the escort agency for which Daphne worked operated both in the high-end stratum and in the middle market. The agency promoted their high-end escorts with a description of their educational attainments, although they do not mention this in the profiles of the escorts who work for their more affordable escort service.

Several study participants who sought employment with a high-end agency expressed awareness of the importance of their educational capital within their application process. For example, Sophie stated that:

> You must study at a university, but in case they see that she is an intelligent girl, they may hire her in case she studies at the university of applied science.

In this quote Sophie further specifies that being a student at a university of applied science is insufficient to qualify for a job as a high-end escort, even though this type of education is part of the higher educational landscape in the Netherlands. Robin then explained why education is important for escorts in the higher strata:

> You must be able to uphold a conversation.

Veronique, who shared this viewpoint, explained why she felt that she is well-equipped for her job as an escort:

> I can talk about a larger variety of things compared to someone who is less educated.

The idea that highly educated people are better conversational partners was supported by most of the students. The ability to converse with clients is more relevant in the higher branches of the sex industry because in these sectors bookings usually last longer and therefore provide more opportunity for conversation. Francis evidences this in the quote below:

> The bookings I take last 3 hours or longer, and nobody is able to have sex for 3 hours. Besides this, it is mandatory for clients to talk with the escort for at least half an hour before any touching is permitted. In the first half hour, they cannot just jump on you and they know that. They get a briefing. When I have a dinner date, we dine for at least two-and-a-half hours in a fancy restaurant. Within this time frame, no physical contact is allowed.

Several escorts mentioned that the clients that seek longer bookings with well-paid escorts are also themselves highly-educated. For example, Francis said:

> I have done many dinner dates during which I functioned as the conversation partner of a well-educated client.

Nelson et al. (2020) suggest that clients seek a conversational partner of similar intellectual abilities which is supported by Francis' experiences. In addition to this, the educational background of the escorts also underpins their privilege. Higher education is not accessible to everyone who works in the sex industry which makes the work of highly educated sex workers scarcer and increases the market value of their work. This may in turn enhance the (perceived) class position of the consumer.

Two studies on student sex work refer to student sex workers not only promoting themselves by making use of their intellectual capacity, but also capitalising on the fetishised image of the student (Momerency, 2011; Simpson & Smith, 2018). Besides the suggestion that students are intelligent and capable to uphold conversations, characteristics such as being of a relatively young age, along with youthfulness, purity, freshness and innocence, are elements of the image of the 'sexy student' (Ibid.).

In addition to the focus on the students' age, the studies of the three scholars give the impression that the student fetish also has a class and race element to it. In Simpson & Smith's study (2018), for instance, student sex worker Sara presents herself as a native British student. Momerency (2011) points out that one of the student sex workers in her study described herself as "a neat, well-brought-up girl, a student" (p. 98) to give the impression that she comes from a good family.

The idea that the sexualised image of the student has a certain market value is also visible on the two Dutch main advertising platforms for sex workers in the Netherlands, kinky.nl and sexjobs.nl, where several advertisements can be found of female sex workers who advertise themselves as students. In contrast with the advertising strategy of these sex workers, who may or may not be students for real, only two of my study participants who work for third parties rely on the sexualised image of the student. For example, Poppy said that:

> It [that she is a student] is written in my profile. Clients like to read that. It is a special image.

Similarly, Robin stated that:

> They [the clients] love students because it sounds sexy. I always told them that I was a student. Both the clients and the agency like that.

Besides these two, none of the other students who work for third parties shared with me that their clients were interested in their student status. When I questioned Eline about this phenomenon, she answered:

> I am not so sure that clients are really attracted to that.

Sophie was certain that her clients would not be interested in the student image. As she said:

> I don't think [that clients find the student image appealing], it is much more about being young.

Sophie confirms the point made by Frida earlier in this chapter, that the relatively young age of most student sex workers contributes to the market value of the services they offer.

Alongside education, and not separable from it, is the possession of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) which also has a significant impact on the students' ability to access the higher strata of the sex industry. In the higher strata of the sex industry, cultural capital has a great economic value (Nelson et al., 2020; Tsang, 2017). A scan of the websites of high-end escort agencies in the Netherlands shows how the owners capitalise on this. In the profiles of the escorts, they mention their preferences for food, wine and perfume, as well as their interest in arts.

As the only escort who is able to formulate her own description on the escort agency's website, Veronique also uses her cultural capital to promote herself. When describing her profile, she said:

> On the website, I talk about dancing, my political worldview and my academic background. They can take me to the theatre if they like.

Similar to educational capital, cultural capital enables the students to discuss a wider variety of topics with their clients. It also supports their ability to accompany clients outside their private residence or hotel room. They will, for example, feel more at ease in expensive restaurants where particular skills, behaviour and knowledge are expected of them such as table manners and knowledge of food and wine. Elina illustrated this:

> [as an escort] it is mandatory to know how to act in fine restaurants.

Cultural capital also enables the students to accompany clients during longer encounters, such as day trips or weekends away that may include expensive dining and theatre visits. With the right language use, table manners and some knowledge of and interest in art, the students can be suitable partners for these activities. Besides the possession of erotic, educational and cultural capital, having access to economic capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1996) also impacts sex workers' status in the whorearchy and determines their access to the different strata of the sex industry (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Hoang,

2011; van der Meulen et al., 2013). Labour in the sex industry is to a great extent performative. A portion of the students who work for third parties in the higher strata stem from lower- and middle income families. Nevertheless, they can pass as economically privileged because of their ability to meet Western beauty norms and their possession of educational and cultural capital. These characteristics of the privileged socioeconomic classes make their relatively modest income background invisible.

In summary, section 6.1.1 shows that the student sex workers in this study working for third parties in the higher echelons see their educational and cultural capital as features that are essential to their ability to work in the higher strata. The student sex workers spoke with a sense of pride about their possession of these characteristics. Their educational and social capital, and for some also their economic capital distinguishes them from sex workers who do not possess these characteristics.

In section 6.1, I also showed that a number of student sex workers criticised the exclusionary aesthetic demands of the higher echelons of the Dutch sex industry which both reinforce Western beauty standards and that make this sector inaccessible to most people. In line with this criticism, I anticipated that at least some of the students would be equally concerned with the inequality that may result from the demand of clients and third parties for sex workers with a high educational, cultural and economic capital as many sex workers in the country may not possess these characteristics. However, this was shown not to be the case.

6.1.2. Less Stringent Hiring Criteria in the Mid-market

Third parties that do not operate in the high-end market are less concerned with their workers' ability to meet Western beauty norms (Read, 2015). Daphne's search for her desired occupation illustrates this fact. Whilst Daphne was very pleased with her job as an escort for a mid-range escort service, she initially contacted the agency to apply for a job with their other business which was a high-end service. Daphne explained why she gave up her initial wish to operate in the high-end industry:

> The owner explained that the other women there [at the high-end agency] are real models. He said: 'You are also beautiful. I can put you on the website. But the clients spend high amounts of money and for that reason they want the most beautiful girls. These clients are difficult, they are very demanding'. They explained that at their other bureau, the lower payment will easily be compensated by the larger number of bookings. At the same time, the clients are much easier to deal with.

By setting out the difficult behaviour of well-paying clients and by stressing the financial benefits of her ability to get a larger number of bookings in the mid-market, the owners avoided insulting Daphne by making explicit that she does not meet the physical requirements they have put in place for their high-end service. At the same time, they successfully evoked her desire to work for their less exclusive market.

Here, Daphne only refers to her inability to meet beauty demands. What may also have played a role in why the agency did not want to hire her for their high-end service is the possibility that Daphne, who was born in an Eastern European non-EU country, is restricted by speaking Dutch with an accent. Whilst Brooks (2010) states that although, in itself, this does not have to limit sex workers' access to their desired job, it nevertheless makes visible that Daphne was born outside Western Europe. In Western Europe (and the UK), sex workers who were born in countries of the Eastern bloc have a lower status in the whorearchy compared to their white counterparts of Western European descent (Bowen, 2018). Whilst both groups are white, those white Eastern European sex workers are 'othered' in Western Europe, taken not to be real Europeans because of their standard of living, for example (Lapiņa & Vertelytė, 2020, Probst, 2023). In addition, sex workers of Eastern European origin are stereotyped as being exploited, victimised and trafficked (Probst, 2019), which is contradictory to the elite image that the higher strata of the sex industry try to uphold. Nonetheless, Daphne did not speak about the possible impact of her Eastern European descent in relation to her inability to work as a high-end escort.

Despite the less stringent aesthetic requirements of the mid-market, two white Dutch native students, Lisa and Naomi, were still fearful that they would not be able to find employment in this stratum because of their appearance. With a higher bodily weight than most women of their age, they were concerned that they would not be slim enough to become an escort. Lisa only dared to apply for a job when she found a company that appeared to be less exclusionary. As Lisa explained:

> I found an agency that looked nice and that appeared as if they would accept me. I have a bit of a bigger size. I thought that escorts had to meet particular standards and be slim. Agencies often only display supermodels but this one was different, so I thought that I could give it a try.

Lisa could work for the agency without her weight having a negative impact on her employment. Different from Lisa, Niki was certain that she would face rejection and for that reason she refrained from applying for the job entirely. As she said:

> With escort agencies, you see only women that don't look like me. They have nobody with my body type. I thought 'I don't fit in here'. In clubs and small-scale brothels it is the same. I realised that that was not an option for me.

Naomi limited herself to webcam work because she thought that people with her size would not be accepted by brothel or agency owners. Since she did not attempt to apply, it remains uncertain whether she would indeed have been rejected. It may be that business owners only portray the slimmest sex workers on their websites whilst the sex workers that actually work for them are more diverse.

Luz and Enrique, two Dutch native students who are also young and white, but who differed from Lisa and Naomi by being slim, did not encounter any problems securing a job in a massage

parlour and a club in the mid-stratum of the sex industry. The idea that they could possibly be rejected did not occur to them which may be caused by their awareness of their ability to meet Western beauty norms. In addition to this, it may also be that they anticipated that the hiring criteria within their sector of choice would not be very restrictive.

Whilst the aesthetic demands within the mid-market may be less exclusionary than those of the higher strata of the sex industry, the possession of a great level of erotic capital does give sex workers within this stratum a significant advantage over other sex workers who possess a lesser amount of erotic capital. Luz, who is 24, greatly benefited from her relatively young age and her ability to meet Western beauty demands. As she said:

> There is a high demand for my services because I am young and blonde.

The high demand for her services gave her a good income, but also complicated her relationship with other workers who received fewer clients because of a combination of their appearance and age.

Enrique, who was 22, also benefited from his relatively young age. However, as a male sex worker for other males, the clock was ticking faster for him. Enrique explains:

> Twenty-one years old is prime time. But it depends on your appearance. A non-smoker who is not overweight could possibly work until about 30 years old.

Enrique has a healthy body weight and whilst he was not sure whether he would continue working as a sex worker alongside his future job, his statement above suggests that he has the potential to stay in his line of work for a few more years.

In addition to the looser aesthetic requirements of the mid-market, third parties in this stratum did not pay much attention to the workers' possession of educational and cultural capital. When in contact with their clients, the student sex workers who worked in this stratum very rarely made use of these forms of capital. When I asked Enrique whether he promoted himself with his student identity, he said:

> Some visitors of the club want to get to know me better. In that case, I will tell them that I'm a student.

When I asked Luz the same question, she stated that:

> I don't actively promote myself as a student, but I do disclose it when they ask for it.

When I asked her how her clients responded to her student identity, she said:

> I don't think that they find that necessarily appealing. But I don't know. Maybe it makes me look young.

Here again, Luz refers to her young age as a selling point. Enrique also believed that his educational background had little value in the club. As he confirmed:

> I think that I am the only one in the club with an academic background. They look at me as the smart one. I am the scientist. Not a very erotic reputation, I reckon. So far, it has happened only once that a client chose me because of my background in maths. In this case, the client worked in the same field so we had a shared interest in things.

Daphne also did not see her educational background as a unique selling point for her work as a sex worker. Similar to the students who work as high-end escorts, she stressed the importance of her ability to uphold conversations with clients for her job. However, she differs from them in the sense that she does not identify her educational or cultural capital as a requisite for that. Daphne believes that in combination with her communicative skills, it is her personality that enables her to make a good connection with her clients.

Enrique, Luz and Daphne have the same educational and cultural capital as the students who work for third parties in the more elevated parts of the sex industry. The limited use of these capacities for the markets in which they operate may be related to the fact that the relatively moderate fees they charge attract clients with a lower educational background.

Considering the points made above, it is not unlikely that at least occasionally, the three students serve clients who have less educational and cultural capital than themselves. This would contradict the assumption of some academics that clients a priori hold a more privileged position in society compared to the sex workers who provide services to them (Vaughn, 2019).

6.2. Independent Student Sex Workers

Ten of the students worked as independent sex workers. Three of them combined independent work with work for a third party. Students chose to (also) operate independently because of a variety of reasons. As a self-employed sex worker, they enjoy a greater level of flexibility and autonomy and they avoid having to share their earnings with third parties. Male and transgender sex workers have few options than to work for themselves, as most third parties only work with cisgender women (Aidsfonds, 2018; van den Dries et al., 2021). As self-employed workers, the students do not have to deal with the selection criteria of third parties. Instead, they directly engage with potential clients. When promoting themselves online, Naomi and Lisa learned that they are able to run a successful business without meeting hegemonic beauty norms.

Naomi, who presumed that she would not get hired by escort agencies or brothel owners because of her weight, mentioned that she eventually became one of the top-earning webcam models

in Europe. When Lisa worked as an independent escort, she also learned that it is not the case that clients only desire thin women. She explained:

> In my work I learned that it is not the case that you have to meet particular physical criteria. I really believe that it is more important that you are comfortable with yourself.

The idea that the tastes and preferences of clients are much more diverse than some brothel and agency owners acknowledge, is also reported by a number of academics (Liepe-Levinson 2002; Stardust, 2015), as well as by the director of the Dutch Association of brothel owners (van Dorst, personal communication, February 24, 2021). In addition to this, McKeganey and Barnard (1996) argue that for some men, the ability to have sex with a variety of different women is one of the reasons why paying for sex appeals to them. It is likely that as a method to get in touch with clients, the use of the internet contributed to Naomi and Lisa's ability to capitalise on the variety of tastes that exist among clients. When advertising online, sex workers can reach a much wider audience which increases their chance to meet clients that are attracted to their particular profile (Bernstein, 2007; Burghart, 2018; Walby, 2012).

Nevertheless, Enrique and Liam experienced that independent sex workers who recruit clients online are not completely freed of hegemonic beauty norms either. They noticed that their ability to meet the physical demands of the gay spaces on the internet impacts their earning potential. Regarding the chat site through which Enrique recruits his clients, Enrique said:

> They always ask for your stats: your age, weight, length, length of your penis, whether you are a hairy person. I learned that these things impact what fees you can charge.

Liam also saw a connection between appearance and the fees that sex workers can charge. He said:

> There are boys who ask €250 for a date, but that is only possible when you are really muscular.

The demand to be muscular is also mentioned in other studies as being of great importance for independently working male escorts (Logan, 2010; Nelson et al., 2020; Ryan, 2019).

Independent student sex workers do not experience constraints imposed by third parties who may choose not to hire them. Nevertheless, as Enrique and Liam's quotes show, existing ideas of what counts as desirable in a given community can enhance the earning potential of some independent working student sex workers and diminish the commercial success of others.

6.2.1. The Student fetish: Not Accessible to Everyone

In working for high-end escort agencies, Poppy and Robin were able to capitalise on the fetishised image of the student successfully. I hence wondered about the extent to which independent

student sex workers also used their student identity to attract clients. Enrique, Tobias, Liam, Yannick and Livia mentioned that they occasionally advertised as students. Livia said:

> I do mention it [on the sugar arrangement website].

Then Liam explained:

> I put it in my profile because some people like it to hire a young smart ass.

When I asked Naomi whether she did the same, she had to deliberate for a while and answered:

> I think that I did so in the beginning. I portrayed myself as the innocent student who wanted to do something funny and kinky.

Her limited recall, as well as the fact that she did not adopt the student identity as a permanent promotion strategy, gives the impression that this was not her focal selling point. Naomi understood why this image did not work for her. As she explained:

> With a particular appearance you get fetishised much faster. They [the clients] only go for their fetish. I also have that as a BBW [the Big Beautiful Women]. You can have a well-developed marketing plan, but when they go for their fetish, it becomes irrelevant how you profile yourself.

