

My Life is My Ceremony
Indigenous Women of the Sex Trade Share Stories about their
Families and their Resiliency

by

Sherri Pooyak
BSW University of Regina 1998

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Leslie Brown (School of Social Work)
Supervisor

Dr. Jeannine Carriere (School of Social Work)
Departmental Member

Dr. Honore France-Rodriquez (Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership
Studies)
Outside Member

Abstract

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Leslie Brown (School of Social Work)

Supervisor

Dr. Jeannine Carriere (School of Social Work)

Co-Supervisor or Departmental Member

Dr. Honore France-Rodriquez (Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies)

Outside Member

The current discourse on women who work in the sex trade is often viewed through a lens based on “victim and abuse” (Gorkoff and Runner, 2003, p. 15) positioning them as being helpless, needing to be rescued and reformed in hopes they will become upstanding citizens. Constructing a resilient identity of Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade aims to shed new light on the identities of a population who are often portrayed negatively. One of the ways this reconstruction can be done is to focus on their familial relationships, thereby challenging the existing discourse that often blames the families of women in the sex trade as reasons for their involvement.

Using narrative analysis, this qualitative study focused on the lives of five Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade. The purpose of this study was two-fold: First was to gain an understanding of the familial relationships of Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade; second was to gain an understanding of how these relationships have contributed to their resiliency.

The Indigenous women who participated in this study shared stories of their familial relationships highlighting the supportive and constructive aspects derived from their

familial relationships. Secondly, they discussed the economic violence that found them making a constrained choice to engage in the sex trade as a means of survival. Thirdly, they spoke of how their familial relationships created family bonds, their connections to their families, and described their families as a source of strength, courage, and unconditional love, which positively contributed to their resilience. The fourth theme challenges the victim and abuse paradigm, as their narratives of resilience reveal how these women have sought to construct new identities and outlines the struggles they have encountered in their efforts to develop these new identities.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who find themselves involved in the sex trade for whatever reason. Particularly the women who participated in this study as the sharing of their stories has shed light on the resiliency of this population that has not been discussed before. I am honoured that your willingness to share your story with me has allowed me to highlight your own resilience.

As I have already acknowledged, but would also like to further dedicate this thesis to the young women I had worked with during my early days in frontline practice. There were many young women that I had met during that time and each one of them inspired, awed and challenged me in many ways; especially those who had been involved in the sex trade. They are my inspiration.

Chapter 1

Background

Prior to entering graduate school, I worked as a social worker in a residential facility, which is located in Saskatchewan with “high risk/high needs” youth, where my role was to “stabilize and assess.” Working with youth who were deemed “unstable” required me to make critical decisions regarding their immediate futures for appropriate care, presented me with a significant learning curve. The majority of those admitted to the facility had a variety of mental health and behavioural issues, either directly or indirectly related to various types of abuse (sexual, physical, substance) they had experienced. Furthermore, a significant number of the female youth had been involved to some degree in the sex trade. This line of work changed my worldview and the way I practiced social work. It was my interest in these youth that drew me to my area of research, primarily because I wanted to learn and understand their experiences in a positive way, rather than focusing on their issues, problems or weaknesses.

It was during this time when I was employed as Youth Facility Worker (my formal job title) that I first met a young woman who disclosed that she had been working in the sex trade as a means of providing for her family. This type of sex work is often referred to as:

Survival sex (sale of sexual services by a persons, such as homeless youth and women in poverty who have very few options) through to the more bourgeois styles of sex trade (including some street prostitution) where both adults are consenting, albeit in a way that is shaped by their gender,

occupation, ethnicity, socio-economic status and cultural values. (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:15)

From the description this young woman offered, she had been engaging in survival sex as a means for her to provide for her and her younger siblings.

Her story is only one among many that challenged my assumptions, values and beliefs about sex trade work. I had previously believed that these young women needed to be saved and protected and that I, with my social work training, could do this. It is this “saving the soul” mentality, wanting to rescue these young women from harm that I practiced prior to meeting the young woman I previously mentioned. I believed I knew what was best for them and their future. I had been taught and assumed that the reason for involvement in the sex trade was exclusively because they were coerced and forced (by a pimp or some other person) into it. These beliefs were challenged as I came to find new understanding as to why individuals become involved in the sex trade, realizing that meeting basic survival needs, such as food, clothing and shelter, and poverty were often motivating factors for their entry into the sex trade. Women who work in the sex trade are often viewed through a lens based on *victim and abuse* (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:15), positioning them as being helpless and in need of being saved - helped and reformed - as such so that they theoretically can become upstanding citizens. Constructing a resilient identity of Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade aims to shed new light on the resilient identities of a population who are often portrayed negatively. One of the ways this reconstruction can be done is by listening to these women’s firsthand accounts of their lives, as they tell their stories, and focusing on how their

relationships with their family have provided them with strength, courage, and unconditional love. This also serves to challenge the existing discourse that tends to blame families of Indigenous women in the sex trade as reasons for their involvement.

Purpose of the Study

As mentioned, in my professional practice, I met many young women who had been involved in the sex trade. Among these young women, there are a few who stand out in my mind for their strength, ability to survive and maintain a strong connection to their families. It is the memory of these young women who have guided my focus and interest in this topic. In the early stages of my research, I realized that they each had strong family connections (despite what may have been indicated by some reports), that their running away from the residence would often be to make reassurances that their family members were safe. While they were “on the run,” they often engaged in sex work, it was as a means of survival and escaping poverty. Their stories compelled and demanded my attention, and hence became the focus of my research. As a social worker, I became more interested in how professional social workers can work with this population of young women by helping them to build on the strengths of their familial relationships. The more I reflected on how we might go about this, the more curious I became about each of the dynamics of young woman’s familial relationships. This led me to realize that a deeper understanding, focusing on the positive attributes of these relationships, would be crucial in this regard.

Research Objectives

My thesis is an attempt to provide an alternative perspective of the Indigenous young female sex trade workers in relation to their familial relationships. I will present both negative and positive perspectives, and more importantly emphasize the importance of their familial relationships as Indigenous people.

The two main objectives of this qualitative research study are:

- *To gain an understanding of the familial relationships of Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade, and;*
- *To gain an understanding of how these relationships have contributed to their resiliency.*

Conceptual Framework

Self-Location

I am Cree, from Sweetgrass, Saskatchewan. Upon embarking on graduate studies, and after practicing social work for the past six years working with children and youth who were involved in the sex trade, I knew that I wanted to study further the issue of child prostitution, specifically the issue of Indigenous children and youth who were involved in the sex trade. From the beginning of my journey, I wanted my thesis to be reflective of my personal belief system and identity as an Indigenous woman, derived from the traditional knowledge of Cree culture. As such, the inclusion of references to Cree traditions and culture throughout my thesis are informed by the teachings and ceremonies I received primarily from an Elder from my community who resides on Moosomin First Nation in Saskatchewan. His guidance and support was instrumental in helping me to

better understand traditional Cree epistemology, which includes the importance of storytelling as it relates to Cree ways of knowing.

Indigenous Epistemology

As mentioned, this qualitative study uses an Indigenous epistemology from a Cree perspective and a narrative method of analysis. Each woman interviewed was given the opportunity to tell her story and to discuss what her family means to her. In asking these women about their families, the intention was to help those working with this population to gain a better understanding of the connection they feel towards their families and, consistent with traditional Cree beliefs, how their families' involvement in their lives is often of greater importance than might be initially anticipated.