Similar to Naomi, Lauren also had limited options to promote herself as a student. As she explained:

> They always have lots of questions about ethnicity, but they never really ask for my education. That only happened a couple of times. A lot of webcam models I interacted with on Twitter would really play up that they were students and be like 'OK, here is my exam week, do you want to send me extra money?' I never experienced that myself. I did wear a schoolgirl uniform though. But, I did that because it is an Asian fetish thing.

In Lauren's case, it was not her weight, but her Asian appearance that made it difficult to capitalise on the student image. As a consequence of the stereotyping of Asian women in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the West (see for a further explanation of this phenomenon section 5.4 on pages 109-110), Lauren's presumed ethnicity became her all-encompassing identity that leaves no room for acting out sex work personae unrelated to the ethnic group to which she belongs in the eyes of her clients. The phenomenon is also evidenced elsewhere that women of colour have limited options in what working persona they can use in sex work besides stereotypes based on their (presumed) race (Raguparan, 2017). As an internationally well-known Asian stereotype that originated in Japan, the schoolgirl fetish represents an idealised docile and innocent adolescent type of femininity (Kinsella,

2002; Miller, 2011) that differs from the adult higher education student who is not necessarily impeccable, was available to her because it fits her presumed ethnic profile.

Enrique, who self-identified as masculine during the interview but had recently started to explore the feminine side of his identity and presents himself with different gender identities to clients. When he promotes himself as a cisgender male, he uses '22student$$' as a nickname, whilst he does not use his student identity when he is active on the chat site as 'cdpayboy' [crossdressing payboy].

It seems that for overweight, non-white or transgender sex workers, their race, bodily weight or gender already fill in their identity in such a way that capitalising on other images becomes difficult. This reality explains why the students who manage to some extent to capitalise successfully on their student identity are all white, slim and cisgender.

6.2.2. Intellectual Sexiness

Whilst the independent student sex workers who are white, slim, cisgender and young had the ability to capitalise on their student identity, for most students this was not the marketing strategy they used most. Similar to some of the students who work for third parties, the independent workers capitalised much more on their cultural and educational capital. This was especially the case for Tobias, Liam, Enrique, Yannick and Livia. For example, Tobias explained that:

> It is not so much about the fact that I am a student. Instead, it is much more about the fact that I am highly educated and intelligent.

Similarly, Yannick said:

> I do use my student identity [when advertising herself], you must advertise with what is available to you. However, clients are not that interested in it. The most important aspect of my student identity is that it reassures clients that I am intelligent.

Yannick works as an (online) financial dominant who takes advantage of her clients financially; also referred to as financial domination. Her intellectual capacities not only appeal to her clients as an attractive personal feature, but her intelligence also contributes to her ability to show that she possesses enough authority to be able to dominate her customers.

In addition to explicitly mentioning their educational level in their online profiles, the students also made this implicitly clear by ensuring that their advertisements and other forms of online communication were well-written. Several students recognised that their educational and linguistic capital distinguished them favourably from other sex workers. For example, Enrique said:

> I really don't see any proper Dutch language use on the chat site. Myself, I do write without any mistakes. I show clients that I possess great language proficiency.

Livia had the same experience:

> Different to most people on sugar arrangement platforms, I do know how to write.

Similar to the student sex workers who work for third parties in the higher strata of the sex industry, the independent sex workers also used their cultural and educational capital to be able to entertain their clients with conversations. For example, Livia said:

> Because of my education, I have something to say.

The intellectual background of their clients is quite likely also similar. Livia said:

> I usually attract higher educated men who want someone smart. That is why the client I spoke about earlier has such a crush on me.

Whilst the fees of most independent workers who promote themselves as highly educated are significantly lower than the fees charged by the high-end escort agencies, they seemingly attract a clientele with a similar educational level and in line with that fact, these clients may also have a comparable income.

As I have shown, it can be lucrative for student sex workers to capitalise on their intelligence, their educational achievements, their linguistic capital and their cultural capital. These assets enable them to work with a higher educated and wealthier clientele in the higher strata of the sex industry. These sectors are then associated with diminished stigma and it is to this subject that I turn in the next section.

6.3. Sex Work Hierarchies and the Navigation of Stigma

With regard to the general population of sex workers (Dewey et al., 2019; Weitzer, 2022) and student sex workers specifically (J. Jones, 2019; Simpson & Smith, 2020), the stigma of sex work captured in this study is one of the most prominent challenges sex workers face. However, what works in the favour of the student sex workers in this study is that most of them work in the middle and upper parts of the sex industry. As stated earlier, jobs in the middle-market, and even more so in the higher strata, have a higher status which lessens the stigma attached to the occupation.

A small part of the student sex workers in this study actively used their positioning in the sex industry to undertake boundary work to manage the stigma of sex work. A similar phenomenon is also evidenced elsewhere in studies on sex workers in general (Benoit et al., 2018; Morrison & Whitehead, 2005; Weitzer, 2017) and in research on student sex work (Janssen, 2018; Simpson & Smith, 2020; van der Wagen et al., 2010). Moreover, Goffman (1964) points out that other stigmatised groups manage their exclusion in a similar fashion.

When I asked a group of four high end escorts what terminology I could use to describe their work, it appeared that they were very eager to distinguish themselves from sex workers with a lower status. Whilst the four women did not necessarily object to the term 'sex work', they preferred not to

use the word out of fear that people might get the wrong idea about the nature of their occupation. For example, Poppy said:

> I call it 'high-class escort', otherwise people may think that I stand behind the windows. People can be easily judgemental.

Similarly, Frida explained that:

> When I talk about it with others, I say 'high-class escort'. It should not make a difference whether you work behind the windows or as an escort. You will eventually have sex. But there is a major difference in how you work. It is just a nice job. You dine in fine restaurants and you have good conversations. It is so much more than sex. So yes, there is a difference.

Daphne was not unhappy with the sex work identity. Nevertheless, when describing her work, she provided a similar contrast with how she assumed sex work behind the windows would be. She said:

> My work is on a different level; my clients are certainly not drunk. Well, that may happen late at night, but generally speaking, I attract different people than in the red light. The whole experience is different. For myself and for my clients. Yes, I do understand that society has a very different view of the work behind the windows compared to escort work.

Whilst the sex industry in the Netherlands consists of a wide variety of sectors that have different levels of status attached to them, four of the five students explicitly referred to window-based sex work as the antithesis of their own job. The students may have chosen this point of reference because of the relatively low status of the sector. This is to say that the windows are very visible, the fees the workers charge are often relatively low, the services provided by the workers mainly consist of the sexual act and the number of clients served by each worker is often high. However, this could also be said about street work, whilst none of the students referred to this stratum.

One possible reason why the students were more likely to point out the contrast between window sex work and their own privileged occupation is that window sex work is a very iconic and well-known phenomenon of the Dutch sex industry. Interestingly enough, none of the four students had ever been in contact with someone who actually works in this sector. For example, Daphne said:

> I don't know how it really is to work in the Wallen [a window area in the Amsterdam red light district], but I imagine that you are treated as a piece of meat.

It seems then that the students base their comparison on stereotypes.

The context in which the students were most likely to present themselves as high-class workers was when they wanted to disclose their occupation to significant others. Regarding this, Sophie said:

> For me there is no need to constantly repeat that I work in the high-class sector. I don't put that much value in that. However, when I disclosed my work to my parents, I did

> use it. When people think of high-class escorts, they think of luxury. Nice hotel rooms, rich men, jewels. It is not true, but people nevertheless believe it. It makes it more positive and it lessens the stigma. To a smaller extent, you are selling sex. Instead, you are a special lady to someone.

I coded the way Sophie and several other student sex workers who work for high-end escort agencies speak about their job as the *high-class narrative.* With this code, I refer to the presentation of their occupation as being very luxurious and very different compared to any other type of sex work.

The outcome of the use of the high-class narrative did vary. Whilst Sophie experienced her reliance on this representation of her work as successful, this was to a lesser extent the case for Frida, who said:

> Some people keep their negative ideas. No matter how luxurious it is, it is sex for money. The conditions don't change a thing.

Whether useful or not on the individual level, the students' use of their privileged position within the industry to manage stigma has some significant drawbacks. As Chapkis rightfully argues, "attaining respectability for some sexual professionals will do little to improve the lives of most sex trade workers" (2017, p. 3). Frida recognised this problem too in saying:

> On one hand, I just explain what my work is like. But it is a bit unkind, because I compare myself with escorts who are not high class. By doing so, I push them further down to make myself look better.

Different from Frida, Sophie was not concerned with the fact that she contributed to the further increase of inequality among different sex workers. She said:

> I am realistic. There is a major difference between girls. You know, there are differences in the world. People don't look the same at a cleaner or a hotel manager. You also see differences between high-class and regular sex workers. It is like that.

Poppy and Daphne did not share with me whether or not they had considered the possible consequences of the fact that they used the status of their occupation to deal with stigma. However, when I got back to Poppy a few years after the interview, she mentioned that over time, she became less concerned with sex work stigma and was therefore also less inclined to undertake boundary work to manage its harmful effect.

By further increasing the disparity among different groups of sex workers, the students also feed the already existing binary perspective on sex work. Several students experienced it as annoying that sex workers are either perceived as extremely privileged or as severely exploited. Regarding this, Elina said:

> When speaking of sex work, people often think about trafficking that takes place among workers behind the windows but when I talk with friends about my work, they think of it as an incredible luxury. They are extremes with not much in between.

The misrepresentation bothered Elina because neither representation properly reflected her experiences in her work.

In addition to the negative impact on underprivileged groups of sex workers and the misrepresentation of the profession, there is another reason why it can be harmful to use one's elevated position to manage stigma. This stigma management technique also feeds the stigmatisation of the whole profession. As Benoit et al. (2018) rightfully point out:

> This type of social distancing [presenting oneself as more respectful than other sex workers] is commonplace and creates a vicious cycle in which sex workers, in their struggle to escape prostitution stigma, perpetuate harmful stereotypes which in turn feed back into the very stigma they are burdened with at interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels.

When sex work is only acceptable under particular conditions, this underlines that there is something intrinsically wrong with the occupation which has to be compensated for.

In this study, several students used the high standing of their stratum to make this distinction. As I explained in chapter 2, this type of boundary work was also visible in two other studies on student sex work in the Netherlands (Janssen, 2018; van der Wagen et al., 2010) and in the UK (Simpson & Smith, 2020). In other studies, student sex workers relied on the temporary nature of their occupation to present themselves as better than sex workers who may be involved in sex work for a longer period of time (Trautner & Collett, 2010), or they stressed their educational attainments to make them look better than their colleagues who have no access to higher education (Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010).

When sex workers uplift their own status by further pushing down others, they not only harm these sex workers by further increasing their stigma (Hanks, 2019), they also reinforce the idea that sex work by itself, in all its diversity, is not an acceptable job. This anti-sex work viewpoint feeds their own stigma, irrespective of the sector in which they work. Besides reinforcing the stigma of sex work, the stigmatisation of sex workers in sectors that are perceived as 'lower', also referred to as "horizontal stigma" (Mellor & Benoit, 2023, p. 2), hinders mutual support across workers from different strata as well as collective activism for the improvement of sex workers' rights (Toubiana & Ruebottom, 2022).

6.3.1. A Critical Outlook on the Whorearchy

Different to the student sex workers discussed in the previous section, the largest part of the student sex workers did not use the status attached to their stratum in the sex industry to manage the sex work stigma. Several students who had strong ties with the sex worker community in the Netherlands rather embraced the diversity that exists within the profession. For example, Liam said:

> Here at the university, it is so monotonous. In sex work, you meet people from all walks of life. From the high end to the streets. I like that. I don't look at myself as being

> better than them because I serve fewer clients. Absolutely not. Remember, the job is not bad, isn't it?

Naomi, Veronique and Robin shared similar perspectives. The four students had worked or volunteered for advocacy groups for sex workers. During their work, they had the opportunity to meet sex workers involved in a variety of different types of occupations. For Naomi, this was an opportunity to break down stereotypes. She said:

> Before I met a key person in our self-led group who had worked behind the windows herself, I had very unnuanced ideas regarding this sector.

It may be that the other students also benefited from such encounters. Besides these contacts, as activists, it is likely that they were able to develop a greater understanding of the negative consequences associated with the hierarchies among sex workers.

As explained in chapter five, Veronique, Paulina and Ariane had the opportunity to look at sex work during their studies. It is not unlikely that the insights the students gained through their education (also) contributed to their nuanced perspective regarding sex workers involved in other strata within the sex industry than themselves. This was also the case for Elina. Whilst studies of the sex industry were not part of her curriculum, she researched the phenomenon of stigma. She said:

> Some call themselves 'high end'. I am less inclined to do so. It is not only that I am too down to earth for that. I researched stigma, and I think it is because of that that I am more aware of the processes that take place. I do understand that others do it. It has a negative connotation. You want to distance yourself from that. But I feel that when you stress the high-class element, you distance yourself from the lower classes. I don't like doing that and in the end no one will benefit from it.

Because of her studies, Elina was aware of the fact that boundary work to improve one's own status negatively impacts all sex workers, as described by Benoit et al. (2018). This was a reason for her not to do so.

I should note though that students who endorse diversity in the sex industry and who have no intention to uplift their status by pushing down others may nevertheless unintentionally benefit from the lesser stigma attached to their work. It is difficult to disclose one's occupation without giving cues of the privileged nature of the job.

As a group of four students who currently or in the past had worked in the lower or middle strata of the sex industry, Lauren, Lina, Luz and Lisette did not rely on social distancing to manage stigma. Besides the fact that the status attached to their work would provide fewer opportunities for diminishing stigma, it may also be that their experiences at work have broken down stereotypes attached to the different strata. The above case applied to Lina as having worked in a variety of lower and midrange sectors, she rebranded herself as a high-end escort. Whilst significant upwards mobility is unusual in the sex industry (Weitzer, 2022), Lina was able to do so with the aid of a website

designer specialised in the sex industry. This partnership, in combination with her access to higher education, enabled her to successfully capitalise on the high-end imaginary.

Regarding the rebranding of her working persona, Lina said:

> Working as a high-class escort means that you get clients who treat you better. Besides this, it does not actually mean anything.

With this statement she both expresses that she benefits from the better treatment from clients and at the same time challenges the importance paid to the status attached to jobs in the high-end escort industry. Naomi and Lea, who both solely work as a webcam models, could manage stigma by presenting themselves as morally superior to full service sex workers because they have no physical contact with clients which gives them a higher position in the whorearchy (Dewey & Zheng, 2013; Herremann, 2022; Sawicki et al, 2019; Weitzer, 2018). Interview excerpts with Lea did not lead into that direction and Naomi explicitly rejected this idea. She said:

> It occurred to me when I dated men that they said something like: 'Your webcam work is a turn on for me, but if you would do escort, I would really not be OK with that.' Then, I would be like 'Hey, we have only met five hours ago!'

In this quote Naomi explains that it is not on these relative strangers to make a moral judgment of what type of sex work is either good or bad.

6.4. Conclusion

The sex industry is a very hierarchical labour sector. These hierarchies are not only internalised by the general public but also by (student) sex workers. The criteria that inform the status of each stratum within the sex industry are, amongst others, the visibility of the sector, the location where the work takes place, the identity of the customers and the workers in terms of for example socioeconomic status, educational level and racial background, the remuneration and the labour conditions. Most students prefer to work in the middle and the higher strata of the sex industry, where they are able to generate a higher income and where they face, on the whole, better labour conditions. The stigma attached to occupations in these strata is less severe.

Student sex workers differ from lower educated sex workers through their possession of a high cultural and educational capital. These qualities enhanced the labour opportunities of most study participants in their attempt to secure their preferred job. The possession of cultural and educational capital is highly valued by third parties in the higher strata of the sex industry as well as by many clients.

However, several students nevertheless struggled finding their desired occupation. The intersection of their race, language use, appearance and body shape, imposed barriers in their ability

to secure their preferred job. Contrary to the experiences of these students, due to intersectional privilege, several students who meet Western beauty demands by being white and slim experienced no difficulties in accessing their desired stratum of the sex industry. A small part of this group managed the stigma associated with their job by pointing out their privileged place within the whorearchy and by downplaying workers in lower strata.

Doing so is not unproblematic. The boundary work the student sex workers undertake further stigmatises sex workers in other sectors. At the same time, the idea that sex work can only be acceptable under certain conditions reinforces the idea that sex work is an intrinsically problematic occupation which reproduces the stigma for all sex workers. I also argued that pointing out differences between different sex workers further feeds the existing binary viewpoint in which sex workers are either perceived as privileged workers embedded in luxuries or as victims. Students engaged with advocacy work for sex workers and students who have dedicated themselves to the sex industry in the context of their studies were not inclined to use the standing of their sector to uplift their status.

In chapter seven, I further elaborate on the students' experiences at work. In the middle and the higher echelons of the Dutch sex industry where most students find employment, clients and third parties pose a great demand on the students' performance of emotional labour (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Hoang, 2010; Hochschild, 1983/2003). Most student sex workers were very involved with the performance of emotional labour. In chapter seven, I will elaborate on both the advantages and the challenges that come with this aspect of the students' labour in the sex industry.

Chapter 7.
Experiences: The Pleasure and the Challenges of the Emotional Demands of Sex Work

In chapter six, I provided insight into the journey that the student sex workers have undertaken to find their preferred niche within the sex industry. In my intersectional analysis, I showed that the ability to meet Western beauty norms - such as being white, slim and young, amongst others – heavily influences in which stratum of the sex industry a student can work. One characteristic of my study population not always present among the larger population of sex workers in the Netherlands is their high educational and cultural capital. In combination with these aforementioned characteristics, the possession of a certain level of educational and cultural capital supports the students' ability to work in the more lucrative and more prestigious middle and higher sectors of the sex industry where they often experience better labour conditions.

One characteristic of the middle and upper strata of the sex industry is the significance of the performance of emotional labour by sex workers (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Hoang, 2010). Besides a brief engagement with the concept on the part of J Jones (2019), none of the studies on student sex work presented in chapter 2 have discussed the engagement of students with emotional labour. Owing to the stated gap in the literature on student sex work, I was not aware of how involved some student sex workers were with the performance of emotional labour and therefore my interview schedule did not cover this subject. Despite this, the student sex workers still spoke at length about the emotional demands of their work, which was particularly the case amongst self-employed student sex workers. They put a lot of effort into creating a sense of genuineness and reciprocity, so deriving significant pleasure from connecting with their clients. This made their work both enjoyable and valuable. However, their relative closeness with their clients makes it difficult at times for them to enforce boundaries. The students who work for third parties also enjoy the social contact with their clients but are less emotionally involved with them on the whole.

In this chapter, I explore the differing experiences with the performance of emotional labour of the two groups of student sex workers. Near the end of my analysis, I address the fact that the performance of emotional labour within sex work did not emerge as a gendered phenomenon in this study.

7.1. The Demand of Clients for Intimacy

Most encounters in the (higher) middle market, and even more so the upper parts of the sex industry, last longer and involve a larger range of non-sexual activities compared to sex work that takes place in the lower ends of the sector (Cunningham & Kendall, 2017). Longer bookings that involve more than just the sexual act enable the client to get to know the sex worker and to build up an intimate

connection (Weitzer, 2010). For this reason, these paid encounters often resemble a romantic date. Clients highly value encounters with sex workers in which they experience a level of intimacy (Brents & Jackson, 2013; Grönvall & Plantin, 2021; Huff, 2011; Milrod & Weitzer, 2012) which is also reflected in the fees that sex workers can charge for this service (Brents & Jackson, 2013; Carbonero & Gómez Garrido, 2018; Nelson et al., 2020). The label that is often used for this type of paid encounter is the Girlfriend Experience (abbreviated as GFE) or the Boyfriend Experience (BFE), depending on the gender of the sex worker (Nelson et al., 2020; Tewksbury & Lapsey, 2017).

A possible explanation of the popularity of this service is the idea that some men who pay for sex do so out of emotional needs rather than purely for sexual gratification (Lucas, 2005). It may be easier for them to share their feelings with a stranger than with someone in their own network (Weitzer, 2010). Another possible reason why some clients prefer encounters that resemble a romantic date is that it enables them to forget that they have to pay for the service (Sanders, 2008) in an interaction that more closely resembles traditional courtship and fits better with social gender norms (Brents & Jackson, 2013). Given the current moral panic on human trafficking, it may also be that clients prefer this type of encounter to ensure themselves (or others) that they are not involved with someone who is forced to do sex work. A combination of these different motivations may also be possible.

Sex workers operating across all strata of the indoor sex industry (Carbonero & Gómez Garrido, 2018; Huff, 2011) offer the GFE or BFE, whilst this phenomenon is also reported among non-drug dependent street workers (Oselin & Hail-Jares, 2021). In addition to its existing prevalence, this type of service is most common in the higher ends of the sex industry (Bernstein, 2007; Brents & Jackson, 2013; Carbonero & Gómez Garrido, 2018; Tsang, 2017; van der Wagen et al., 2010) in which many student sex workers in the current research work. As several student sex workers argue (see chapter 6), it may be that clients expect that their higher cultural and educational background makes them better equipped to offer this kind of service. This hypothesis has also been posed by Nelson et al. (2020) who noticed in their study of 839 independent female escorts in the USA that higher-educated sex workers offering the GFE charge the highest fees.

As mentioned, a difference became noticeable in the extent to which self-employed student sex workers and student sex workers working for third parties are involved with the performance of emotional labour. For this reason, I will discuss the experiences with the phenomenon of the two groups separately. I will start with the emotional labour performed by the 12 study participants who (also) work independently in the sex industry and who were most eager to connect with their clients. I then will analyse the experiences with emotional labour of the ten students who (also) work for third parties and who keep their clients more emotionally distanced.

7.2. Emotional Labour: A Source of Enjoyment for Independent Student Sex Workers

Most of the students who work independently in the sex industry were very eager to speak about the emotional labour they perform in their work. Similar to the middle-class sex workers in Bernstein's (2007) research, the students genuinely enjoy being in touch with clients and establishing a connection with them. For example, as Liam explains:

> What I write in my profile is that I want to get to know the client. For that reason, I attract a lot of people that do not only look for an orgasm. Instead, they search for company and shared intimacy. Sex is only a part of it. I like to connect with them and to get to know them as a person. Otherwise I would never have done this job for so long. It would be too boring. You know, the sex is not that exciting [Liam laughs]. To the contrary.

Tobias shares Liam's genuine interest in his clients. As he explains:

> I still [after a number of years in this industry] find it interesting to get to know the clients. They are often very sweet men. They are really adorable. I appreciate the personal contact, also when I don't find them physically appealing.

Likewise, Lisa stated that:

> I like the social contact. I do bond with many of my clients. It is good to see them again when we have not been with each other for a while.

Similar statements were made by the largest part of the students who work independently. Before they entered the sex industry the students did not anticipate that they would build up a somehow genuine connection with their clients. In the quote below, Liam explains that he was surprised by the fact that his clients were very much interested in him as a person. As he said:

> I thought that clients would only be interested in sex. I presumed that they would leave shortly thereafter. I thought that I would be treated like an object.

Similar to Liam, Enrique also pointed out that he did not feel objectified in his work. This recognition accorded with his sense of logic. As he acknowledged:

> I realised myself that it is only logical that sex workers are not treated as an object. If a client wants an object, he can also spend that money on a beautiful sex toy. But the added value of sex work is having to do with a real human being.

Similar to Liam and Enrique's positive assessment, several other students were also surprised by the fact that clients treated them as a sexual object to a much lesser extent than they had imagined before they started.

As mentioned, the encounters in the strata of the sex industry in which most students work last longer and consist, besides sex, of activities that are not of a sexual nature. The students then use their educational and cultural capital as well as their communication skills to undertake these activities with clients. It may be that the students' reliance on abilities existing beyond their erotic

capital makes them feel less objectified. Tobias explicitly pointed out a positive correlation between his education and the pleasant way his clients treat him:

> I think that when my clients book people who have fewer intellectual capacities than me, the encounter will be different. I guess that escorts who have less education may experience more objectification.

Tobias is highly educated and can only guess how clients treat lower educated sex workers. However, his hypothesis may be right. Studies indicate that in the higher strata of the sex industry where the workers are more likely to be highly educated, clients show a greater level of politeness compared to clients in the lower strata (Joohee, 2016; Schoof, 2018). Here, Tobias only mentions his educational privilege, but it is conceivable that his racial privilege also has an impact on his pleasant experiences. Several studies also point out a connection between the racial background of sex workers (A. Jones, 2020; Brooks, 2010; Joohee, 2016; Steward, 2022; Vaughn, 2019) and the treatment they face, with black sex workers being treated most poorly (Brooks, 2010; Steward, 2022; Vaughn, 2019).

Another reason why clients in the middle and the higher strata of the sex industry may be more inclined to treat sex workers well is their wish to experience an intimate encounter that resembles a non-remunerated romantic date. Clients make it easier for service providers to act like a romanticised boyfriend or girlfriend when they are treated accordingly (Milrod & Monto, 2012; Sanders, 2008). Put differently, in these scenarios the client is encouraged to perform a role in co-creating the GFE (Huff, 2011; Tewksbury & Lapsey, 2017) or BFE. Here again, the students may benefit from their educational, race and class privilege. Clients who can afford a booking with a sex worker that lasts long enough to build up a somehow genuine connection may be predominantly white and may search for such an encounter within their own ethnic and socioeconomic group (Walby, 2012). Unlike most independent student sex workers who were positively surprised to find out that their clients are solely interested in them as a sexualised object, Lauren was less concerned with being someone's object of desire. As she put it:

> I don't mind it [being objectified]. I think it would be silly and naïve to think that you would not get objectified in prostitution. So, I was OK with that.

Whilst Lauren possessed a similar level of educational and cultural capital as the other student sex workers that work in the mid or the upper strata, she chose to work behind the windows because she was unwilling to offer the girlfriend experience. She explained:

> I am not a very touchy person. Especially with people I am not attractive to. I don't want them to cuddle me or anything.

Activities such as kissing or hugging are less common behind the windows. As mentioned in chapter three, the encounters that take place there last only a short time and are for the largest part focused on

the sexual act. The long conversations that enable the sex workers to make a connection with their clients are less common in this part of the sex industry. Nevertheless, the increased normalisation of the demand for more emotional intimacy as part of a paid sexual encounter (Bernstein, 2007) has also reached the windows. It occasionally occurred to Lauren that clients would initiate forms of affection beyond the agreed sexual acts which upset her: “That is way too much work for the money.” Lauren confirms here that the intimacy these clients demand requires an investment in emotional labour and that a higher premium should be paid for this effort.

7.2.1. Meaningful Labour and Personal Development

In addition to the pleasure they derive from building up a certain connection with their clients, most independent student sex workers within this study suggested that the emotional labour they perform gives meaning to their work. The students experience personal growth as a result of the exchanges they have with their clients. For example, Liam said:

> I had not anticipated that the job would also contribute to my personal development.

The encounters he had with clients enabled him to understand others better which was also the case for Lisa. She said:

> I get to know a lot of different people. I do have interesting conversations with them. It is because of this that I am able to understand a wider variety of perspectives.

Enrique experienced personal growth in his sexuality, stating that:

> Some people are very clumsy with sex. They feel insecure. This is very different for me. I feel very at ease when having sex. At work, I often encounter clients with erectile dysfunction. I know that there is no need to make a big issue of that. It does not impede a feeling of shared intimacy. I can easily adjust to situations like these. For that reason, I can say that my work positively contributes to sex in my private life.

Similar to Liam and Lisa, in his private life Enrique benefits from the skills he has developed through his work.

Most independent student sex workers take their emotional labour to be valuable because it enables them to contribute to the well-being of their clients. In this context, they described situations that ranged from simply being able to provide intimacy and sexual pleasure to supporting clients at the most desperate moments of their lives. Regarding the latter, Naomi said:

> One client told me: ‘You are a lifesaver!’ I knew that that was the case.

It happened a number of times that she had webcam conversations during which she sensed that her clients had no-one else to talk to when they found themselves in a situation of despair. Similarly, Liam had visited a client who disclosed that he reconsidered his initial idea to commit suicide because he saw the light at the end of the tunnel after his booking with this sex worker. In turn, Enrique had to comfort a client who had experienced sexual violence in the past. He explained:

> A very good customer told me that his first gay experience was a gang rape. I could see what an impact it had on him. All he asked from me was to be hugged the whole evening. I realised that I meant a lot to him that night.

Distinct from the experiences of Naomi, Liam and Enrique, Tobias's encounters with clients were often more light-hearted. He said:

> Getting to know people, hearing their stories, being able to offer people intimacy is actually a very rewarding job. What I notice is that clients are very happy near the end of the booking.

Whilst Tobias did not have to support clients who deal with severe difficulties in their lives, he experiences as rewarding his ability to provide intimacy to clients who need it. Similar to Tobias, two other students Lea and Livia were also happy to talk with their clients and to provide them with intimacy. However, as soon as clients became too demanding on a psychological level, both students were less eager to continue working with them. Regarding one particular client, Lea said:

> I had a client with severe problems. I don't want to be a psychologist, but I also did not want to be unkind and reject him. He spoke about his addiction and his depression. I was much more a psychologist than a sex worker. It was emotionally tiring. I want to do sex work; I am not a psychiatrist. But OK, this seems to be part of the job.

Lea had not entered her profession to provide psychological aid to clients. It is likely that her disinterest in this particular demand has made it harder for her to employ deep acting to evoke the suitable feelings of care. This can make the situation emotionally more taxing. Whilst webcam workers can easily reject or even block clients, Lea did not want to be unkind and was therefore reluctant to do so. At the same time, she found it acceptable to acknowledge that there are also downsides associated with her job. Livia responded differently to a similar occurrence. As soon as one of her clients became emotionally too demanding, she stopped seeing him. She said:

> I had this client whose life is always difficult. The conversations were always very heavy, so I told him that I did not want to see him anymore.

Different to Lea, Livia decided to cease seeing the client and avoided having to invest a large amount of emotional labour.

7.2.2. Emotionally Committed whilst Maintaining Boundaries

The fact that most student sex workers who work independently are involved very emotionally with their clients makes their work meaningful. However, the students' emotional commitment to their clients does not mean that the boundaries between their work and their private lives are completely blurred. At least to some extent, most independent student sex workers use Hochschild's (1983/2003) healthy estrangement. The students appreciate the time they spend with their clients but once the booking is over, they close off the encounter on an emotional level; at least as much as they are able to. Considering that their agendas are packed with multiple activities and obligations such as lectures, papers, exams, internships, jobs outside the sex industry, hobbies, sport, household obligations and, in some cases, political activism, sororities and volunteering work, the fact that these sex workers remain emotionally involved with clients beyond the bookings almost seems impossible.

What appears to help the independent student sex workers in creating some professional distance is the adaptation of elements of a double self. Lea and Naomi have developed a working persona that resembles an ideal-typical version of themself. Lea, who was waiting for a sex-change operation, presented herself in her desired future feminine role while Naomi, who deals with bodily insecurities, advertised online as a very confident and body positive webcam model. Lauren adopted an ethnic profile that matched with her appearance but not with her actual nationality. Yannick, who does not self-identify as a person with a dominant character, stepped into a very dominant role to be able to work as a financial dominatrix. To separate her work life further from her private life in the future, she hopes to be able to attract clients whom, to a lesser extent, resemble her peers. She said:

> So far, I have only met guys from my own age group. That really feels odd. I would rather meet much older clients because that keeps them a bit more at distance.

Yannick deliberated on a strategy to get in touch with these more mature clients. Other students were less inclined to develop a work identity. Instead, they kept their work and their private lives separated by dedicating particular hours to their job, reserving the remaining parts of the day for their studies and other activities or they purposely kept their private physical space hidden from their clients. For example, Lina said:

> I don't allow clients to call me day and night. I only want to be available from seven to eleven. I have to be home by midnight. At any other time, the phone is switched off.

This practice enabled Lina to keep both worlds separated. In addition to this, her limited availability also enabled her to succeed in her studies. In contrast, Liam was less concerned with time limitations. He found it more important to keep clients away from his private space. He said:

> I am unable to receive clients at home. I live in student accommodation and before that, I lived with my parents. I must say that seeing clients elsewhere has always worked well for me. I would not want to receive clients at home. My house really is a part of my private life.

Not having clients entering his private residence enabled Liam to maintain a certain professional distance from his job.

7.2.3. Balancing Authenticity

Taking on a working role which gives one the ability to separate one's work life and one's private life is associated with a positive impact on the emotional health of sex workers (Chapkis, 1997). It helps sex workers not to take experiences personally and it supports their abilities to set boundaries. However, taking on a professional role conflicts with the growing demand from clients to hire a sex worker who is very authentic; a phenomenon that is most prevalent in the middle and upper parts of the sex industry (Bernstein, 2007; Huff, 2011) in which most students work. For this reason, sex workers have to find a middle ground to satisfy both their own needs as well as the needs of their clients (Sanders, 2005a). This can be a challenge (Davina, 2017). When Lisette had just started working as an escort, she found it hard to find the right balance. She said:

> I have been very much occupied with the protection of my boundaries. Society does not see my job as work and because of that, I did not look at it as such either. Consequently, the boundaries between my private self and my work identity were very unclear. Clients could trespass my boundaries too easily. This happened with clients who thought that there was more between us than just a commercial encounter. It also happened with clients who desperately needed me to cope with their lives.