A Cree Indigenous epistemological perspective is based on a belief system in which all things are interconnected. This means that both the living and non-living are interdependent on one another for survival. Our lives are connected not only to each other, but also to the land we live on and to the plants, animals, trees and water. As a result of this intrinsic interconnectedness, we understand that our culture is of great value and needs to be preserved, which is often achieved through maintaining language and cultural traditions such as ceremonies (Ermine, 1995:102; Hanohano, 1999:207; Wilson, 2008:74).

Significance of the study

Through my thesis, I hope to convey the value and importance of sharing stories and knowledge that are told in the voices of these women and to validate the experiences of

Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade while honoring their connections to their family. My inquiry into these women's lives highlights their resiliency and identifies how their families have contributed to this quality. While the body of literature refers to how young people do not feel valued within society and are often treated as though they are "less [important] than" adults (Shaw & Butler, 1998:181), in general many Indigenous people can relate to this sentiment –years of colonization has resulted in oppression and marginalization within mainstream society. Battiste (2000) writes “Indigenous peoples worldwide are still undergoing trauma and stress from genocide and the destruction of their lives by colonization” (p. xxii).

Clarification of Terms

A clarification of terms is necessary to enable the reader to understand my position and/or understand the political and sensitive nature of my thesis topic. The specific terms in question refer to the qualification of the population being examined in the study, that being “Indigenous” and “women who have had involvement in the sex trade.” I will use the term "Indigenous" rather than other terms such as "Aboriginal," "Native" and "Indian" which have also been used to describe "Indigenous" people. It is my personal preference to use this term as I feel it includes all First Peoples without marginalizing Métis, those who are of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage as well as the Inuit. It is inclusive of all Indigenous people – the people who have been living on the land since time immemorial.

I use the term “women who have had involvement in the sex trade” as it allows for an inclusion of those who have had marginal to extensive involvement. I wanted to be able

to include the voices of women who have "tried it once" (limited, direct involvement), are affected by peers that are directly involved and those are at risk of being recruited into the sex trade. The women who have had high levels of involvement in the sex trade are those who are enmeshed in the sex trade and may have lived on the streets or live on the streets, with limited connection to their family members (Kingsley & Mark, 2000:13; UNYA, 2002:1).

Chapter Summaries

This thesis consists of five chapters; the following is a brief outline of each chapter.

Chapter One: Introduction outlines the statement of the problem; research objectives; conceptual framework; significance of the study; and clarification of the terminology. It provides the reader an overview as to how the study was carried out and what the reader can expect from the thesis.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review discusses the current literature concerning Indigenous women involved in the sex trade and the sexual exploitation of Indigenous youth. This chapter provides an overview of some of the main points of sex trade work such as reasons for involvement, background characteristics and health effects of sex trade work. The next section describes an Indigenous family system outlining the cultural values and beliefs of Indigenous Cree people. Since this thesis is focusing on resilience a discussion of the discourse surrounding the literature on resilience is needed and provided. Lastly, this chapter outlines the conceptual framework and theoretical concepts used throughout this thesis. The conceptual framework is that of the Indigenous Cree which includes a discussion of the theoretical concepts on *interconnectedness*

(McCormick, 1997:173), *self-in-relation* (Graveline, 1998:57) and *family making* (Bella, 2006:1).

Chapter Three: Narrative Analysis and Storytelling details the methodology that will be used for the analysis of the data. Fraser (2002) writes that narrative analysis can “provide ways to make sense of language, including that which is not spoken...they also provide ways to understand the interactions that occur among individuals, groups and societies...they are able to authorize the stories that ‘ordinary people tell’” (p. 181). It is through what Fraser (2002) describes as the “meaning-making dialogue” (p. 181) - the way in which the teller tells their story. This chapter also provides a description of the methods used in this study such as the selection of participants, data collection, recruitment limitations, interview process and organization of the data.

Chapter Four: Making Meaning introduces the participants or *storytellers* and provides a sketch of their background information, where they come from and who they are. This chapter also includes the women’s stories as to provide the reader a better understanding of her respective and her experiences.

Chapter Five: Analysis begins by discussing the data analysis in what Fraser (2004) describe as “scanning across different domains of experience” (p. 191). Through scanning different domains themes are derived from these women’s story about their familial relationships and their resiliency. This is followed by my interpretations; analysis and findings of the stories followed by a discussion of how these stories can

influence social work practice as it pertains to this population. Lastly, I discuss the strengths and weaknesses, implications for social work and, personal reflections regarding this study.

Conclusion

This thesis begins with a discussion looking at the current literature discourse on Indigenous youth who have been involved in the sex trade. It is through the literature that my research interest was narrowed and an argument was developed as I challenge the current discourse, which suggests that Indigenous youth and women are *victimized and abused*. I argue that this population has strengths, which are often ignored and unreported. Strengths, such as their strong familial relationships and their ability to survive the most difficult of circumstances are often left unexamined, as the focus has been on reasons why female youth and adult women become involved in sex work in the first place. This thesis will reveal that their ability to maintain varying degrees of self-empowerment is in large part due to the connections and supports that they have received within their familial relationships.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

I vividly recall a story I was told by a youth with whom I worked with. At fourteen years old, her family circumstances placed her in a position of parental responsibility by having her care for her four younger siblings. She took her responsibilities very seriously, doing whatever she could to ensure that her siblings were fed and cared for. As a result, she had to make difficult choices, one of which was deciding to enter the sex trade. For her, this was the only viable option as she had little education, minimal work opportunities and no socially-sanctioned means of earning enough money to ensure the survival of her family.

The story of survival sex and the selling of sex through prostitution have been documented both in the literature and among mainstream media. Poverty has driven sex trade workers to survive through means that further oppress them (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:20; Kingsley & Mark, 2000:9; UNYA, 2002:47). The story previously told was one among the first stories I had directly heard about youth involvement in the sex trade. Over time it became abundantly clear that situations like hers were not an anomaly as many others have found themselves in parallel circumstances. Nonetheless, her story in particular haunts me. It is a powerful story that has brought both tragedy and inspiration to me as I have been both saddened and inspired at once. Above all else, the most stunning aspect of her story was the underlying resiliency that was woven through her narrative. Her resiliency was based upon her strong connection to her family, her drive to

ensure their safety and survival, and her willingness to do everything within her means to provide for them.

Indigenous Females and Sex Trade Work

For the purposes of this study, there were five key documents reviewed that focused primarily on Indigenous female youth and adult women involved in sex trade work. The works of Gorkoff & Runner (2003), Kingsley & Mark, (2000) and, the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA, 2002) write specifically about youth involvement in the sex trade and discuss at the length the issues that surround this population. Dalla, (2001a), (2002b) and McIntyre (2002) provided the most extensive accounts of Indigenous women involved in the sex trade. However, it should be noted that Gorkoff & Runner's (2003) work included non-Indigenous participants as well. In conducting the literature search, I was initially disappointed by the lack of research that reflected the voices of Indigenous women. The aforementioned studies were the exception to this omission. In reviewing the larger portion of the research on this population, my main criticism relates to the construction of the identity of these individuals, often reducing the women to being victims of abuse at the hands of their families, as well as their pimps and johns. This perspective is valid for many Indigenous and non-Indigenous women; however it is only a partial description of their experiences as there is much more to be accounted. For example, gaining an understanding as to the dynamic nature of their familial relationships is yet to thoroughly be explored. Within this, the direct voices of those involved in the sex trade were left unheard throughout the breadth of the information available.