For Lisette, it was helpful to frame sex work as a job. As soon as that was the case, it became easier for her to set professional boundaries with her clients. Since then, she significantly reduced the amount of private time she invested in them which contributed to her ability to pursue her dream to enter higher education. However, it did take her some time to develop this professional attitude. Similarly, Liam also needed time to learn how to enforce boundaries. He explained:

> Now, I can deal much better with this complexity [the balance between genuineness and professionalism] compared to when I was 18 years old. At that time, I was too worried that clients would stop liking me when I would apply stricter boundaries.

Lisa and Liam's experience support Hochschild's (1983/2003) idea that the development of a work persona requires a level of maturity in the job. Nevertheless, the more experienced student sex workers in my study remained occupied with a constant re-evaluation of their role. The following interview excerpt provides an insight in this process. With regard to the client who had suffered sexual abuse in the past, Enrique said:

> I noticed that the client found it very hard to let me go and I understood this very well. It was a very heavy experience for me. The client desperately needed me to be able to

> feel ok. So, how do you say goodbye in such a situation? For me it is just a job. It is such a complex balance between the business aspect of it and how it can become personal. It really is a skill to balance the two.

Enrique is one of the students who were most able to distinguish his real persona clearly from his work profile. Yet the complex emotional setting he describes in the quote above made it a challenge to deal properly with such a situation.

7.2.4. Authenticity and Boundary Crossing

For Livia, who works as a sugar baby, the line between her work life and her private life was much more blurred, which is different than for the students who adopted several elements of a double self. Instead, Livia approached her work with only a single self. She admitted that:

> I am always very much myself [at work]. That is my working persona.

She exposed a lot of herself during the encounters, and in the interview excerpt below she explains why:

> The only way I am able to do this job is by making a deep connection. I want to know who I am dealing with and once I open up, I really go into depth with them. That is how I am.

Livia made a conscious choice to be very authentic during her work. In addition to keeping little distance from her clients on an emotional level, she also considered sharing her physical space with one of her regular clients. This repeat customer had plans to buy an investment property and Livia considered accepting the offer to accommodate herself in this building. Whilst she experienced the emotional closeness between herself and her clients as positive, her little professional distance had severe consequences. As she explained:

> I know that it is because of this [because of her authenticity and the intimate connection she develops with her clients] that it happens so often that men fall in love with me despite the fact that they are married and have kids.

Another consequence of the intimate connection between Livia and her clients is that the latter often loses sight of the fact that he is a consumer of a paid service. Livia explained:

> To ask for a monthly compensation remains difficult. They want to be part of my private life. They don't want to believe that it is a job. They think it is all real. They think that we are lovers, they think ‘she doesn't do it for the money, she does it for me’.

The emotional labour cost Livia much energy to put her clients back in their role *as* clients and to get compensated for her work. These requirements were not only due to her high level of authenticity and the little emotional distance between herself and her clients, as the ambiguous nature of sugar

arrangements also further complicated the picture. In sugar arrangements, the conditions of the exchange are far from clear for both parties (Day, 2004). Moreover, the sugar arrangement websites through which most sugar babies contact their sugar daddies do not enhance clarity. As Livia explained, they prohibit advertisers from explicitly stating their desired compensation. As someone who explored her options as a sugar baby before she became an escort, Sophie also confirms this contradiction. Although the occupation is not seen as such within the Dutch regulated framework for the sex industry, when we discussed the legal implications of the fact that sugaring resembles escort work, she said:

> The sugar daddy and sugar baby must like each other and then, an arrangement may develop. But it must not be the primary intention.

With 'the development of an arrangement,' Sophie refers to the agreement between both parties regarding the investment of the sugar baby and the nature of her compensation. In her view, the websites profile the encounter as such to avoid any association with sex work. At a later stage, the women's negotiation power remains diminished because sugar babies are expected to hide the connection between their remuneration and their willingness to have sex.

Nevertheless, several students who worked in a more formalised part of the sex industry and who showed elements of a double self, alongside aspects associated with a single self also encountered clients who tried to merge their commercial encounter into a non-remunerated one. For example, as Liam explained:

> When time is running up, I have to search for ways to bring the encounter to an end. I have to be creative and come up with excuses like 'I have to leave at this or that time because…' Clients tend to push the boundaries. This is the hard part of the job. Some clients feel really hurt because that lovely boy is not their friend who wants to chat with them for hours without getting paid.

Liam's working practice mostly contained elements of a double self, such as his insistence on meeting clients outside his private residence and his registration as an escort with the chamber of commerce. Nonetheless, the quote above, Liam does not fall back on a clearly defined hourly rate that would separate his working hours from his private time. In this respect, he shows signs of a single self. In fact, Liam relies on excuses to avoid hurting his clients' feelings by making the remunerated nature of the encounter too obvious. This decision is not so much commercially motivated. Instead, it is difficult for him to be honest about the financial nature of the encounter because he genuinely likes most of his clients. Here, his professional role gets blurred.

Other students also reported that the sympathy they felt for a part of their clientele made it more difficult for them to respond in a concise way to situations in which clients pushed their boundaries by trying to become part of their private lives. It may be the case that the clients of the student sex workers truly believe that their feelings for their service providers are genuinely mutual.

As Milrod and Weitzer (2012) point out, it has a sense of logic that they experience confusion when a paid encounter feels like an authentic romantic date.

In her 2008 study of the sexual scripts of male clients, Sanders indeed encountered clients who were unsure whether or not the encounter was strictly commercial for the sex worker. It is possible that the confusion is even greater when the service providers maintain little distance between themselves and their clients, so showing evidence of a single self, particularly when they genuinely like their clients. The clients may also be aware that many student sex workers adopt a selection process before they accept a booking. Their awareness of the fact that their service provider selected them from a larger group of potential customers may further feed into their illusion of mutuality.

My data shows that it is precisely this confusion that motivates the clients to compromise the professional role of student sex workers, burdening the latter with the task of performing emotional labour to put the client back in their role as clients. In her 2007 study, Bernstein elaborated widely on the pleasure self-employed middle-class sex workers experience when providing their services in a genuinely authentic fashion. My research confirms that sex workers who are more or less similarly privileged as Bernstein's study participants can indeed find enjoyment in providing paid encounters that include a high level of intimacy. However, my data also shows that another side of the coin exists that is not present in Bernstein's ground-breaking work; namely, that the provision of intimate services through the simulation of a romantic date also requires a significant emotional investment in the enforcement of boundaries.

7.2.5. Performing Emotional Labour to Manage Other Types of Misconduct

Clients who crossed the boundaries of the student sex workers who work independently mostly did so by disguising the commercial nature of the transaction. However, several students have also had to deal with other types of boundary crossing. Students who worked exclusively online, or who used the internet to recruit clients for a face-to-face meeting, faced online harassment. The fact that online interactions are anonymous and at distance may lower the threshold for bad behaviour (Mitchell et al., 2010). As Lea explained, for example:

> Most of the time, my job is nice. I hold a very positive attitude towards 80% of my clients. But the remaining 20% has the tendency to push my boundaries. When I say 'No, that is not possible,' they don't move on to something else. Instead they ask, 'Why not?' and continue to ask for it. The other 80% gets it straight away that not everything is possible and is like, 'Let's do something else instead.'

Whilst Lea found this behaviour utterly annoying, she did not feel that she had to invest a great deal of emotional labour in the enforcement of her boundaries. As a webcam model, she could easily end the conversation with clients who behave in such ways. Although an escort can also end the encounter with a client and leave, the threshold to click away an unruly customer may be much lower.

Naomi also encountered unpleasant clients via the webcam. Unlike Lea's case, these clients

did not trespass her boundaries by asking her for shows she was unwilling to perform. Instead, they verbally abused her, as she acknowledged:

> Similar to other types of sex work, clients can mentally break you despite the fact that there is a screen between the two of you. People can say anything to you whilst they remain anonymous. I can deal with that because I take on my working role once I start working. As a webcam model, I am not insecure. I just laugh about people who say silly things.

For Naomi, her adoption of a double self then lessened the harm caused by the insults from viewers. This was also the case for Enrique. Regarding the conversations he had online when he searched for clients for face-to-face encounters, he said:

> Some people just don't realise that they are actually dealing with a human being.

Whilst Enrique, similar to Lea and Naomi, was not overly concerned with the bad behaviour of people online, A. Jones (2016) points out that experiences like these do qualify as workplace harassment. The possible psychological harm caused by this kind of online harassment has yet to be explored (Ibid).

In addition to online harassment, another way that clients or people who pretend to be clients step over the boundaries of these students is by reaching out to them without having any intention to make a booking (time wasters) or by not showing up at appointments (fakers). As reliable clients often demand a lot of time and energy before they proceed with a booking, it is difficult for sex workers to distinguish between sincere and unreliable people (Lilu Izar, 2019). Whilst the behaviour of fakers and time wasters is rarely discussed in the academic literature on sex work, it has been talked about on the discussion fora used by sex workers (Hookers, 2021; Support and Advice for Escorts, 2021) that they are very prevalent among independent sex workers who are engaged in direct forms of sex work. Several student sex workers referred to fakers and time wasters as one of the largest downsides of their job. Indeed, Lina suffers a lot from both types of misconduct and with regard to the fakers, as she explained:

> Some guys make bookings and then cancel them. Their aunty is ill, they have to care for their granny. I give them two chances. When the booking still does not take place the third time, I am done with them.

She continued to speak about time wasters:

> About half of the clients are normal. The other half is not. Some of them are very, very annoying. They only seek attention. They ask questions whilst the answers are already obvious. They are ready to see a psychologist. I say to them: 'I am not someone you found via e-matching or Tinder [two dating Apps for non-commercial purposes that are well-known in The Netherlands], so when are we finally going to meet?'

As her testimony shows, Lina experiences as frustrating the misconduct of the insincere clients. She tries to manage these situations by adhering to a policy she had implemented to deal with this

frequently occurring problem. Whilst the boundaries she draws may force her clients to end their behaviour, this does not mean that the emotional impact of the boundary crossing ends there. As the Australian blogger and escort Wolf (2018) explains, sex workers invest a lot of emotional labour in their initial contact with a potential new client. By deep acting, they attempt to evoke the right emotions in themselves that enable them to act in such a way that potential clients feel encouraged to pursue the booking. As Wolf (2018) puts it, when clients reach out to sex workers without even considering paying for their services, this is not only a theft of their time and energy but also their emotional investment which may explain Lina's angriness and frustration.

Several student sex workers who work via the webcam or other forms of media also faced clients who sought their attention without any intention to compensate them for their work. Yannick, who recruits most clients via X and fetish sites, said:

> There are too many fake men who don't lead to any money whatsoever.

However, owing to her ability to identify the behaviour at an early stage, this issue did not bother her very much. When Naomi and Lauren worked on a webcam site where the sex workers only make money when they receive tips, they did not encounter illegitimate customers because non-paying visitors are allowed in these spaces. However, when no-one paid them for a number of hours, not only did this have financial consequences but it also frustrated them. Lauren said:

> Camming is a bit difficult, there are a lot of free members. A lot of people want to see everything for free. So, sometimes you are waiting like 3 or 4 hours before people with money start tipping.

Lauren experienced exhaustion investing emotional labour in communication with others without getting compensated for it, and she confessed that "You can get so bored and tired." Being fed up with this scenario, she moved on to sex work behind the windows. There are also quite likely to be down hours in this sector, though she did not express any concerns about these during the interview.

7.2.6. Repulsive Emotional Labour

Only Livia referenced the need to perform repulsive emotional labour (Hoang, 2010). For her, this was related to the age of her client. She said:

> I once had sex with someone who was around 60 or so. After this, I stopped sugaring. I felt so disgusted afterwards. He also looked older. He had an old man's scent and he had just finished smoking. I felt so bad. It made me stop doing this.

Owing to the disgust Livia felt in relation to this client, she ceased working as a sugar baby. After a while, she reconsidered this decision and returned to the job. She said:

> I started working again. I thought, I'll implement age criteria. That is the good thing about sugar arrangements.

Livia realised herself that her job would be more attractive when she stopped seeing older clients. As a self-employed sex worker she enjoyed the freedom to make this decision, which was also informed by her privileged position as a student sex worker who is not financially dependent on sex work. It may be that none of the other independently working student sex workers shared experiences with feelings of disgust towards clients because they also effectively used selection criteria based on their own needs. It may also be that they are not easily disgusted by people, or that they found it acceptable to also have to deal with clients they find repulsive. Whatever the reason might be for the students not to talk about being repulsed by clients, the fact that Livia's feelings initially motivated her to stop working as a sugar baby shows that they can be extremely unpleasant for (student) sex workers. For this reason, I concur with Hoang (2010) that repulsive emotional labour is a form of emotional work that deserves more attention.

7.3. The Emotional Labour of Students Who Work for Third Parties

Here, 10 of the student sex workers (also) work for third parties. With the exception of Enrique, who works in a nightclub where clients can talk with the sex workers before they decide to pay for their services, the 9 other students only deal with clients when their actual booking starts. The women who work for escort agencies receive very little information about the client before they meet them. As Francis explained:

> When I go to a client for a booking, I have a name and an age - that's it.

Similarly Luz, who works in a massage parlour, does not have any prior information about new clients until the massage commences. Unlike the self-employed student sex workers who get to know their clients once they respond to their advertisement or connect with them via any other route, the students who work for third parties cannot invest in the relationship with their clients until their actual booking starts. Consequently, they have less time to develop a sense of intimacy. Regarding this issue, Veronique stated that:

> Before the booking starts, you know how much time you have. I always try to achieve 'a click' as quickly as possible. Within the timeframe available a lot of things must be done.

With 'a click' Veronique refers to the feeling that both parties get along with each other well. Veronique invests emotional labour in trying to achieve this feeling rapidly because her clients cannot always afford to see her for a longer period of time. Similar to Veronique, Poppy also attempts to meet her clients' desires within a relatively limited time frame. As she put it:

> There is a time limitation, so you must read people quickly to find out how you can give them a good time within the time available.

The minimum booking period for her agency is two hours. However, considering that the escort and her client have just met, this is a relatively short time-frame to build up rapport.

Student sex workers who work for third parties may also have (much) longer encounters with clients, which provides more space to develop a connection with the client. However, 7 of the 10 students who work for third parties are less eager to bond with their clients compared to the students who are self-employed. The students who work for intermediaries like to converse with their customers, but their narratives do not indicate that they see their social contact with their clients as an important feature of their job. For example, Francis said:

> It is a nice way to make money. You sit on the sofa with a glass of wine, chatting with a nice man or woman.

She continued:

> If I would meet the same person five times, then I would maybe be like 'I don't want it anymore'.

Francis was not interested in developing a longer-lasting intimacy with her clients. Likewise, the clients of the students who work for third parties are not always interested in getting to know their service provider. For example, when Poppy gave a second thought to my question whether clients were interested in the image of the student as a marketing tool (see chapter six), she added:

> But some clients are actually not that much interested in the person behind the escort.

In case they do want to get to know her, she would say that she is a student. Different to the other students who work for third parties, Veronique, Robin and Daphne were more interested in bonding with their clients. And this was often mutual. Veronique spoke very positively about the shared intimacy she experiences during her bookings. She said:

> I like to offer someone a special intimate experience. Sometimes you share very intimate moments with someone you will never see again. That is OK. The moment of intimacy was there. Yes, the intimacy enriches my life.

For Veronique, the shared intimacy was a valuable part of her job. Robin elaborated on the outcome of her bonding with her clients. She said:

> I soon realised that it all goes much deeper than I anticipated. All sorts of emotional things came up. Again, a client was crying.

Robin's experiences with regard to the emotional needs of her clients motivated her to educate herself in further tantra and counselling which finally enabled her to start her own private practice in sexual healing.

7.3.1. Clients' Acknowledgment of the Professional Boundaries of Student Sex Workers

Unlike several self-employed student sex workers, the students who work for third parties did not share experiences of clients who tried to trespass their boundaries by attempting to become part of their private life. A number of reasons may explain the difference.

The fact that most of the students who work for third parties were only emotionally involved with their clients to a limited extent makes it less likely that the clients would believe there was more going on between them than a purely commercial exchange. In addition, the students work via third parties who run a legal business in the regulated sex industry. This scenario makes the commercial nature of the encounter more obvious compared to a paid encounter that originates from, for example, a dating app developed for non-commercial dating, or a general gay chat site which was the strategy used to recruit clients by Tobias, Liam and Enrique, for example.

The third party also supports the workers' professionality. For example, it is uncommon for escorts to stay longer with clients than the time they have paid for. Escorts have to report the end of the session by phone and when they fail to do so at the agreed time, a security protocol will be activated (Sekswerk.info, n.d.). Similarly, Luz and Enrique will be notified by the host of the brothel or parlour when their booking ends.

Intermediaries do not allow the exchange of contact details between sex workers and clients. When the workers respect this rule, clients are not able to maintain contact with the sex workers beyond the paid encounters.

The students' adoption of a double self may also play a part in explaining why clients do not trespass their professional boundaries. Most student sex workers who work for third parties are employed in the escort sector. Within this sector, the workers present themselves to clients with a manufactured identity. In most but not all cases, the intermediary heavily influences the students' working role. With the exception of Veronique, the students who work as escorts are not allowed to write their own online profile. Alongside displaying basic information regarding age, size, services on offer and fees, the personal profiles of the high-end escorts refer to their higher class by displaying an expensive taste in wine, designer lingerie and designer perfumes. Different to the escort agencies who take bookings at any time of day or night, the part-time availability of the escorts gives the impression that they are not solely dependent of the income from sex work. The online presentation of the escorts further reflects the process of upscaling I discussed in chapter three.

Whilst the requirement to adopt this image takes away a level of freedom from the workers, the role they have to perform may also help them to keep their work and their private life separated. Regarding this tendency, Frida stated that when

> You step into a role you are not completely yourself. This is also the case when you develop a certain connection. When you go home, it is really over.

Although Frida develops a connection with her clients at times, she does so as a professional. Such connections do not preclude her genuine interest in the client, but when she goes home the relationship ends. Daphne, who worked for a mid-tier escort agency, did not write her own profile either. Nevertheless, she has experienced more freedom in how she could present herself to her clients. She chooses to adopt a double self by means of undertaking small adjustments to her real persona, such as a working name. However, Daphne also insisted on keeping some of her authenticity, stating that:

> You give them something, you get something back. I show bits of my private life and from there we build up a relationship of trust.

This mutuality helped her build up good contact with her clients, whilst the disclosure of some elements of her real persona also had practical benefits. As she said:

> At times I take three bookings a night. It is too difficult for me to remember everything I have said.

Developing a persona that is too different from her real life was not only undesirable for Daphne, but it would also make her job too complicated. Despite her relative realness, Daphne did not encounter clients who attempted to cross her professional boundaries which may be caused by the fact that she was very concise with them about the nature of the encounter. She said:

> I do not want to create unrealistic expectations. This is my job and they must know that. For some men, I may be too expensive. That is a shame for them.

Whilst this may sound harsh, Daphne stressed that she was able to talk about this with her clients without hurting their feelings.

The owner of the club in which Enrique works also has no intention of enforcing a particular identity upon the workers. However, he did recommend that Enrique reconsiders his gender expression at work. Enrique said:

> When I went to the club for the first time, I was wearing nail polish. The staff asked me: 'Would you mind not wearing nail polish at work? Our customers look for masculinity.'

Enrique questioned the idea that men actually know what they desire to that extent. Nevertheless, he followed up on the advice. Enrique experienced little difficulties in separating his work and his private life. However, adopting a particular gender role that was not his own may have further contributed to this. The parlour in which Luz found employment was not at all concerned with the representation of their workers. As Luz said:

> You run your little shop. You put up the make-up that you like, you buy your wardrobe.

The owner leaves it to the women to decide what kind of working persona they want to display, if any. However, identity management did not play a significant role in Luz's ability to keep both worlds separated. The very fact that Luz had to enter the physical space of the parlour separated her professional life from her private life.

7.3.2. Emotional Labour to Manage Clients' Misbehaviour

Similar to the self-employed student sex workers, the students who work for third parties occasionally have to perform emotional labour to deal with clients who do not behave well. For example, as Sophie explained:

> In the club, I had a client who was very drunk. All of a sudden he did something with me I did not agree with. I said: 'We are not going to do this.' He was like: 'Sorry!' and immediately did it again. I decided to end the session if he would do it again. And he did. Then I thought: 'OK, I will take advantage of you.' I said: 'It's allowed, but I charge extra.' He took his wallet and I snatched two fifty euro notes out and said: 'Now you can.' I felt relieved that I took him back.

The disrespect for her boundaries made Sophie tired emotionally, but she was happy that she made her client pay more for his behaviour.

Aside from this incident, the students who work for third parties did not reveal any other forms of misbehaviour during their interviews. The fact that their intermediaries offer them a level of protection may play a role in this. The escort agencies verify the details of their clients and instruct their workers what to do in case their booking develops into a wrong direction. All the students who work as escorts stressed that they were allowed to reject a client when they felt unsafe. Rejecting a client for other reasons was also permitted. However, as Elina explained, this can have consequences:

> You can always reject clients. But in reality, you would not do so for no reason because eventually this will end the working relationship with the agency. But the hard line is that knowing the client from your private life or threats to your safety are certainly legitimate grounds to reject the client.

The escorts felt reassured with this policy although it may be the case that when an actual threat to their safety occurs, it may be difficult to decide when to reject the client or not to proceed with the booking.

The students who work for third parties were very rarely confronted with the phenomenon of fakers or time wasters. In fact, it may not be very attractive for people who seek attention to call an agency or a brothel without the intention to proceed with an actual booking because they cannot speak directly with the sex worker. This saves the students from a significant emotional and time

investment. Similar to the self-employed student sex workers, very few students who work for third parties referred to the use of repulsive emotional labour in order to hide their disgust at being intimate with clients they find unattractive or unclean. Sophie was one of the few students who did talk about this subject. She said:

> I also have bookings that I don't like. Men who I find dirty and smelly. But OK, a dentist also has patients who smell badly.

For Sophie, the occasional use of repulsive emotional labour was an acceptable part of her job. If she found this too unpleasant, then she would have the right not to proceed with the booking. However, different from the students who are self-employed and who can reject clients without further consequences, students like Sophie who work for an agency may think twice before doing so. As Elina explained, this might potentially impact their relationship with the agency.

7.3.3. Emotional Labour in Contact with Third Parties

Several escorts explained that their agency would only hire escorts for part-time work as a way to protect them. For example, Sophie said:

> They protect you in the sense that they only let you do this as something extra [as a way to earn some additional money alongside another income], If you have to pay your rent with it, you may feel like you have to do things you may not want to do.

Sophie refers to the idea that when someone is solely dependent on the job, this tends to lower the threshold for overstepping one's own boundaries. This may well be the case, and it may indeed be so that escort agencies adopt this policy to protect their workers. Whilst this was not mentioned by the students, part-time work may also make the emotional impact of sex work more manageable psychologically (Hanks, 2019). However, one interviewee also pointed out another reason why intermediaries are eager to work with escorts who also have other financial resources or could potentially access a student loan. As Robin cynically stated:

> You get paid well, but it is not your job!

The obligation to have other means to sustain oneself seems to function in support of the elevated class position of the escorts by setting them apart from escorts who work to make a living. High-end escort agencies pressure the escorts to perform emotional labour to uphold the illusion that their occupation is by no means motivated by financial need. The statement of the owner of a high-end escort agency that the student sex workers would reject the 25-euro gift card for taking part in my study confirms how important it is for the agencies to represent the escorts as wealthy. In reality, with the exception of one study participant, the student sex workers were happy to receive the compensation.

Besides a certain emotional pressure to perform this elevated class position, another downside associated with this practice is that it has implications for the working conditions of the escorts. A hobby does not require labour rights. When the COVID-19 pandemics broke out a few years after my fieldwork, the idea that the high-end escort industry is not meant to sustain the individual sex worker dismissed third parties too easily from their responsibility to provide financial aid to the escorts when the government had also failed to do so (van Stempvoort, 2021).

7.3.4. Emotional Labour: A Note on Gender

Hochschild (1979) points out that most emotional labour is undertaken by females. For this reason, one may expect that female sex workers to be more occupied with the performance of such labour compared to male sex workers. However, my analysis has shown that this was not the case among the student sex workers in the current study. The 3 male student sex workers were as willing to offer a BFE as the women were willing to offer a GFE which corresponds with the discussion of the BFE in the literature. The few existing studies paying attention to this phenomenon indicate that men who pay for sex with men are as interested in combining a level of intimacy with sexual gratification as men who seek paid encounters with women (Bernstein, 2007; Tewksbury & Lapsey, 2017).

It is not uncommon for male sex workers to be willing to meet this demand (Lennes, 2021; Scott & Kumar, 2022; Walby, 2012). Walby (2012) even goes so far as to claim that male sex workers who identify as being gay and who work with male clients, such as Liam, Tobias and Enrique, are more likely to offer intimacy beyond sex compared to female sex workers. Walby (Ibid.) argues that because homosexual men are often more experienced in non-monogamous relationships and the separation of love, intimacy and sex, it is less alien to gay male sex workers to build up an intimate connection with someone they barely know.

The following interview excerpt with Enrique upholds Walby's connection between homosexuality, non-monogamy, the separation of sex and intimacy and the willingness to provide intimacy to clients. Enrique, who identifies as pansexual (a person who is sexually attracted to people of any gender), gave insight into how he looks at love and intimacy in his private life and at work. As he put it:

> I look with a very open and free perspective at love and intimacy. For me, the one who gives me love does not have to be the same person who gives me intimacy. Regarding intimacy, just looking at each other can be very intimate. Hugging and having sex, likewise. These activities do not have to take place with the same person. So yes, my free attitude towards love and intimacy have an impact on my relationships and my sex work.

Enrique looks at his separation of love and intimacy in his private life and at work are two sides of the same coin.

However, non-monogamous relationships do not exist solely among gay men. This

relationship type has become increasingly popular in the Netherlands in the last decade among white, often highly-educated middle-class people (Roodsaaz, 2022). A part of the female students in this research were also engaged with (N=1) or considered (N=5) this type of relationship. However, whether or not this impacts on their willingness and ease to offer a GFE was not discussed in the interviews with the students concerned.

At the same time, the female students who did not practise polyamory were also willing to provide intimacy with a relative stranger. Whilst the relationship with the practice of non-monogamy as suggested by Walby (2012) remains unclear, what I can establish based on the above is that the performance of emotional labour to offer a GFE or a BFE is not a gendered activity.

7.4. Conclusion

The importance of sex workers' use of emotional labour is a characteristic of the middle and the upper strata of the sex industry in which most student workers in this study work. Whilst questions about this theme were not part of my interview schedule, the student sex workers participating in this study spoke at length about the pleasures and also the challenges associated with this.

The group of student sex workers who were most occupied with their performance of emotional labour were the self-employed students. Many self-employed student sex workers genuinely enjoyed getting to know their clients and connecting with them which made their work meaningful. Different to what the students anticipated before they started working, they feel that their clients do not see them solely as a sexualised object. Instead, they learned that to a great extent their clients search for intimacy and connection. I suggested that their positive experiences on the whole with their clients may be impacted by their relatively privileged position in terms of race, education and class.

However, there is also a downside associated with the students' bonding with their clients. The somehow genuine connection between the two causes confusion in the latter regarding the commercial nature of the relationship. In some cases, this confusion leads to boundary crossing. Whilst most self-employed students adopt a double self and separate their working role from their private lives, clients nevertheless trespass their professional boundaries by attempting to go beyond the paid encounter. The constant re-evaluation and re-enforcement of their boundaries demands a significant amount of emotional labour from the student sex workers. This is even more so for the student sex workers who show signs of a single self and blur the line between their work and their private life. Self-employed student sex workers also invest emotional labour in dealing with so-called fakers and time wasters and more rarely with other forms of misconduct. Dealing with boundary crossing and other forms of bad behaviour detracts time and energy from the students they cannot invest in their studies and their multiple other activities.

Most, but not all, of the students who work for third parties such as escort agencies or brothel owners were less involved with the performance of emotional labour for their clients compared to the

students who are self-employed. Whilst the students who work for intermediaries enjoy being social with their clients, most of them were not very involved in bonding with them. The absence of a strong connection between the two parties may be the reason why the students who work for third parties were less likely to encounter clients who ignore their professional boundaries.

Another factor that may explain this issue around boundaries is that the owners of the escort agencies or brothels where the student sex workers work run an official business in the regulated Dutch sex industry. This reality makes the professional nature of the exchange explicit and lessens the risk that clients experience confusion regarding the origin of the encounter. Consequently, the students are less occupied with the enforcement of their professional boundaries. Students who work for third parties do not have to select their own clients which also saves them making a significant investment in emotional labour.

Alongside these benefits, the students who work for third parties experience a reduced autonomy in their work. They have very limited control over which clients they see, whilst the students who work for high-end escort agencies also have very little choice in how they present themselves to clients. Some high-end escort agencies also implicitly demand the students to perform emotional labour beyond their bookings when they pressure them to uphold the image of the desired class position by disguising their financial motivation to undertake the job.

Students make different choices in terms of how they want to work in the sex industry. Irrespective of these choices, all forms of sex work in the middle and the higher strata of the sex industry require the performance of emotional labour by these student workers. Whilst the part-time nature of the students' involvement in the sex industry gives them time to recover from the impact of their emotional investment in their work, it should be taken into consideration that the students perform their emotionally demanding job alongside the multiple demands and sources of stress experienced by young people in higher education.

Chapter 8.
Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to create a better understanding of the involvement of students in higher education in the sex industry in the Netherlands. In order to explore what (prospective) student sex workers themselves see as being essential to their lives and work, I sought to enter the field with some broad research questions. This inductive approach suits exploratory studies in relatively new research areas (Denscombe, 2014; Punch, 2005), such as research on student sex work, but it is also a suitable response to the negative experiences that some sex workers have with research on sex work (Desiree Alliance, 2016; Jeffreys, 2009; Norberg, 2006; van der Meulen, 2011; Wahab, 2003).

Two research questions guided the study. Firstly, I desired to explore what motivates students in higher education in the Netherlands to become engaged in sex work. Secondly, I wanted to know how student sex workers in the Netherlands experience their engagement in sex work and how they navigate the potential challenges they may encounter.

In this final chapter, I summarise my main findings. Combining my first and second research questions, I will first address the motivations and experiences of student sex workers in the Netherlands. Then, I will set out how student sex workers in the Netherlands deal with the challenges they encounter in relation to their work. After answering my research questions, I will elaborate on the contribution to knowledge made within the study. I will also proceed to give a number of recommendations. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of the study and suggest avenues for further inquiry.

8.1. Motivations and Experiences

The present study challenges the idea brought forward by most studies on student sex work undertaken in Western countries that the phenomenon of student sex work should primarily be seen in the light of the financial hardship experienced by some students in higher education (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Betzer et al., 2014; J. Jones, 2019; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Lantz, 2005; Roberts et al., 2007a, 2007b, 2012, 2013; Sanders et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2014; Steward, 2022). Higher education is relatively affordable in the Netherlands compared to countries with high tuition fees such as the UK, Australia, the US and Canada. As this has remained the case in the Netherlands following the introduction of the social loan system, it is my proposition that student sex work cannot only be explained through the lens of financial hardship. For most but not all the participants in the current study, a variety of practical and intrinsic motivations also played an important role in their decision to become involved with sex work.

Whilst the intrinsic and practical motivations for working in the sex industry loomed large in the desire of most of the students in this study to work as sex workers, it goes without saying that the high earning potential of the occupation was also of great importance for them. I allotted categories to four socio-economic groups of students to showcased how, for each of these groups, the income generated by sex work played a different role in their ability to study.

This study involved a diverse group of students: those with a higher socio-economic background; students who come from families with a middle income; students who re-entered higher education to obtain a second degree whilst they were already qualified for the labour market; and students who struggle financially. With the identification of these 4 socio-economic groups and categorisation of the students into them, I have challenged the idea that the cost of higher education impacts all students to the same degree, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, the level of parental aid they receive and the aid offered by the government. For the students with a higher socio-economic background who received a generous level of parental support and who also received financial aid from the state, the money earned in sex work has made it possible for them to adopt a comfortable lifestyle and to build up savings. Hence, the income generated from sex work has not played a significant role in their access to higher education.