The simple fact of the matter is that commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth is a microcosm of many of the values, attitudes, and

beliefs which are predominant in Canadian society at large. This issue, which has life-long repercussions for those involved, is often minimized and isolated as a 'deviant' activity practiced by individual youth. This common and public perspective allows the rest of society to ignore their own roles in creating, sustaining and perpetuating an environment where commercial sexual exploitation is allowed to flourish through indifference and wilful ignorance. (Kingsley & Mark, 2000:9)

It is estimated that in Canada, ninety percent of children and youth who have involvement in the sex trade are of Indigenous ancestry. Many are female, with an average age of fourteen years old and some as young as nine (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:17; Kingsley & Mark, 2000:9). The literature suggests that their involvement in the sex trade is based on the need to survive. This type of survival is referred to as *survival sex* as it is the exchange of sexual services for food, shelter, drugs/alcohol, money and/or approval, the transaction is between the individual and those "who purchase or profit in any way from children and youth in the sex trade" (Kingsley & Mark, 2000:2). Sexual intercourse, in this respect, is taken to be a commodity in which they trade their spirits for food, clothing and, shelter (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:15; Kingsley & Mark, 2000:9) as their friends and peers from the street encourage sex for survival. Tired and hungry, youth make the choice to barter the only commodity available – survival sex to them becomes the one viable option. It is a constrained choice that many Indigenous youth and women, who are actively engaged in the sex trade view as their only viable means of

survival and feel empowered by being self-sufficient in this respect (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:20).

For an Indigenous youth under the age of sixteen and involved in the sex trade, accessing public and community-based social services presents significant concerns. If they approach social services, they risk being apprehended and placed in the child welfare system, thereby losing all control they might feel they have over their lives. Furthermore, as the UNYA (2002) explained, youth “are often turned away from services, before they can even ask for help. They believe that this is due to stereotypes of staff towards ‘hustlers or prostitutes’” (Urban Native Youth Association [UNYA]:13). As a result individuals are reluctant to request or receive the services being offered by agencies such as social services and non-government agencies. Additionally, finding a regularly paying job is an unrealistic option for most due to their age, lack of education and skills, or on a more basic level, knowledge as to how to find a job among other marginalizing factors (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:20; Kingsley & Mark, 2000:12; McIntyre, 2000:20).

Perhaps the most detrimental impact on those directly involved in the sex trade is the effects that come about as a direct result of the exchange of sexual services, affecting their overall health physically, psychologically and, emotionally. Notably, they risk contracting sexually transmitted infections and long-term health issues such as HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C. It has been demonstrated that street youth have much higher rates of HIV/AIDS infection than youth who are not street-involved (Downe, 2003:87). Other risk factors related to sex work include, chemical dependency, violence (which has

been identified as a primary concern among this population), psycho-emotional vulnerability, hunger and general ill health and lack of well-being (Downe, 2003:101). As a means of coping youth often turn to drugs and alcohol which can exacerbate existing problems and can re-entrench involvement in the sex trade as addictions develop.

In Saskatoon, the severity of the sex trade is starting to be better understood and only in the last several years have the stark realities of its effects become known. McDermott (2004) found that "[I]n some circles, Saskatoon has been referred to as the capital for the child sex trade" (p. 1). McDermott (2004) suggests that a disproportionate number of this population are of Indigenous ancestry and estimates it at 80-90% (p.1). Juxtapose this with McIntyre's (2002) study in which only 26% per cent of the participants were of Indigenous ancestry (p. 10). Furthermore, the extent of the involvement of children and youth in the sex trade industry has reached troubling proportions as the average age is reported to be fourteen years (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:17; Kingsley & Mark, 2000:9), many of them continue to stay involved in the sex trade until adulthood (Tutty & Nixon, 2003:41; McIntyre, 2002:2).

Adult women in the sex trade

The literature review thus far has primarily focused on the experiences of Indigenous female youth. My study began with the intent to focus on this population exclusively, but as will be discussed in the following chapter, circumstances led me to shift the focus of my interviews from the experiences of youth to those of adult women within this population. While there are many similarities between these two age groups, there are some noteworthy differences.

The discourse on Indigenous sex trade work identifies a high degree of consistency between the documented experiences of female youth and adult women. Three of the most common factors that are represented across the two demographics include the average age of entry into the sex trade, a history of physical and sexual abuse and, involvement in the child welfare system (Dalla, 2002b:64; McIntyre, 2002:26). Dalla (2001a) writes that “[U]ndoubtedly, entry into prostitution results from the culmination of multiple interdependent personal and contextual factors” (p. 1069). Furthermore, there appears to be no single direct causal factor as to why individuals enter the sex trade. Dalla (2001a) argues that a “[L]ack of strong family ties and a sense of not belonging are typical background characteristics of prostitutes” (p. 1069). She qualifies this statement by pointing out that this does mean that they do not want or seek to have relationships with their families, rather they may seek to repair relationships with members of their families, particularly with biological siblings (Dalla, 2001a:1076).

One factor that is not unique to adults and is more common among those over the age of 18 is having children. In instances where women have children to care for and have little or no means to provide for them, sex trade work becomes a viable option. For women who have and have not had previous involvement in the sex trade, returning or entering becomes a viable source of income and way to provide for their families (Dalla, 2001a:1081). Paradoxically, such action taken to earn money to provide for their family could contribute to their children being placed in the child welfare system as a result of their attempts to provide for them.

While there are many commonalities, there are additional noteworthy differences between the experiences of youth and adult females in the sex trade. Perhaps one of the most obvious and concerning points is that of capacity and consent. A woman over eighteen years has the legal right to engage in and consent to a sexual relationship with another consenting adult as she sees fit. Youth are not necessarily legally able to do this. This is a very complex ethical issue, and is simply acknowledged here without a discussion of its intricacies. Furthermore, a mature and experienced adult woman, who is aware of the risks associated with sex trade work, considers leaving the sex trade or attempts to leave the trade more often than youth do (McIntyre, 2002:16). The effects of continued involvement in the sex trade become apparent and increasingly serious as the women get older. Common experiences reported in the research include chronic health problems, violence, addictions, and unplanned pregnancy (Dalla, 2001a:1081; McIntyre, 2002:18). These experiences can culminate in a desire to live a different quality of life, one that does not involve drugs, alcohol and sex trade work (Dalla, 2001a:1083; Dalla, 2002b:72; McIntyre, 2002:4). On the other hand, unlike youth, adult women “who begin sex work out of financial need, there appears to be a psychological progression in the self-acceptance of the ‘prostitute’ label” (Dalla, 2002b, p. 71) leading the women to engage riskier behaviour. If this is the case, it can be argued that involvement in the sex trade, regardless of the age of entry, takes on a developmental quality. Development in this case might be described as a downward spiral for those who are unable to find the means and/or have the necessary resources and support to exit and can led to tragic consequences.

My work with Indigenous youth who were involved in the sex trade provided me with some degree of understanding as to the extent with which this issue reaches. In reviewing the literature a much more troubling set of circumstances were brought forward. As a social worker, I was naturally interested in the dynamics that exist in the relationships between the women engaged in this lifestyle and their families. After a review of the literature I derived two critical factors that were often overlooked in the reviewed literature.