Depending on the level of parental and governmental support as well as the students' attitudes towards student loans, the remainder of the students experienced various levels of dependency on the income from sex work. Although middle-income students who entered higher education after the introduction of the social loan system were very unhappy with the abolition of their bursary, they were not overly concerned with having to take out a loan. Once they entered the sex industry, they were glad that they could stop increasing their debt further. Despite this, none of these students related their entry into the sex industry to the introduction of the social loan system.

For the students who received little financial support, or who had to support their parents financially, the money from sex work played a greater role in their ability to be successful in higher education. This was even more the case when they felt anxious about borrowing money for their studies.

Nevertheless, most student sex workers could access a variety of alternative options to finance their studies. Depending on nationality and age, the possibilities range from a tuition fees and/or maintenance loan or a mainstream job alongside full-time or part-time studies. Ultimately, all but two students could also enter the labour market with the secondary and tertiary educational achievements that they already possess. The two students without an entry qualification for the labour market can search for a mainstream job that requires no formal education, but this may bring them into a precarious financial position.

8.1.1. Intrinsic and Practical Motivations

Most of the student sex workers featured in this study not only enjoyed the financial benefits of their job, but also intrinsically liked their job. In terms of the aspects of their job that they greatly enjoyed, the students named the ability to meet a variety of different clients and to spend time with them, as well as feeling that their work is valuable.

The phenomenon that students want to work in the sex industry to experience pleasure at work is not unique to the Netherlands. A significant part of the existing studies on student sex work mention that at least some of their study participants have intrinsic motivations for being a sex worker (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Clouet, 2008; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Janssen, 2018; Roberts et al., 2013; Sanders & Hardy, 2015; Sagar et al., 2016; Sinacore et al., 2014; van der Wagen et la., 2010). Sanders and Hardy (2015) state that this should not be seen in isolation of a culture of pleasure-seeking that exists among students.

Two very specific forms of pleasure emerged in the current study that were not or only briefly mentioned in any of the existing studies on student sex work. Many student sex workers found pleasure in the performance of emotional labour to meet their clients' desire for intimacy and connection. A smaller group of (prospective) student sex workers (also) had feminist and intellectual drivers for working in the sex industry. The three aspects will be discussed below.

In the current study, a significant group of student sex workers enjoyed spending time with their clients and being social with them. Despite expectations that sex work would mainly be centred on the performance of sexual acts which not all the student sex workers saw as a problem per se, they soon learned that their performance of emotional labour was at least as important. The student sex workers invest emotionally in their work by developing a connection with their clients, showing genuine interest and being affectionate towards them. Hence, they offered a boyfriend or a girlfriend experience. With their cultural and educational capital, the students felt well equipped for their job as this would make them an excellent conversational partner.

The self-employed students were most involved with the performance of emotional labour. With their clients, they like to create a somehow genuine connection and they feel that their emotional labour gives meaning to their work. Compared to their counterparts who work for third parties, many of the self-employed student sex workers let clients get significantly closer to them while ensuring that the boundaries between their work and their private lives are not completely blurred. Most student sex workers have thus adapted a double self in an attempt to separate both worlds.

A group of five students who self-define as feminists became sex workers, or considered doing so, because this work aligns with their feminist convictions. The students either derived or anticipated deriving pleasure from putting their political viewpoints into practice at work. They viewed sex work as a more agentic alternative for mainstream service industry jobs in which they faced sexual harassment, or they enjoyed using sex work as a site of subversion of heteronormativity and notions of female sexuality.

A portion of these students, as well as students who did not look upon their work as a political act, have greatly enjoyed their ability to feed their sex work experience back into their studies. The students critically reviewed the existing research on sex work, developed their thinking regarding research ethics on sex work and proposed new ideas of how to make research on sex work more inclusive of the sex worker community. One student also undertook an autoethnography drawn from her own perspective as a sex worker.

Hence, the students took advantage of their unique position of being able to blend into the two worlds of the sex industry and academia in order to enhance their studies. Two students who were (selectively) open about their sex work experience within their university also used the insights from their work to educate fellow students. Institutions of higher education can thus contribute to the destigmatisation of sex work when they create an environment in which this is possible.

Besides the financial and intrinsic motivations, the student sex workers participating in this study also chose their occupation for its practical benefits. Similar to most of the studies on student sex work (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Haeger & Deil-Amen; Lantz, 2005; Maher et al., 2012; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Sagar et al., 2015a), this study found that the high money-to-time ratio and flexible nature of sex industry work are key benefits to students. In the sex industry, students can generate a relatively high income without losing valuable study time and organise their work around their study hours.

To date, this study alone has been able to link these two practical benefits with the performance pressure that students in higher education in the Netherlands experience. In the context of the Netherlands, performance-related stress is understood as the pressure that students experience to thrive in the competitive higher educational environment (National Institute for Public Health and the Environment et al., 2021). The factors behind this phenomenon are the impact of social media that enables students to compare themselves with others (The Council of Public Health & Society, 2018), pressure from potential employers or peers to be a successful student, and the students' own desire to achieve their educational goals (Dopmeijer, 2017). To varying degrees, the study participants in the current study experience performance stress. For many of them, the high earnings of sex work within a relatively short time frame and the flexible nature of the occupation have made it possible for them to earn money without compromising their academic achievements.

8.1.2. Privileged Sex Workers

The students' ability to enjoy their work in the sex industry should be seen in the light of their relatively privileged position in the sex industry. Three factors impact upon the work experiences of the student sex workers. These are the absence of severe financial pressure to do sex work, the students' ability to work legally, and the students' access to the middle and higher strata of the sex industry.

As mentioned in 8.1, the largest group of student sex workers in this study can access other financial recourses to finance their studies besides the income from sex work. This safety net enhances the student sex workers' well-being and safety at work. Sex workers who enter their occupation in the absence of severe financial pressure are better equipped to create good working conditions for themselves (van der Wagen et al., 2010; VanWesenbeeck, 1994, 2011). Amongst other advantages, they find it easier to reject clients and have a better negotiation power vis-à-vis clients and third parties (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Sanders, 2005b; van Den Dries, 2021). In cases of unjust treatment, the students can easily move on, which is to say that they can risk losing their occupation in the sex industry and search for other options in this sector, or they can stop working as a sex worker altogether. It is often the case that people who opt for sex work from a relatively privileged starting point are also better equipped to deal with the emotional demands of the occupation (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Sanders, 2005b). Positive motivations for entry can also increase self-confidence (VanWesenbeeck, 2006) that may even last when sex workers leave the occupation (Westerik, 2010).

One privilege that the study participants enjoyed and which positively impacts their safety and labour conditions is that they could work legally. Whilst a regulated sex industry often leads to the exclusion of particular groups of sex workers (Showden & Majic, 2014; Sawicki et al., 2019; van der Meulen, 2013; VanWesenbeeck, 2020) this did not impact the student sex workers in this study. In terms of nationality, all the student sex workers had access to the Dutch labour market. Besides this, most self-employed workers lived in an area in which independent escort work was unregulated. The students who worked for third parties worked for brothel owners or agencies with a licence.

Sex workers who work legally experience a lower threshold to report violence (Aidsfonds, 2018; Lutnick, 2019; O'Doherty, 2011). The legal context makes it also less likely that clients misbehave (Abel et al., 2010). Although the Dutch government refrains from actively inspecting the labour conditions within legal sex industry businesses (Aidsfonds, 2018; Ketelaars, 2015), third parties may nevertheless behave better to avoid the risk of losing their licence.

What's more, the on the whole favourable working experiences of the student sex workers in this study are also related to the type of jobs and markets they had access to. The sex industry consists of a large variety of different sectors that are positioned hierarchically (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007; Hoang, 2010; Kong, 2006; Stardust, 2015; van Wijk et al., 2017; van der Meulen et al., 2013; Wahab, 2004) within the whorearchy (Mellor & Benoit, 2023). About half of the student sex workers worked in the middle strata of the sex industry as independent escorts, or in a massage parlour or a brothel. Another large group worked in the highest echelons for high-end escort agencies or as an independent high-end escort. Only one student worked behind the windows, which is a sector that is positioned lower in the whorearchy.

Besides having a higher status, jobs in the middle and higher echelons of the sex industry offer better labour conditions (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Petro, 2010), a greater level of safety (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; van der Meulen et al., 2013) and in the highest strata also a much higher

enumeration (Petro, 2010; van der Meulen et al., 2013). In view of the afore-mentioned benefits, jobs within the middle market are in high demand amongst student sex workers, and even more so in the highest strata of the sex industry.

8.2. Challenges

Despite the mostly positive experiences of the majority of student sex workers in this study, this majority had also experienced drawbacks in relation to their work. The most prominent challenges were the inaccessibility of jobs in the higher strata of the sex industry for some students, the stigma of sex work, safety concerns and bad behaviour from clients.

This study hence points out that the most popular jobs in the highest strata of the sex industry were not accessible to all the student sex workers. Different factors impact sex workers' access to these strata. For female students, these include being relatively young, being able to meet Western beauty norms by being white and slim, and not having tattoos and piercings. The ability to speak Dutch also played a role. Male student sex workers pointed out the importance of being young and muscular.

In addition to these characteristics, the possession of educational and cultural capital played a major role for many student sex workers in their access to their desired job. Both third parties in the higher strata of the sex industry as well as the clients of self-employed student sex workers greatly valued these forms of capital. The possession of educational and cultural capital was less important for student sex workers who worked for third parties in the middle market. Male student sex workers in this study used this selling point to similar degrees as female study participants.

Whilst all student sex workers in the current study possessed educational and cultural capital, the stringent physical demands and the requirement to speak Dutch made it difficult for some students to work in the higher strata of the sector. Two students also presumed that they would not qualify for the midmarket because of their body weight. A substantial part of the student sex workers spoke at length about their (anticipated) inability to access their desired occupation.

Both the students who faced rejection by third parties and a small number of students who did have access to their desired job objected to the stringent hiring criteria. In contrast, several student sex workers with jobs as high-end escorts expressed how pleased they were that they could work in their sector of choice. They made no further comment on how the exclusionary nature of the occupation impacts others.

For most student sex workers, stigma was the most important downside of sex work. Most student sex workers were concerned with the stigma on sex work prior to their entry into the sex industry, and many remained worried about its harmful effect throughout their career. Similar to student sex workers in the research of Janssen (2018) and Simpson and Smith (2020), a part of the student sex workers in the present study used their ability to work within the middle or higher

echelons of the sex industry to manage sex work stigma.

The students who worked as high-class escorts adopted what I refer to as high-class narrative in which they present their job as being very luxurious and significantly different from other types of sex work. These students 'other' sex workers in parts of the sex industry with a lower status, such as the windows, to create a more acceptable identity for themselves. One student who worked in the midmarket also created a more favourable identity for herself at the expense of sex workers in more stigmatised parts of the sex industry. Only the female student sex workers used their positionality in the stratified sex industry to manage sex work stigma, which may be related to the gendered nature of the stigma of sex work. As this study has pointed out and is evidenced elsewhere (Janssen, 2018), female student sex workers are more severely impacted by sex work stigma.

Considering the burden of the stigma around sex work, it is understandable that these students seek a way to lessen its harms. However, doing so at the expense of others is not unproblematic. Firstly, it further marginalises already underprivileged sex workers (Simpson & Smith, 2020). Secondly, by stressing the disparity among different groups of sex workers, the students further feed the binary perspective on sex work in which sex workers are either seen as extremely privileged or extremely poor. Neither representation properly accounts to the diversity that exists in the sex industry. Thirdly, when sex work is only acceptable under particular conditions, this points out there is something intrinsically wrong with the occupation that they have to compensate for, so creating a vicious cycle in which the student sex workers perpetuate their own stigma (Benoit et al., 2018).

Reinforcing sex work stigma not only impacts upon the well-being of sex workers adversely, but it may also feed the development of counterproductive or harmful sex work legislation. Besides reinforcing the stigma of sex work, the stigmatisation of sex workers in lower strata, or "horizontal stigma" (Mellor & Benoit, 2023, p. 2), also hinders collective activism for the improvement of sex workers' rights.

Besides the inaccessibility of certain jobs and the stigma of sex work, several student sex workers saw safety risks as a major downside to their occupation. Safety concerns were also one of the subjects with which the students struggled when they deliberated upon whether or not they wanted to enter the sex industry. A large study undertaken in the Netherlands indeed indicates that sex workers are at risk of violence (Aidsfonds, 2018). However, only one student sex worker mentioned an incident in which a client trespassed her physical boundaries.

Online forms of harassment were mentioned much more frequently. Both students who worked solely online and students who used the internet to recruit clients encountered people who insulted them or who otherwise acted disrespectfully. The fact that online interactions are anonymous and take place at distance may lower the threshold for bad behaviour (Mitchell et al., 2010). Whilst the student sex workers did not describe the incidents they encountered as being very worrisome, they do qualify as workplace harassment (Jones, 2016).

The relatively low prevalence of physical violence may be related to a number of protective factors. Along with the legal status of the sex work therein, the jobs in the middle and higher strata of the sex industry are associated with a lower risk of harm (J. Jones, 2019). In addition to the above, the risks of harm are mediated by identity (Brents & Hausbeck, 2020; J. Jones, 2019; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; van der Meulen et al., 2012; Weizter, 2022), which may work in the favour of the student sex workers with relatively privileged identities in terms of race, class and access to education, to name some categories. What may also have enhanced the safety of the student sex workers is the safety protocols that third parties use and the selection criteria that self-employed student sex workers adopt.

One challenge experienced by many self-employed student sex workers is the crossing of their professional boundaries by clients. In *Temporarily Yours, Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex*, Bernstein (2007) describes the pleasure that middle-class sex workers derive from being very authentic in their work. This study confirms the pleasure sex workers experience in offering clients a somehow genuine encounter. However, the current study also exposes a major trade-off associated with this, not encountered by Bernstein (2007). The relative closeness between the student sex workers and their clients causes confusion in the latter who place too much belief in the mutuality of the encounter. For the students to put their clients back in their place *as* clients requires a constant re-enforcement of their boundaries and a significant amount of emotional labour. This type of misbehaviour does bring the students into an emotionally complex situation that they have to manage alongside the multiple demands and stressors experienced as higher education students.

Student sex workers who work for high-end escort agencies were less emotionally involved with their clients, which may be one of the reasons why their clients were less likely to trespass on their professional boundaries. However, this group had to deal with a different aspect of emotional labour in relation to sex work. In contact with their agencies, the student sex workers in the higher strata had to put effort into upholding their status as privileged workers who are not financially dependent on their work. This reality obscures the labour aspect of their work, which can adversely impact their labour rights.

8.3. Contributions to Knowledge Made Within This Study

Insight into the motivations and experiences of student sex workers in the Netherlands is scant, despite the unique context of the Netherlands with a regulated sex industry, a somehow tolerant climate in terms of the acceptance of sexual diversity, sexuality and sex work, and moderate tuition fees. This research fills this gap by highlighting why some students in the Netherlands are inclined to undertake occupations in the sex industry and how they make sense of their experiences within this line of work. In so doing, this study contributes to the emerging international research landscape of student sex work.

A prominent finding in this study was that the financial hardship lens used by most studies on student sex work does no justice to the diversity of reasons why some students in the Netherlands choose to work in the sex industry. The phenomenon that students choose to work in the sex industry, despite most having access to a variety of alternative recourses to be able to study, shows that student sex work is not necessarily tied to financial destitution. This is seldom evidenced in research on student sex work (for exceptions see Janssen, 2018; van der Wagen et al., 2010). Sex work among people who are otherwise financially stable is also rarely acknowledged in sex work research in general (for one example see Bernstein, 2007).

It is relatively uncommon for researchers to dedicate themselves to the study of sex work by looking at the positive aspects associated with the occupation (A. Jones, 2019; Sagar et al., 2016; Weitzer, 2022), which obscures the possible advantages of the job (Sagar et al., 2016). This study provides further empirical evidence of the fact that, depending on the circumstances, sex work can indeed be an enjoyable occupation.

The study also points out that the ability to enjoy sex work should not be seen in isolation of the intersectional privilege enjoyed by most of the student sex workers in the current study in terms of socio-economic background, nationality, race, age and their ability to meet Western beauty norms, as well as their cultural and educational capital. These factors have a significant impact on the quality of the jobs that (student) sex workers can access. What also impacts upon the generally pleasant experiences of the student sex workers is that, with one exception aside, they are in the position to choose their occupation from a variety of other options to finance their studies. Furthermore, the fact that they are not solely dependent on their job gives them greater bargaining power in relation to clients and third parties. Hence, in the absence of severe financial pressure, it is easier to set boundaries.

In discussion about the (in)accessibility of the different strata of the sex industry, several sex workers expressed awareness of their relative privilege: for example, in relation to their appearance or their educational and cultural capital. What remained largely absent from the discussions about the subject of privilege is the impact of race, nationality and migrant status. Despite evidence of the severity of racism in the sex industry (Bowen, 2021; Brooks, 2010; A. Jones, 2015; Miller-Young, 2010; Steward, 2020), including discrimination against Eastern European sex workers who are perceived as being less white (Lapiņa & Vertelytė. 2020; Probst, 2023), only a few of the student sex workers expressed awareness of their privileges in terms of skin colour or nationality.

Whilst I have witnessed in sex workers' rights groups how feminist sentiments exist widely among sex workers and can be additional drivers for working in the industry for some sex workers, this kind of motivation is rarely evidenced in research. Instead, this research provides empirical evidence of the phenomenon that some sex workers with feminist sentiments indeed (also) seek to work as sex workers because this aligns with their political ideas. Amongst other motivations, they desire to subvert ideas of heteronormativity and female chastity. The ideas of the students were not

fixed when they found themselves in the process of exploring the work sector. Hence, further research is recommended for the question of what sex work can mean for feminist-motivated sex workers.

To date, this study is the first to have pointed out that for a small group of student sex workers sex work not only contributes to their studies by providing the extra means to study but their interest in sex work also stimulated them intellectually. A number of student sex workers used the insights they had gained at work within their studies. For some students, their intellectual interest in sex work existed prior to their entry into the sex industry which aided them in dismantling stereotypes of sex workers and contributed to their ability to inform themselves properly about the occupation.

Despite the fact that occupations in the middle and the higher strata of the sex in which many students work pose a greater demand upon the performance of emotional labour of the workers (Brents & Hausbeck, 2010; Hoang, 2010), only one existing study on student sex work (J. Jones, 2019) briefly discussed the topic. In contrast, in the current study, the performance of emotional labour emerged as a significant theme for the student sex workers and therefore filled a gap in existing research on student sex work. The ability to connect with clients made the student sex workers' work enjoyable and valuable. This study showed that the call upon the emotional labour of student sex workers is greatest among self-employed student sex workers who maintain contact with clients from their initial inquiry until beyond their booking. Male student sex workers in this study were as much involved with emotional labour in their work as the transgender and cisgender female student sex workers. This finding confirms the suggestion of Lennes (2021), Scott & Kumar (2022) and Walby (2012) that emotional labour in sex work is not a gendered activity. The extent to which this is also the case in other service industry jobs remains to be investigated.

This study further contributes to the understanding of the performance of emotional labour in sex work by showing that an initial genuine and pleasurable connection with a client can escalate into the harm of boundary pushing. Whilst the student sex workers separate their job from their private lives to varying degrees, there are instances where clients attempt to trespass their professional boundaries which forces student sex workers to undertake boundary work to defend their privacy. The current study showed that such occurrences can bring student sex workers into an emotionally difficult situation, especially when they like their clients. The study showed that the risk to face clients who do not respect student sex workers' professional boundaries is greatest when the study participants adopted (elements of) a single self and kept little distance between themselves and their clients. Therefore, this study suggests that the use of a double self in sex work can protect against this type of harm.

Sex work stigma was the main drawback identified within this study. The study further enhanced the understanding of the stigma of sex work by pointing out that there is not one sex work stigma. Instead of being a fixed entity (Bjønness et al., 2022), the study highlights that sex work stigma is contingent on the intersections of different axes of privilege and oppression, as well as on

place and context. In this study, gender, class and race played a major role in the level of stigma that student sex workers in the Netherlands experience.

Besides the one exception of Steward (2022), whose qualitative research on student sex work included one male study participant, this is the only qualitative study on sex work amongst students in which male student sex workers have taken part. This unique position made it possible to look at gender differences in relation to sex work stigma. The gendered nature of sex work stigma was already visible in the student sex workers' initial considerations when entering the sex industry. The suggestion of becoming involved with sex work was perceived as a compliment for male student sex workers, while female student sex workers saw this as an insult. Besides these findings, several male and female student sex workers expressed the view in their interviews that female students are more heavily punished for being involved in sex work.

It is often suggested that male sex workers experience the double stigma of working in the sex industry and having sex with male partners (Comte, 2014; Minichiello et al., 2013; van den Dries et al., 2022). By submitting themselves to the desires of other males, they also transgress norms of masculinity (Rand, 2022). I recognise that these different forms of marginalisation can add up. However, homophobia and stringent ideas around masculinity did not have much impact on the three male student sex workers in this study. They all lived in Amsterdam and were part of the local LGBTQI+ community and sex work community. They also spent a lot of time with fellow academics who held a permissive attitude towards sexual diversity. Liam described the culture at his university as "where everything goes". Homophobia exists in Amsterdam (Buijs et al., 2011), but the three study participants spent most of their time within their own bubble and were lucky enough not to have encountered any homophobic incidents. This highlights that intersectional stigma is dependent on place and context.

Besides gender, this study points out the impact of class and race on the severity of sex work stigma. As mentioned earlier, due to a variety of factors such as their educational and cultural capital and their ability to meet Western beauty norms by being white and slim, some student sex workers were able to work in the highest strata of the sex industry. Occupations in these echelons have a higher status which lessens the stigma attached to these jobs. Several student sex workers used this elevated position to point out how they differ from sex workers in the lower strata. By so doing, they both managed their own stigma and further stigmatised other sex workers.

The above findings show that combatting the stigma of sex work is not easy. This study pointed out a number of avenues of how institutions of higher education can play a role in the destigmatisation of (student) sex work. Similar to many people in society, several of the student sex workers had stigmatising viewpoints of sex workers, prior to their entry. The new insights that the students gained via lectures, research projects, extracurricular activities and the networks with which they became involved as higher education students, and arguably the critical thinking they developed

in higher education, aided them in dismantling commonly held stereotypes. This shows how powerful education about sex work can be in its potential to change attitudes.

Higher education can also play a role in dismantling the whorearchy. The students whom, in some capacity, had been involved with the study of sex work (or the phenomenon of stigma in general) were less inclined to use the standing of their occupation to manage the stigma of sex work. This tendency may be explained by their greater understanding of the harms associated with this practice.

Moreover, this study showed that institutions of higher education can also contribute to the destigmatisation of sex work by giving student sex workers who are open about their work a platform to educate fellow students about sex work. The possibility of being able to do so is dependent on the context. In the Netherlands where sex work is regulated, student sex workers are not likely to face legal repercussions when they are open about their work. Having said that, even when sex work is not criminalised in a given country, the moral disapproval of sex work within universities (Cusick et al., 2009) and concerns about the status of the institution in relation to such students (Roberts, 2007a, 2007b) may make this a difficult endeavour.

I end this section with two key points about sex work that appeared strongly within this study. The political debate around sex work in the Netherlands and abroad is increasingly oriented around victimisation, a perspective that is also supported by several academics (Connelly, 2016; Dewey et al., 2019; Oude Breil, 2023; Scoular, 2004; van der Meulen, 2011). Sex workers are associated with coercion, human trafficking and vulnerability (Dewey et al., 2019; Oude Breil, 2023).

This study contributes to the destigmatisation of (student) sex work by challenging this victim approach. Contrary to this perspective, the student sex workers who took part in this study made a conscious and well-informed choice to work in the sex industry. They took advantage of the benefits the occupation has to offer them and showed awareness of potential harms that may occur in sex work. In so doing, this study adds to existing studies that point out that the framing of sex workers as victims fails to properly represent the diversity of motivations and experiences that exist among sex workers.

Moreover, the current study pointed out that when sex work takes place under just conditions, as was the case among the student sex workers in this study, it is not in itself a harmful occupation. Exploitation and bad treatment by third parties or clients are an ongoing concern, but they are not intrinsically tied to the occupation. In most countries in the world, the legal approach to sex work harms sex workers more than that it supports them. Insight into the reality that the exchange of sex (and varying degrees of emotional labour) for money is not itself problematic may help governments to develop policies that actually contribute to sex workers' working conditions and safety rather than doing the opposite.

8.4. Recommendations

Different to existing studies on student sex work (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; Cusick et al., 2009; Sagar et al., 2015a; Simpson & Smith, 2020, 2021; Trueman et al., 2022), none of the student sex workers in the current study refer to negative experiences within higher education in relation to their work. Whilst fear of disclosure was not uncommon, none of the students had encountered situations in which they faced discrimination because of their occupation. Several student sex workers also indicated that they presumed it would be unlikely that their institution of higher education would enforce disciplinary measures because of students' involvement with the sex industry. One student related this assumption to the taken-for-granted idea that sex work is legal in the Netherlands. However, most de facto sex work in the Netherlands takes place outside the legal circuit which means that sex workers often violate bylaws although this may be unknown to institutions of higher education.

However, I would not hasten to assume that universities in the Netherlands are necessarily well-equipped to respond appropriately to disclosures (or undesired outings) from student sex workers. Nor would I expect them to find it easy to adequately support student sex workers in need of help. For this reason, I support recommendations made in several studies on student sex work to offer guidance and training to raise awareness of the existence of student sex workers, to dismantle stereotypes of sex workers, and to inform staff about how to address the possible needs of student sex workers (Amoah & Cowling, 2016; J. Jones, 2019; Sagar et al., 2015a,b; Steward, 2022).

General sensitivity training about sex work for professionals already exists in the Netherlands in the form of an e-learning (van den Dries & Luhrs, 2020), but a programme adapted to the specific situation of student sex workers has yet to be developed. Considering that university staff are dealing with high workloads, such training should be accompanied by a campaign that raises awareness of why it is important to be educated about student sex work. However, this is not the only measure that can be undertaken to achieve a safer and more welcoming environment for student sex workers. In 2020, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences wrote a national action plan for greater diversity and inclusion in higher education and research (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2020). According to the ministry, diversity not only supports equal opportunities but also enhances the quality of education and research (Ibid.).

A multi-stakeholder partnership has emerged between the government, Dutch universities and several organisations such as the Association of Universities (VSNU), the network of PhD-researchers (PNN), the network of postdoc researchers (PostdocNL), the association of female professors (LNVH), the expert centre of diversity (ECHO), and several other organisations to reach this goal. Universities of applied sciences will be included shortly (Ibid.). The action plan considers discrimination based on a variety of characteristics:

> We use a broad definition of diversity, covering not only characteristics that tend to be visible (e.g. gender, cultural background) but also characteristics which may be either less visible or invisible (e.g. disability, psychological illness, chronic illness, sexual preference, socio-economic background, beliefs, religion, talents, working style, education, experience). (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2020, p. 9)

Despite the fact that insofar none of the student sex workers in this study have faced discrimination in higher education, there is no guarantee that this will not take place in the future. In this light, it is important to consider the current increase in sex work stigma in the country (Rottier, 2019; VanWesenbeeck, 2011). For this reason, I encourage the partnership to consider sex work stigma in the action plan. As discussed in this thesis, considering the role played by some institutions of higher education in the destigmatisation of sex work I have significant hope that there may be willingness in this partnership to consider the inclusion of sex work stigma as a form of discrimination that should also be taken into account.

8.5. Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Further Research

The adaptation of a modified qualitative grounded theory approach and the use of semi-structured interviews have proven to be very productive within the context of this study because they have enabled the student sex workers to take the discussion into the direction that they saw as being most relevant. The constant comparative method (Birks & Mills, 2015) gave me the possibility to further verify the themes that the students brought forward alongside new interview data of subsequent interviewees and alongside relevant literature. This approach gave the student sex workers a more agentic role within the study which, to some extent, compensated for the fact that I was not able to undertake a full participatory study as I originally aimed to do for this research.

Despite the stated benefits of my approach, qualitative studies cannot escape their reduced generalisability (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002), especially when it concerns research on sex work. Due to factors such as stigma and the illegal nature of a large part of the sex work that takes place in the Netherlands, sex workers are largely invisible (Pro Facto & Intraval, 2016; van Wijk et al., 2014). Factors such as these make the development of a representative sampling frame for the sex industry impossible (Abel et al., 2010; Benoit et al., 2005; Shaver, 2005; van der Meulen, 2011).

Wagenaar et al. (2013) rightfully point out that "A perfect sample, in the sense that it is representative of the complete population of sex workers in a country, is an impossible ideal" (p. 103). It is not known what the sector looks like in terms of numbers, identities of people involved, geographic spread and its spread over sectors (Aidsfonds, 2018; Wagenaar et al., 2012, 2013). Considering the dearth of research on student sex work in the Netherlands (van Stempvoort & Janssen, 2022), this may be even more so for the understudied sub-population of student sex workers in the country. Therefore, I would recommend remaining cautious about holding the outcome of this study as representative of the larger population of student sex workers in the Netherlands.

This study includes a relatively diverse sample of study participants. I have interviewed students who self-identify as cisgender male and cisgender female as well as a study participant who was questioning his gender identity and a transgender student who was about to initiate gender affirming surgery. Most students were heterosexual, but the study also included gay men, bisexual women and pansexual students. The students ranged in age, varying from 19-44 years old and in working or have worked in direct and indirect sex work across eight different sectors within the sex industry.

Nevertheless, particular groups of student sex workers are not well represented in the study. Besides one student of Asian descent, all the study participants are white and with only one exception all the white student sex workers were of Western European descent. Whilst no statistics are available, it is conceivable that students of colour of any nationality and white students from outside Western Europe work in the Dutch sex industry in larger numbers. The difficulties that researchers experience in accessing a student sex worker population with a greater racial diversity is also evidenced elsewhere (J. Jones, 2019; Simpson & Smith, 2020; Steward, 2019; 2022).

Whilst students with different nationalities took part in this study, only three students came from outside the European Union, of whom only one had gained Dutch citizenship whilst another possessed an EU passport. The inclusion of a greater number of non-EU study participants could have further enriched the study for two reasons. Firstly, this group of students has to pay significantly higher tuition fees. Although the fact that many non-EU students in the Netherlands come from relatively privileged backgrounds (Popescu et al., 2021) may offer some respite, the costs of education in the Netherlands can still be difficult to cover. Consequently, these students might experience greater pressure to work in the sex industry. Secondly, particular exceptions aside, non-EU students have no access to the legal sex industry in the Netherlands. Moreover, working illegally makes it more difficult to access rights which increases the risk of violence (Aidsfonds, 2018).

In addition, this study did not include student sex workers with caring obligations and the research was not inclusive of student sex workers with disabilities. Both groups may experience greater difficulties in earning money alongside their studies which may impact their involvement with sex work.

On the whole, the students who took part in this study indicated that they enjoy working in the sex industry. As argued by Simpson and Smith (2020), the student sex workers who choose to take part in research on sex work may emphasise positive experiences to oppose stigmatising representations of sex workers as victims. Furthermore, the fact that the students elaborated widely on their positive experiences may be impacted by the phenomenon that sex workers who like their job face greater acceptance in society (Easterbrook-Smith, 2018, 2022a, 2022b).

The predominance of students with positive experiences in the sex industry may also be caused by the unwillingness of students with negative experiences to take part in a study about their work. The study did not include students who see their engagement with sex work as involuntary.

Should there be students who look at their involvement with sex work as such, these students may also be less likely to come forward with their experiences in a study.

In summary, this study provides in-depth knowledge of the motivations and experiences of a relatively diverse group of student sex workers in the Netherlands, in terms of socioeconomic background, gender identity, sexual preference, age and type of sex work. However, the findings are limited to student sex workers who are predominantly white, who can work legally in the Dutch sex industry, who are able bodied and who have no caring obligations. It is possible that student sex workers with other identities experience their work in the Dutch sex industry differently, such as (non-EU) student sex workers of colour, students who live with disabilities or who have caring obligations,. One can assume that this is also the case for students who experience greater financial pressure to do sex work or who look at their involvement in sex work as involuntary. In order to cover a wider range of experiences then, I recommend that researchers find ways to reach these missed groups.

As of today in the Netherlands, only a small-scale quantitative study on student sex work has been conducted (Janssen, 2017). Owing to my own limited quantitative data analysis skills and the financial and time limitations affecting my ability to promote a large survey, it was beyond the scope of this study to gather statistical data on the prevalence of student sex work in the Netherlands. A further avenue for research might be the collection of a large data-set on student involvement in the sex industry in the Netherlands. In addition to the numbers of students involved in the sex industry, this new source of data may also illuminate their motivations and experiences further. Lastly, the themes identified in this explorative study may provide guidance when formulating the relevant survey questions.