The first is that despite the many difficulties and issues surrounding this population and their families, there exists a strong bond that is regarded positively. Secondly, the young women that I worked with seemed to possess qualities of inner strength, courage and, tenacity that served to protect them and “keep them going”. As such, I set out to develop a better understanding of the dynamic relationship between women who are involved in the sex trade and their families. I wanted to know how their familial relationship contributed to the qualities of resiliency that enables them to survive despite adverse circumstances. As a result I asked myself a number of questions. To what degree are the women connected to their families? How do they make meaning of their place in their families and the difficulties that they experienced growing up? Furthermore, how do they understand their relationships with the various family members? And how does this contribute to their respective resilient qualities?

Blaming the Family

In my professional experience working with this population, the youth who have been involved in the sex trade seldom talked negatively about their families. A review of the literature found that adult women blamed their parents for their involvement (Nixon & Tutty, 2003:70). Kingsley and Mark's (2000) study also reported that the participants blamed their families for their entry and continued involvement in the sex trade (p. 13). Gorkoff and Runner's (2003) study found that the majority of the women interviewed, reported having experienced some degree of childhood sexual abuse by a family member. As a consequence they were apprehended and removed by child protective services from the family home (p. 25). The fact that they "were living away from their families of origin immediately before becoming involved in prostitution is notable and is similar to the experiences of others exploited by prostitution as children" (Gorkoff & Runner:31). Furthermore, this study goes on to report that family members can "normalize the behaviour", even among some families where sex trade as a means of survival has been turned to for generations (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:31). As previously suggested, the realities of sex trade work cannot be diminished in their importance, but represent one level of analysis that does not account for the greater dynamic; which suggests that if blame need be fixed, it is not necessarily the family's sole responsibility.

There are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration in attempting to understand the experiences of Indigenous women involved in the sex trade that extend beyond the immediate interactions of individual family members. The lives of Indigenous people cannot be discussed without taking into consideration the marginalizing factors that impact day-to-day living. Poverty, racism, marginalization and

the effects of colonization are intergenerational factors, but more immediately, a daily reality for those who live in the shadow of its direct impact (McShane & Hastings, 2004:38-39). The concept of *economic violence* suggests that poverty imposed by these factors leaves individuals with few options to earn sufficient money to survive, leaving the sex trade as one of very few means to this ends. These issues will be further discussed in this later thesis, but are acknowledged here for contextual purposes. Furthermore, if family members “normalize the behaviour” of sex work as a means of survival, as has been reported within the literature, then there needs to be an understanding as to why that is.

A review of the literature examining the familial relationships of this population requires that the cultural connotations of family from an Indigenous perspective must be clarified before an appropriate understanding of these dynamics can be further explored. This is particularly critical in light of the disproportionate over-representation of Indigenous females that comprise the population in question.

The findings of these studies are troubling and point to significant areas of concern. There is a great deal of work to be done in order to better understand these factors so that appropriate interventions can be deployed to assist families in preventing abuse and mitigate the effects of the damage to facilitate healing. The intent of this study, however, is to develop a better understanding of the positive features of the familial relationships of this population. The majority of the research and literature focuses on the maladaptive

and problematic features of the familial relationships of these women, often going so far as to specifically place blame on the family for her involvement in the sex trade.

The ravages of these marginalizing features impact the well-being of entire communities, families and individuals. As was previously suggested, the role of interconnectedness is an embedded feature in Indigenous culture and is a primary characteristic in the relational aspects of how we, as Indigenous people understand our families. This distinction, while subtle, is important and is evidenced in research that points to facts such as “Aboriginal youth appear to be less likely than non-Aboriginal to cut ties with their families after entering street culture,” (Department of Justice, 1998:1). The UNYA (2002) acknowledges, that “the unconditional love that children and youth have for their family, despite the dysfunction or abuse they may have experienced” as a critical feature (p. 38). Family dysfunction (including addictions, abuse and other factors) may have led to entering the sex trade as a means of providing for the basic needs of family, but did not impair this depth of connection. In fact, there was a clear expression of “their willingness to forgive but not to forget” (p. 38). For Indigenous people, the family is of the utmost importance and the cohesive tie that binds us together. Wilson (2008) writes that “[F]amily is what holds us in relationship as individuals and bridges us as individuals in our communities and nations” (p. 86). It is therefore not surprising that many street involved youth maintain their connection to their families, as it is an inherent part of who they are as Indigenous people.

Portrait of an Indigenous Family

As Ermine, Sinclair and Browne discuss (2005), Indigenous families placed significant value on children and youth (p. 15). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996) states:

As in the case of contemporary society in Canada, among Aboriginal peoples traditionally it has been the responsibility of the family to nurture children and introduce them to their responsibilities as members of society. However, the extended family continued to play a significant role throughout the lives of its members. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996, Vol. 3. 2:5)

Elders take the point of view that the young people will be the leaders of the future and will be responsible for passing on cultural traditions, values and beliefs and see it as their job to ensure that they pass on cultural values and to maintain the cultural beliefs systems. More importantly they will be responsible for the continuation of cultural ceremonies (Ermine, Sinclair & Browne, 2005:15), and "[Y]outh are integral to the notion that community culture will have continuity" (p. 15). If today's youth are responsible for the continuity of the community, then we must change our perspective to account for the fact that they are our futures leaders and assist them in this development by building on the strengths that they possess.

Indigenous family systems are often called "kinships" as the term reflects the cultural significance of the family system beyond the immediate biological family. McShane and Hastings (2004) describe kinship systems as "emphasizing the interconnectedness of many family members and even more familial community members" and "one of the

fundamental traditional values of First Peoples" (p. 39). The interconnectedness within an Indigenous kinship system can be "described as a series of relationships, starting with the family, that reaches further and further out so that it encompasses the universe" (McCormick, 1997:173). Author del Carmen Rodriguez (2004) also describes the socio-cultural importance of kinship or family explaining how the culture of a family, for example, affects individual behaviours, child-rearing practices, discipline, and the importance of achievement and education (p. 30). The author goes on to say that such sets of norms often determine its form and functioning, including the type of family, its size and shape as culture defines the boundaries and rules for interaction, and communication patterns between family members and within the community. The roles of family members and the ways of defining problems and outlining specific coping skills are defined by the culture (p. 30).

The value of cultural familial relationships and its emphasis on interconnectedness among Indigenous people signifies its importance among their cultural worldview. We are all interconnected; we are all related; we are all one. In previous research for a graduate course, I interviewed my sister, Shona Gladue in our family home in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. Gladue described the importance of family within the Cree Indigenous culture, which she defined as *wahkatowin* meaning "all my relations", placing emphasis on the intertwining relationship between humans, the land and the spiritual world (S. Gladue, personal communication, September, 25, 2005). Our *wahkatowin*, includes the immediate as well as the extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins), and together they make up the family system. An aunt, uncle, cousin or distant family

member may be adopted as mother, father or sibling. As well, non-biologically related family members also may be adopted. The Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) describes the traditional Indigenous family:

Family encompasses an extended network of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. In many First Nation communities, members of the same clan are considered family, linked through kinship ties that may not be clearly traceable, but trace back to a common ancestor in mythical time. (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3. 2:p. 4)

In Cree tradition, the role of the family, parents and extended family members was to ensure the sustainability of the people, to ensure that the values were passed down and the child understood the importance of their Elders and "were shown that people needed clear and clean minds to stay healthy. Values like truth and to cherish life were taught and enforced on children in the home," (Ermine, Sinclair & Browne, 2005:15). As I have heard and been told many times: children are our future and we must protect them.