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Appendix 1: Recruitment Flyer

Call for Research Participants

Student Sex Work Project Netherlands

The Student Sex Work Project Netherlands seeks to provide insight in the motivations, experiences and needs of students who sell erotic services. You can contribute to the study by participating in a face-to-face or Skype interview. All information you provide will be treated confidentially. The University of Amsterdam and Swansea University granted ethical approval for the study.

Who can take part?

Any student in higher education in the Netherlands who sells erotic services or who seriously considers doing so can participate in the study. If you were a student within the last three years and worked in the erotic service industry whilst studying, you are also eligible to take part.

Will I get compensated?

As a compensation for your time, you will receive a € 25,00 gift card.

Who is the researcher?

I have worked for 10 years as a service provider for sex workers. I am affiliated with PROUD, the Dutch self-organisation for sex workers and SWexpertise, a platform for the improvement of the position of sex workers in the Netherlands. I conduct this study for my PhD thesis.

What are erotic services?

- Webcamming
- Getting paid for hook-ups via dating Apps
- Stripping/ burlesque dancing
- Acting in a porn movie
- Working as an escort
- Taking part in sugar arrangements

Any other exchange of sex for money, such as working in a club, offering in calls at home etc.

How to get in touch?

You can email me via SSWPNL@swansea.ac.uk. I look forward to hearing from you!

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Student sex work in the Netherlands: a comparative analysis with the UK

Information sheet for student sex workers

This document provides an overview of the study.
Please read it carefully and ask any questions you may have.

Who is the researcher?
My name is Marije van Stempvoort. I have a background in gender studies (MA, Utrecht University) and I have worked as a policy officer for Humanitas Welfare Work for sex workers in Rotterdam. I started this PhD study on student sex work in the Netherlands in October 2016. My research is made possible by Swansea University in co-operation with the University of Amsterdam. My supervisors are Prof. Tracey Sagar (Swansea University), Ms Deborah Jones (Swansea University) and Dr Marie-Louise Janssen (University of Amsterdam).

Why a study on student sex work in the Netherlands?
The Student Sex Work Project (in short TSSWP) in the UK was the largest study ever on student sex work. The project leaders, Prof Sagar and Ms Jones, concluded that one in twenty students in the UK has ever worked in the sex industry. The researchers gained in-depth insight in student sex workers' motivations, experiences and needs. In a smaller study, Dr Janssen concluded that the number of students working in the sex industry in Amsterdam is even higher. Knowledge on the motivations, experiences and needs of student sex workers in the Netherlands does not yet exist. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap. In addition to this, the research will also focus at societal changes in sexuality, dating culture and transactional sex from the perspective of student sex workers.

What are the benefits of the study?
The research will contribute to a better understanding of student sex work in the Netherlands. In addition to creating new knowledge on this subject, this study also has a number of practical benefits:

1. Destigmatisation

Sex workers suffer tremendously from stigma. A better understanding of student sex work will contribute to a better representation of this part of the labour force in the sex industry. A more realistic representation will support de-stigmatisation.

2. Policymaking

Most sex workers in the Netherlands indicate that they do not benefit from the current regulation of the sex industry. Further knowledge on student sex work could provide input for the design of a prostitution policy that takes the needs of student sex workers into consideration.

3. Best practices for service provision

In the UK, student sex workers use more support services than other students. However, they are not always satisfied with the current possibilities for assistance. This study will provide insight in the question if student sex workers in the Netherlands need support as well and if so, what kind of support. This information can be used to improve existing services and to set up new facilities.

Who can take part in the research?
You can contribute to the study if you work or have worked in the sex industry whilst studying. This may be direct sex work (sex work that includes physical contact with the client), indirect sex work (sex work not involving physical contact) or both. Both current and previous student sex workers can take part in the research. However, previous student sex workers must meet the additional criterion that their last working day in the sex industry whilst being a student did take place no longer than three years ago. Participants must be 18 years old or older, without any age maximum. Participants can be male, female and transgender. Both national and international (EU and non-EU students) can take part. Their level of studies must be BA/BSc or MA/MSc. They may study full-time or part-time.

What are my personal benefits if I take part?
By participating in this study, you can contribute to the stated goals above. Some student sex workers may find it pleasant to be able to speak about their experiences as a student sex worker in a non-judgemental, supporting and confidential environment. As a compensation for your time, you will receive a (e-)gift card worth € 25 from a retailer of your choice.

How can I contribute to the study?
You can contribute to the study by doing an interview with the researcher and by providing feedback on one or more important documents. These include the recruitment flyer, the interview questions, the data analysis and the recommendations. You can also give feedback on the accuracy of the transcription of your own interview. After the research has been published, you can use the outcome of the study at any occasion you may want (advocacy purposes, fund raising, follow-up research etc.). It is up to you if you want to take part in the interview only or that you want to give

feedback on one or more documents as well. In either case you will receive a gift card worth € 25 for your total contribution.

Are there any risks?
Participation in this study will not cause any physical harm. It is unlikely that the topics will cause distress. You may choose not to answer questions without giving any reason. In addition to this, you can withdraw at any time. Despite the effort I will put into the protection of your privacy, there is minimal risk that others might find out that you are working as a sex worker: for example when someone hears you talking when doing the interview in a public space.

Can you guarantee anonymity?
I am aware of the fact that anonymity is utmost important for sex workers. Therefore, you do not have to give your real name. Before the interview starts, you will have to sign a consent form. You may sign this form with a pseudonym or with your working name. All information collected from you during the study will be kept strictly confidential. The researcher will remove the interview from the data recorder or mobile phone upon the earliest occasion. In most cases, this will be within a few hours after the interview. The computer that will be used to transcribe the interview has controlled access through a password. All quotes that will be used in the PhD, journal publications, book chapters or in any other form, will be anonymised via the use of fictitious names. Your course will not be mentioned. In exceptional circumstances in which you or anyone around you is in immediate danger, I may have to breach confidentiality. As this study is made possible by Swansea University in Wales, all information participants provide will be handled in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

Where will the interview take place?
The interview can either take place online via Skype or face-to-face. Face-to-face interviews can take place at the University of Amsterdam, at information and service centre Door2Door in Rotterdam at P&G 292 in Amsterdam and at SPOT 46 in The Hague. It is also possible to do the interview in a public space such as a café or a library, as far as the noise level enables me to record the interview. In case you do not want me to record the interview, I can write down your answers.

How much time will my participation take?
The interview will take one to two hours. The interview can be arranged around your schedule and can take place during a weekday or in the weekend. We can meet either during the day or in the evening (provided that the agreed location is accessible). The contribution to the participatory elements can take place as soon as the documents you are willing to review (the flyer, the research questions, the data analysis etc.) are available. You will get sufficient time to complete this task. Feedback can be provided via email, via Skype or via the telephone.

What if I want to withdraw from the study?
Participation in this study is voluntarily at all times. Therefore, you can withdraw your consent to participate during any stage of the study.

What will happen with the results of the research?
The results from the study will form the basis of my PhD thesis. In addition to this, I may use the outcome for journal publications, book chapters and books. If you would like to receive a printed or digital version of the completed version of my PhD, I will be happy to provide one. You are also more than welcome to attend public meetings in which I will speak about the research.

Did you receive ethical approval for this study?
The study has gained ethical approval from Swansea University's Criminology and Law Research Ethics Committee. Should you wish to make a complaint on ethical grounds, you can contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee via name@swansea.ac.uk.

Who can I contact for further information?
You can get in touch with me at name@swansea.ac.uk. You can contact my supervisors via name@swansea.ac.uk.

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Student sex work in the Netherlands

Informed consent sheet for participants

Please make sure that you have read the information sheet. Any questions you may have should be answered before you sign this form.

By signing this form, I indicate that:

- I have read, and fully understood the information sheet
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time
- I understand that I am not obliged to answer questions I do not want to answer
- I understand that my data will be held securely
- I understand that any information that could identify me will not be used in published material

Participant
Name:
Signature:
Date:

Researcher
Name:
Signature:
Date:

Appendix 4: Debrief Form

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Student sex work in the Netherlands

Debrief form for student sex workers

Thank you for taking part in my study, your contribution was very valuable. I hope that my thesis will lead to a better understanding of student sex work. If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact me via sswpnl@swansea.ac.uk. On the back of this page, I give you the contact details of specialised service providers, should you need any further support.

Alkmaar
Prostitution and health centre
088-0125705
www.ggdhollandsnoorden.nl

Amsterdam
PROUD
Self-organisation for sex workers
06-28445537
info@wijzijnproud.nl
www.wijzijnproud.nl

Amsterdam
P&G292
020-531 8600
info@pg292.nl
www.pg292.nl

Bergen op Zoom
0164-237056
pmw@
wijzijntraversegroep.nl
www.wijzijntraversegroep.nl

Breda
IMW Breda
076-5305888
pmw@imwbreda.nl
www.imwbreda.nl

Friesland
Fier
058-215 7084
Participatie@fier.nl

Gelderland
Next Step II
next.step@iriszorg.nl

Gelderland Zuid
Meldpunt Bijzondere Zorg
024-3297240
mbzteamnijmegen@ggdgelderlandzuid.nl

Goes
SMWO
0113-277111
pmw@smwo.nl
www.smwo.nl

Groningen
Confidential person
Social Work team Ariadne
050-312 6123
06-4649594
info@mjd.nl
www.mjd.nl

Groningen
Terwille
050-3117200
bureaudienst@terwille.nl

Haarlem and Haarlemmermeer
Scharlaken Koord
020-622 6897
info@scharlakenkoord.nl
www.scharlakenkoord.nl

Oost Brabant and Limburg
Terecht/ Leger des Heils
06-22888365
Terecht-LB@legerdesheils.nl

Overijssel
Stichting De Kern
038-547300
sec@stdekern.nl

Rotterdam
Stichting Humanitas Rotterdam en omgeving
010-2211715
pmw@stichtinghumanitas.nl

Rotterdam
Confidential person
06-10503897
vertrouwenspersoon@door2doorrotterdam.nl

Rotterdam
Information and service centre Door2Door
door2door@
stichtinghumanitas.nl
010-795 64 61
www.door2doorrotterdam.nl

The Hague
SHOP
070-3614747
info@shop-denhaag.nl
https://www.shop-denhaag.nl

The Hague
Spot 46
070-3457010
info@spot46.nl
www.spot46.nl

The Hague
Stichting de Haven
070-402 08 04
info@stichtingdehaven.nl
www.stichtingdehaven.nl

Tilburg
013-5433073
intake@
kompaanendebocht.nl
www.kompaanendebocht.nl

Utrecht
De Tussenvoorziening
06-53711 879
outreach@
tussenvoorziening.nl
www.tussenvoorziening.nl

Utrecht
Pretty Woman
030-236 19 99
info@prettywoman-utrecht.nl
www.prettywoman-utrecht.nl

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule

Student sex work project Netherlands

The interview schedule below provides a basic framework for the interview. The questions may be asked in a different order. Additional questions may required for further clarification.

1. Introduction*

Verify if the participant has read the information sheet

Opportunity to ask questions

Explain that the participant is not obliged to answer questions/ can withdraw at any time

Signing the consent form (Skype interviews: ask for oral confirmation)

2. General questions

Which name can I use during the interview?

Can you tell me more about yourself?

What is your age? Where are you from?

How do you define your gender identity?

How do you define your sexual preference? Are you currently in a relationship?

What is your field of study? Do you study fulltime or part-time?

What year are you in/ when did you graduate?

3. General questions regarding sex work

What kind of work do you undertake in the erotic industry? Can you describe what you do? What would be the most appropriate name for your work?** Why?

Under what kind of labour construction do you work (self-employed, employee etc.?)

Do you work in the Netherlands only?

When did you start working in the sex industry (When did you leave the sex industry?)

Do you also have another student job? Do you work as a volunteer? Are you in the board of a sorority? What motivates you to undertake two (or more) jobs?

Can you tell me more about your monthly income? Do you receive money from your parents? Do you have a loan? How do you feel about borrowing money for education?

Who should in your view pay for education?

How do you think that your income will look like after graduation?

4. Motivations for working in the sex industry

How did you come to the idea to do sex work?

What were your expectations?

What benefits did you expect when you entered the industry? What downsides did you consider?

What is/are your motivation(s) to continue working?

Where did you look for information about sex work? Did you feel well-informed about the job? How much time did you take to consider whether you wanted to do sex work?

What motivated you to choose for the sector you currently work in? Did you move on to another type of sex work over time? If so, what was your motivation to do so?

5. Work experiences in the sex industry

How do you experience your work in the sex industry?

What do you like about sex work?

What downsides do you experience?

What is the impact of your education on your work in the sex industry? Do you use your student identity for marketing purposes? Does your educational background give you access to particular markets? Would clients treat student sex workers differently? How do you feel about this?

6. The impact of sex work on students' educational achievements

What aspects of your work are beneficial to your studies?

What aspects of your work have a negative impact on your studies?

What is the impact of your work on your motivation to continue studying?

Does your work have an impact on how you get along with other students? Does your work affect your experiences in extracurricular activities (sororities, social clubs etc.)?

Would your involvement in sex work conflict with policies within your university?

7. The impact of the stigma of sex work on the lives of student sex workers

How does society look at sex workers? How does society look at student sex workers? Are there any differences?

Do you believe that societies' attitude towards sex work has changed over the last two decades? If so, in what way? What would be the cause of the change?

How do you describe stigma?

Have you experienced stigma as a sex worker?

Have you experienced stigma in the educational context (student or staff attitudes, the way sex work is discussed in the classroom etc.)?

Have you experienced stigma because of other reasons than being a sex worker?

What is the impact of the stigma of sex work on your well-being?

7.1. Coping with stigma

How do you react when you experience stigma?

Is there anything you do to make yourself feel better when you experience stigma (looking for support, self-care, thinking about your motivation to do the work, etc.)?

Are there particular aspects of your job that you don't disclose (think for example of hiding that you are currently involved in sex work, pretending that your work does not include full nudity, pretending that you only serve disabled clients, etc.)? What is your motivation to do so? Is this beneficial?

Are there particular things you do to protect your identity? Why? Is this effective?

Do you have anyone you could go to, to speak about your work?

Are you in touch with other sex workers (face to face or online)? Why (not)? Does it make a difference if these colleagues are also students?

7.2. The effect of student sex workers' coping strategies

What is the impact of how you deal with stigma on your well-being?

Are there any downsides to the way you handle stigma?

8. Student sex workers' needs for help and service provision

Have you ever accessed services whilst you were studying and working in the sex industry? If so, did you disclose your occupation in the sex industry? What were your experiences?

Do you know what kind of support exists for sex workers? And for students at your institution?

What organisation(s) would be most suitable to deliver services to student sex workers (for example: a self-organisation for sex workers, a student union, a welfare organisation for sex workers, welfare services within universities)? Why?

Do you find it important that service providers make explicit how they look at sex work? If so, what perspective should they ideally display?

How would you want to access services (online, face-to-face, etc.)?

Do you think that student sex workers experience barriers in accessing help? If so, what would these barriers be?

9. Student sex workers' definition of 'forced labour' in the sex industry

Under which circumstances would you see labour in the sex industry as 'forced'?

9.1. Student sex workers' perception of how their own labour relates to their understanding of 'forced labour'

To what extent is the way you described 'forced labour' applicable to your own occupation in the sex industry?

10. The impact of the regulation of the Dutch sex industry on student sex workers' work experiences

Do you feel well-informed about the legislation concerning your work?

Do you feel safe at work? What is the impact of the legal framework for the Dutch sex industry on your safety?

Can you request assistance from the police when needed? What are the consequences if you would?

Are you able to choose for the type of labour in the sex industry that you like best/ that is most suitable to your needs? Do you experience any barriers?

Do you feel that your anonymity is sufficiently protected? Is this important to you? Why?

Can you decide when you want to work and how long you want to work?

Under which circumstances are you able to refuse clients? And (sexual) practices?

Do you experience pressure to offer unpaid services?

Do you feel that you have the same rights and obligations in your work as other people who provide labour? How do the rights and obligations in the sex industry compare to the rights and obligations in other student jobs?

11. The legal framework for the sex industry

Do you have ideas on how your working conditions could improve?

How would legislation for the sex industry ideally look like to be beneficial to you? Would this be different for non-student sex workers?

12. If other students think of entering the sex industry, what advice would you give them?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

13. Do you know other student sex workers I could interview? Do you have ideas on how I can recruit additional participants?

End of the interview

Thank you for your participation

Hand over the gift voucher and ask the participant to sign for it. Hand out the debrief form.

**The interview schedule is written in the present tense. When applicable, the researcher will use the past tense.*

***In case the participant prefers not to use the words 'sex work/sex industry', the researcher will use the terminology suggested by the participant.*