The Family Background

The Canadian residential school system (which also includes industrial schools) has greatly impacted Indigenous people of all generations. The effects can be witnessed in the high rates of substance abuse, domestic violence, poverty and overall well-being (RCAP, 1996 Vol. 3. 2:10-11). It has been stated that the residential school system was the worst form of abuse as it disconnected families and created generations of children that grew into adults without those interconnections and senses of cultural self (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 2:18). The loss of parental influence and breakdown of the family system has

led to the disconnection among Indigenous communities, and subsequently has contributed today to the high rate of children in the foster care system (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3. 2:19).

From my own personal experience, I can attest to these effects. My late father, Stephen Pooyak (1941-1998), attended a residential school from the time he was six years old until he was fourteen. During his lifetime, he would not (and as I got older I found out, he could not) talk about his experience at residential school. My sister and I have often reflected on the effects of our father's residential school experience on our lives: we were not taught to speak Cree, we were not given our ceremonies, and we have both struggled with understanding our identities as Cree women. Fortunately for us, my late *kokum* (Cree for grandmother) valued and maintained, to the best of her ability, our Cree traditions and was able to pass on the few traditions to her grandchildren. She predominantly spoke Cree and knew little English. As a result, communicating with her was difficult, but this did not deter her from showing us how to honour and embrace our traditions and ceremonies. On the other hand, my father was systematically taught to be ashamed of his Cree heritage. Through his experience at residential school, he tried desperately to ensure that we grew up "knowing and living the white way". I can relate to the experiences of many Indigenous people in Canada as they describe their experiences of abuse, neglect and loss of their culture. Prior to his death, my father talked about his regret in not teaching us Cree or the Cree traditions. We understood, if only minimally, why he wanted a different life for us than what he had experienced - poverty, oppression, and feeling like he never belong in the *white world*. Today, things

are different from my father's experience, and many Indigenous people are re-claiming their identities and talking about their experiences and, their resilience.

Resilience

My interest in resilience stems from my professional practice. As I previously identified, I worked over a six-year period at a residential care facility. The residents were youth between the ages of ten years old to sixteen years old, many of whom of Indigenous ancestry and some had been involved in the sex trade. By virtue of their admission to the facility, all were either temporary or long-term wards of the state and most were there for help with behavioural or mental health issues. Among the residents, a small minority of the female youth were admitted for their involvement in the sex trade. I began to notice how these particular young women demonstrated marked qualities of strength, courage, and perseverance. It is not to say that these youth did not struggle with hopelessness, despair or depression, from which they often escaped by using addictive substances and engaging in other potentially high-risk behaviours. Nonetheless, it was their positive strengths that struck me and I became intrigued. I wanted to gain a better understand of strength based characteristics, which I later learned were factors of resilience.

Reading the literature on resilience, its theory and background, I began questioning the definition of resilience and wondered whether Indigenous women who were involved in sex trade would self-describe as possessing this quality. Along with this, a number of questions arose. Would they self-identify as being resilient? Would they have any sense of the meaning of this concept and if so, what would it mean to their sense of personal identity? Given the appropriate understanding, would this be useful in helping them to

establish a different way of describing themselves? With whom would they attribute development of resilient characteristics? I was interested in further exploring resiliency in relation to how they make meaning of their experiences? And how this has contributed to overcoming their adversities?

Resilience, as defined by Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) as

[A] dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. Implicit within this notion are two critical conditions; (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process. (p. 543)

The literature search on resilience is broad and its research scope encompasses a variety of definitions across various disciplines. As a result my search was narrowed to the following academic fields appropriate to this study: psychiatry, orthopsychiatry, psychology and social work, drawing from both quantitative and qualitative studies, with a specific focus on Indigenous youth, high risk youth and Indigenous families. I found that there was a limited amount of literature on this specific population and what existed did not necessarily focus on individuals involved in the sex trade.

Of the works of Indigenous authors on resilience, Waller (2001) and Cross (2005) were among the most useful and significant research texts I was able to access. They

emphasized the different experiences of Indigenous people in comparison with the mainstream population. Ungar (2004a) contextualizes resilience from a generalized, Canadian research perspective to include the significance of culture connection (2008) and the resilience among high risk/high needs youth. Ungar's work on resilience was of significant value for the purpose of this thesis. The works of Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000:543) are regarded for their leadership in defining the concept of resiliency and their works were pivotal in conceptualizing the theoretical underpinnings of resiliency.

The literature commonly identifies two key factors in identifying resiliency;

1. Risk factors, which is an external or environmental factor that would normally prohibit developmental growth and;
2. Protective factors, or some manner of an internal locus of control, personal characteristics or personality traits that positively contributes to, fosters or promotes resiliency in high-risk individuals, (someone who has experienced extreme adverse situations). (Finkelstein, et al., 2005:151; Little, Axford, & Morpeth, 2003:6; Perkins & Jones, 2004:560; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodick & Sawyer, 2004:2)

The following page presents a chart that I developed outlining the risk and protective associated with resiliency. It was compiled from an extensive literature search on the subject, with specific reference to younger populations and Indigenous people. It is meant

to demonstrate the concept of resilience and to identify factors that have been identified as contributing to individual resilience.

Resilience Factors

Risk Factors

- Abuse: physical; sexual; substance; emotional (including neglect)
- Race: as it pertains to the youth's experiences with marginalization/ oppression; prejudice; racism
- Class: social and economic factors
- Sexuality: promiscuity
- Family: violence and/or marital discord; large families or single parent families; criminal activity and/or involvement from the youth and/ or a parent
- Health: mental health issues either with the parent or the child or youth (suffered a significant loss, such as a parent); lack of available or access to health care
- School: failing; bullying; has no peers
- Community: lack of or lack of access to community resources, such as counselling, food banks, day care; communities that are of a lower socio-economic status such as high levels of criminal activity, poverty; marginalized and oppressed people; high unemployment rates
- Friends: negative peer group (contributes to feelings of isolation and poor coping abilities; distraction from the issues as well as less reliance on the family)
- Self -definition: low self-image; low sense of self-worth

Protective Factors

- Family: safety in the home; stability; structure; attachment to a parent(s); parental involvement and support (i.e., does the youth feel worthy, safe, cared for, valued); strong cultural beliefs and values; religious or spiritual belief
- Personality traits: perseverance; personal competencies; elastic qualities; adaptability to change; invulnerability; ability to recover from stressful or traumatic events; resourcefulness; temperament; good health; intelligence; how the individual “envisions the future”; coping strategies (i.e., use of avoidance, ability to talk about their issues); identifies with their culture; use of a symbol (such as teddy bear or trinket); ability have hope
- Development that can be defined as “normal” when it occurs under difficult conditions such as abuse and/or neglect as a child
- School: is a positive environment for the child/youth; school performance is above average
- Community: is involved in community and recreational activities; has access to community resources, such as counselling, food banks, day care, recreational activities
- Significant positive adult/social support networks, such as a teacher, coach, social worker, care-giver; role model: this person acts as a parent as they provide emotional support, is caring, monitors his/her behaviour (such as attending school)
- Self-definition: self-esteem; competence; attachment to others; sense of autonomy; ability to see they have choices in their lives; are able to learn from their experiences (both the positive and the negative); level of developmental maturity and sense of independence and acceptance.

(Aronowitz, 2005:203-204; Arrington, & Wilson, 2000:226; Bal, Crombez, Van Oost, & Debourdeaudhuij, 2003:1390; Bernard, 1993:44; Bowen & Flora, 2002:530; Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004:225; Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Lapp, 2002:1221-1222; Cross, 2005:151; Denny, Flemming, Clark, & Wall, 2004:143; Flynn, Ghazal, Legault, Vandermeulen, & Petrick, 2004:77; Gilligan, 1999:188 (a) and 2004:95 (b); Hagen, Myers, & Mackintosh, 2005: 211; Henry, 2001:288; Holleran & Waller, 2003:341; Luthar, 1991:600; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000:548; Perkins & Jones, 2004:548; Rak & Patterson, 1996:368-369; Schofield & Brown, 1999:30; Smokowski, Mann, Reynolds, & Fraser 2004:65 & 86; Tebes, Irish, Vasquez, & Perkins 2004:780; Turner, 2001:447; Ungar, 2004:27 & 37; Waller, 2001:292; Waller & Patterson, 2002:82; Waller, Okamoto, Miles, & Hurdle, 2003; Wilcox, Richards, & O'Keefe, 2004:343).

Family members provide young people with knowledge about their culture's values and traditions that exist within the family system. Cultural connections and traditions can be considered protective factors and can play a role in fostering resilience in some of the most resistant youth. Ungar's (2008) article on resilience and culture found that culture plays a significant role in defining and negotiating a resilient identity even when there are negative environmental factors influencing the youth. He suggests that youth living in these types of environments can and have overcome these barriers by seeking out protective factors such as regularly attending school and finding positive role models (including parents and/or siblings).

Philosophical Framework

This section formulates the framework for my research it is the foundation upon which my argument is made. In Indigenous culture, when we meet each other, it is customary to identify "where you come from". Declaring "where one comes from" among Indigenous people is a long-standing tradition that is used as a means of developing a trusting relationship with one another and is formulated in a common sense of identity. As such, "[A] trustful relationship might begin by having an awareness of the different ways of understanding Aboriginal identity" (France, McCormick & del Carmen Rodriguez, 2004:68). In this context, a simpler way of expressing is in the question, "[I]f you do not know where you come from, how can you know yourself?" Consistent with this custom, I have shared where I come from in the *Introduction* section of this thesis, which for me is a way to honour my Cree culture, its people and traditions.

My interest in using this philosophical approach as a framework is based on my personal belief system, which stems from my cultural heritage, its traditions and cultural ways of knowing. My Cree culture is an oral tradition and historically, our connection to our past was maintained through stories and the passing of these narratives from one generation to the next. It is a way of maintaining our personal history and sharing our stories, or personal narratives with others, to both honour our experiences and also for the benefit of what others may be able to learn from our experience. This extends to how we account for our familial histories and the importance of our relationships along with how we make meanings we make of these relationships. It can hold both positive (protective) and negative (risk) factors and implications.

From an Indigenous perspective, knowledge is not something to be taken for granted. Rather it is to be viewed as a gift and it is taught that it should be treated as such. What we know and what we share is to be regarded with the highest respect. The sharing of stories is one way of sharing the Cree teachings. Stories can have many different meanings and take on many different purposes. Stories, for the purpose of this research are shared because what they have to say is what is missing from the literature. The stories told and shared in this thesis focuses on the resilience of Indigenous women of the sex trade, a perspective which is often ignored and untold. Stories share knowledge, and "[K]nowledge is transmitted through stories that shape shift in relation to the wisdom of the storyteller at the time of the telling" (Kovach, 2005:27). As is discussed later, knowledge is embedded in the stories of the women who participated in this study.

Epistemology

How does one describe the existence of something ineffable? Indigenous epistemology is embedded in the belief that things, in and of themselves, are an inexplicable mystery. That said, how does one intelligibly explain a belief in a universal intelligence for which I have no "proof" and exists only in the faith that we are guided and protected by the Creator? Our belief system as Indigenous peoples encompasses exactly this and that all things living and non-living, are integral parts of this singular oneness. The manifest expression of this is rooted in our cultural teachings and spiritual traditions. Cultural protocols guide how things should be done in line with these practices, which hinges on our use of language in the form of stories, which are passed from generation to generation.

For us, existing today relies on an understanding of who we are, relative to our traditional beliefs and the strong connection that we have to the land or *Aski* (Cree for mother earth). As Cree people, remembering our connection to the land (and all that dwell upon it) and our place in the universe, helps to remind us who we are and where we are from and that we are not alone in this world. On the contrary, we are irrevocably connected to one another and to all things. As such, writings concerning Indigenous epistemology stress the importance of maintaining and sustaining cultural traditions where language (its use and meaning) and culture (a reflection of values and beliefs) play a vital role (Corbiere, 2000: 114; Hanohano, 1999:211; Kovach, 2005: 21). Indigenous epistemology takes on a holistic perspective focusing on the mind, body, spirit and emotion as all interrelated (Ermine, 1995:109).

An Indigenous worldview helps us locate our place and rank in the universe: it influences the sense and understanding of culture at a very deep and profound level since it affects the beliefs, values and attitudes, interpretation of time and other aspects of culture. This perspective informs our belief systems, value orientation, decision-making processes, assumptions and modes of problem solving (del Carmen Rodriguez, 2004:30). It signifies the value and importance that we place on relationships, with the land, the people and with us as well. Succinctly stated:

Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationships with the land, with their ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being on the land. Rather than viewing

ourselves as *in* relationship with other people or things, *we* are the relationships that we hold and are a part of. (Wilson, 2008:80)

The Western perspective tends to look at the scientific aspects of attaining and understanding knowledge, focusing on the scientific aspects of the universe (Ermine, 1995:101). Hanohano (1998) writes that Indigenous epistemology, on the other hand, is based on seeking a spiritual understanding and gaining knowledge from the spiritual world about what we know and how we know it (p. 211). This process can be defined as studying the "nature and attainment of knowledge... [a] holistic perspective encompassing the intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual realms" (Hanohano, 1999:211). A western world-view based in scientific knowledge maintains differing epistemological assumptions and is not well equipped to understand the knowledge that is passed down through the oral tradition of telling stories. The Western view embraces the written record whereas Cree people maintained an oral tradition of maintaining knowledge (Thomas, 2005:243).

At this time in our modern age, literacy skills are highly important to both individual and community development. This has become particularly critical for Indigenous people, especially for those working in the academic arenas who are defining Indigenous theory and epistemology. Emerging academics are producing literature outlining an Indigenous paradigm which challenges the exclusivity of existing methods of collecting information to include room for recognition of the value of the traditional approaches. It is equally critical, however, that the oral tradition of telling stories and being able to understand

one's place in part vis-à-vis our personal narratives is not lost in our progress or cast aside as an antiquated vestige. For the purpose of my study, I am interested in hearing the stories about families, histories and experiences of the women who participated in this research study, but also to record their experiences in a written document.

In attempting to outline an Indigenous epistemology, I will further elaborate on some of the fundamental concepts that inform this way of knowing from a Cree perspective. In general, Indigenous people have a strong belief in the Creator, and follow traditional ways as a way of learning about, preserving and maintaining their inherited culture. As Wilson (2001) wrote:

The identity of Indigenous peoples whose concept of self is rooted in the context of community and place, differs strikingly from the identity of many Euro-Canadians whose concept of self is frequently encapsulated in independence of the individual... This self-recognition enables us to understand where and how we belong to this world, and it has the profound effect of ensuring that wherever we may happen to be at any given time, alone or in the company of other people, we do not feel alone.

This knowledge nourishes us. (p. 91)

The conceptual framework that is used in this thesis is predicated on an understanding of the Cree epistemology, a belief of the interdependence, connection, and spiritual bond which is grounded in the belief in the Creator. My purpose in this study and thesis stems from my interest in reframing how some social workers tend to view this population from

the standpoint that these women are *victims and abused*; to one that views their family members providers of strength and guidance rather than blaming them. This frame of reference is drawn directly from the epistemological considerations that have been outlined throughout this section.

The following section describes three concepts emerging from my worldview that frames my understanding of the experiences of the women interviewed. They are as follows: (1) *self-in relation* (Graveline, 1998:55) in terms of understanding and “knowing where you come from”; (2) *interconnectedness* (McCormick, 1997:178) understanding how the women have come to understand themselves in relation to their families; and (3) *family making/meaning making* (Bella, 2006:1) will be used to gain an understanding of how the participants have come to understand their families and make sense of what their families mean to them.

Graveline (1998) and McCormick’s (1997) works have helped to articulate an Indigenous understanding as to how a person comes to understand one’s self and Bella’s (2006) work on *making meaning* and familial relationships have influenced how I have constructed and understood these concepts. Graveline (1998) explored the concept of *self-in relation* further in the following statement:

[A]ll things are dependent on each other. All things and all people, though we have our own individual gifts and special place, are dependent on and share in the growth and work of everything and everyone else. We believe that beings thrive when there is a web of interconnectedness between the

individual and the community and between the community and nature. (p. 55)

This notion of interconnectedness is not a new concept for me. It is an idea that I am familiar with, as it is what I was taught as a child. As I have mentioned previously, my *kokum* (Cree for grandmother) was a traditional woman and was the source of my understanding of this. The notion of interconnectedness has been present through the passing of stories and knowledge by members of our culture through the generations. As Graveline (1998) writes “[O]ur Elders teach us that to be without relations is to be really poor” (p. 56). This type of poverty may not be the same kind of monetary impoverishment that is of common concern in mainstream society, but it is essential to understanding the importance of family and familial relationships.

McCormick (1997) writes that

[I]nterconnectedness can be viewed as the individual’s connection to the world outside the self. Practically, this means to become connected or reconnected to friends, family, community, nature and culture.” The extended family, friends, and members of the community were seen as a natural support for First Nation people and illustrate the importance of belonging. (p. 178)

McCormick's (1997) focuses on counselling techniques for non-Indigenous counsellors to be aware of when working with Indigenous people; however, his approach can be adapted and used as a point of analysis for the purpose of this study. They are as follows:

1. Establishing a social connection and obtaining help/support from others;
2. Establishing a spiritual connection and participation in ceremony;
3. Connecting with nature. (p. 179-80)

In addition, I am adding a fourth theme that McCormick (1997) briefly mentions but does not expand on is the role and connection to family members. For the individual family member, connection to family provides the individual an opportunity to develop, obtain, seek and establish a social and spiritual connection that would lead to involvement and participation in traditional ceremonies (McCormick, 1997:179-180; McShane & Hastings, 2004:34; RCAP, 1996:13). The emphasis is not solely on the individual as McCormick (1997) identifies, rather, it is on the community as a whole and how the individual relates to his or her community.

Bella (2006) defines family making

[A]s the process of creating and sustaining the close relationships that in turn nurture and support us. Family making is the process through which we develop caring and enduring intimate relationships and is comprised of three components within the family making process: caring, endurance and intimacy. (Bella, 2006:1)

Bella (2006:1) redefines the family from that of the traditionally structured construction that currently exists, to include newly defined family systems, that is, family systems that were rarely written about or identified. In thinking about this, my thesis aims to share positive family stories of Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade as positive influences and as contributors to their resilience. This contradicts the majority of the existing literature on this population as their families are negatively portrayed and are often blamed for the women's entry and continued involvement in the sex trade (Nixon & Tutty, 2003:70; Schissel & Fedec, 1999:35). As such, the literature fails to reveal any significant insights into the ways in which the familial relationships of this population have provided care, endurance and intimacy within their lives.

For the purpose of this thesis, Bella's (2006) definition of family making provides a platform for deconstructing *the family*. It also provides a stage for the women who participated in this study and have or are currently working in the sex trade to define, identify and share what their families mean to them. The "family making" theory may potentially support social constructivist family practice. The idea of family as process may facilitate exploration of family strengths and provide a more flexible and inclusive language for recreating family narratives" (Bella, 2006:9). For the purpose of this study, family making provides a foundation for understanding and conveying the important roles that family members play in the lives of Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade.

In conducting this literature search for my thesis, what became apparent was the limited amount of literature specific to the resiliency of Indigenous individuals who have had involvement in the sex trade. Existing resilience literature indicates the important role culture plays in fostering resiliency in an individual especially for those of Indigenous ancestry (Arrington, & Wilson, 2000:203-204; Cross, 1998:151; Holleran & Waller, 2003:340-341; Waller & Patterson, 2002:83; Waller, et al., 2003:90). The role of culture in its ability to foster resilience is crucial as it creates a sense of belonging and pride (Ungar, 2008). The notion of *knowing where you come from* is an integral facet within Indigenous culture and identity. If researchers are going to focus on Indigenous individuals who have had involvement in the sex trade as being resilient, then we must include and acknowledge participants' cultural background and their familial relationships.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature as I sought to inform my study. This includes research describing Indigenous female youth and adult women who are engaged in sex trade work. I also identified the tendency on the part of some researchers to blame the family for their involvement. I provided a discussion and clarified the meaning of family within an Indigenous cultural and historical context. While social workers may disagree on how to construct this population, society will want to know “how to deal with the problem” and “end sexual exploitation”. Discouragingly, these two approaches do not arrive at any tangible answers that are effective as easy preventative strategies or quick fixes. As an Indigenous woman engaged in academic inquiry and as an experienced front-line social worker, working with youth who had been involved in the

sex trade, I feel I am well positioned to appreciate the complexities of the issues surrounding this population. Furthermore, I have outlined the current trends in the body of literature on resilience and have identified various factors that have been attributed and are consistent with resiliency. Finally, I explicated my philosophical framework and Cree epistemology (that for the underlying structures that support my study).

Chapter Three: Narrative Analysis and Storytelling

Purpose Statement:

This thesis is a presentation of a qualitative study that examined how Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade understand their familial relationships, and how these relationships have contributed to their resiliency. For this study, I interviewed five Indigenous women and analyzed the data using a narrative analysis. Narrative analysis was selected because I want to present the women's personal stories without compromising the way in which they were shared with me - personally and in an open, informal and, often forthcoming manner. This chapter defines and discusses narrative analysis and the methods that were utilized and outlines the methods that were selected and implemented throughout the development of this study. Research methods of recruitment, participant selection, data gathering, interview transcription, data analysis, limitations and, ethical considerations will be discussed at length.

Reissman and Quinney (2005) write that “through the telling of stories, they [the women who participated in this study] present their identities and societies” (p. 180). In the case of Indigenous women who have been involved in the sex trade, their identities are often constructed in a negative fashion (as was discussed in Chapter Two: Literature Review). Take for example the media's portrayal of female sex trade workers who have gone missing and/or been murdered, many of whom are of Indigenous ancestry. Not only are they portrayed negatively, their stories are often left untold or are missing altogether (Culhane, 2003:595). Brunshot, Sydnie & Krull (1999) surveyed five major Canadian newspapers from 1985 to 1995 and found that women who were involved in prostitution

were portrayed as criminals and deviant (p. 67). “Media coverage tends to support the conclusion that this is what female criminals do-use their sexuality for economic and material gain-so that we are left with the enduring image that female crime is indeed sexual” (Brunshot, Sydie & Krull, 1999:67-68). This is perhaps in part due to their well documented struggles with poverty, drug addiction and other factors contributing to their marginalization. I argue that these factors (sex work and poverty) tend to overshadow their remarkable qualities of strength, tenacity and other factors that contribute to their resiliency. Employing narrative analysis allows for each woman’s story to be told in her own words, creating the circumstances under which she can share her subjective life experiences. Allowing her to define who she is and facilitate her ability to be able to tell positive meaningful stories about herself, her resiliency and her family in the context of her community.

As a methodology, narrative analysis is interested in the following; by closely examining the details of how and manner in which a story is told; the process of transcription; and identifying and interpreting commonalities among the participants (Fraser, 2004:181). A significant part of this process aims to understand the meaning behind how the story is told and understood and, is expressed by the teller (Fraser, 2004:181). It is not as concerned with the typical structure, beginning, middle and end, rather it aims to look for and derive underlying meanings of the story, posing questions such as: How is the story being told? And what meaning can be derived from the story? “Personal narratives are, at their core, meaning-making units of discourse. “They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories, rather than reproduce the past as it was” (Reissman,

2000:20). In this study, stories are about adding a different perspective or a new dimension to the existing literature. In this sense, the stories shared in this study represent “the possibility that life stories can share a perspective that is in conflict with another perspective” (Thomas, 2005:244).

As Indigenous people, when we talk about our families, we share many perspectives, including the positive joyful times as well as the negative more difficult ones. Dependent on the context, who we are talking to and what we are talking about is the story we will tell. The conditions in which we are willing to share influence how our stories are constructed. In some instances, we will share the most superficial of stories such as funny anecdotes about our children, nieces, nephews, brothers, sisters and parents. Personally, I have fond memories of growing up in a home with a lot of laughter. My late father’s family had a great sense of humour, allowing for levity and affability. Since my father’s death I have lost touch with many of my extended family members and therefore the close connection to the paternal side of my family, as well as the laughter that existed within these relationships. Stories of intimacy, secrets and deeply held private thoughts were often shared with select family members, such as a sister, aunt or *kokum*. Other stories such as the ones of hurt and pain were so hurtful that sometimes they were not shared at all.

In my family, stories of this kind were related to my father’s experiences in residential school. I asked my mother whether he ever talked about it. She indicated that in the seventeen years they were married, or after they were divorced and remained friends he

did not ever talk about his time at residential school. My father's residential school experience impacted my father to an extent that I cannot begin to appreciate. Our stories, especially of this kind, need to be told, to be heard and to be understood. As Thomas (2005) points out, "[T]hese stories are stories of survival and resistance" (p. 238). My father was never able to find his voice, to be able to share his personal narrative in this respect. Yet it is the intimate stories that I have asked my participants to share - narratives so intimate and personal that, like my father, they may have never been shared before. As it turned out, two of the women indicated that they had never previously talked to anyone about their experiences. Also like my father, their stories were difficult for them to tell and were also difficult for me to hear.

There are four aspects of the way in which stories are told that are drawn upon for the purpose of chapter. They are as follows: the importance of stories, sharing stories, how stories are told and hearing the stories. Each concept will be discussed briefly in the following section.

The Importance of Stories

Traditionally, stories were told as a means of teaching members of the community socially appropriate ways of communicating and behaving and were also a way to "share knowledge, philosophy and instruction without direct censorship" (Loppie, 2007:276). As will be explained, the stories, or personal narratives, in the context of this study are meant to shed light on the positive experiences and strengths of populations who are often erroneously cast in a negative light.

In Indigenous culture, when one asks an Elder questions or requests a particular teaching, traditional protocols dictate that the person making the request does so with an offering of tobacco, a blanket and/or money (a monetary gift is often meant to assist with travel, as is often required). It is a sign of respect to the Elder for giving their help. As the researcher, I approached the participants in this study adhering to these same protocols, taking the perspective that in order to show respect in this way, each woman was offered a blanket, tobacco and a small sum of money for offering to share their stories. I explained to each participant why I was giving her these gifts. It was my way of showing respect to them for sharing their stories, as I would to an Elder.

It was of critical importance for me to maintain these protocols as prescribed by the traditions of my culture. As I have already indicated, stories in Cree culture are the means of preserving and disseminating what is known. Sometimes the stories are traditional and are transmitted from person to person in order to ensure that the lineage of the teaching is not lost. As such, the personal narratives of this population need to be heard and passed on, in a way that that honours their experience, their culture and their lives. The inspiration for my research and the methodology of narrative analysis is derived from this understanding – the sharing of stories as a way of learning and gaining new knowledge.

Sharing Stories

Fraser (2004) argues that stories are a way to share with one another our experiences and we share our stories by “organizing our experiences into meaningful episodes that call upon cultural modes of reasoning and representation” (p. 180). Furthermore, sharing of

stories, as a method, validates the experiences and documents the cultural experiences of Indigenous people and as such can be seen as acts of resistance as “they give voice to a story that has not been fully told” (Thomas, 2005:242). These notions inform the underlying point of view from which this project was undertaken and underpin the overall design.

How the Story is Told

The previous section described the reasons for my choice in using a narrative analysis as a methodology and the telling of stories in seeking to understand the experiences of the population being discussed. Fundamentally, these stories are about families, resilience and how these factors are interrelated with one another. As a researcher, careful attention was given to hearing and sharing these particular stories as it offered an important opportunity for greater understanding as to how these women conceptualize and ascribe meaning to their experiences.

As King (2003) writes, a story is told "not to play on your sympathies, but to suggest how stories can control our lives" (p. 9) and to remember, "to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told" (p. 10). This thesis is designed with these concepts in mind as it seeks to convey the way in which family has contributed to these women's resilience despite the many adversities they have experienced, both individually and within a familial context. In the stories that were shared, the tellers (the women) and I, the listener/researcher, played our respective roles. As the listener/researcher, I became privy to the intimate details of the women's lives, hearing their stories, and learning about their lives requires compassion and empathy and

knowing how one can be both of these without falling into the role of *would-be saviour* or feeling the need to save the person. These stories disclose a part of themselves that illustrate the complexity of being human.

Hearing the Stories

As has been previously discussed, an Indigenous epistemology and methodology is based on relationship; the way in which the world is viewed is based on our relationship to the things within our world, such as the land, the animals, and the people. As such, time is necessary to create the relationship between the researcher and the participant (or storyteller) to ensure that the relational aspect is allowed to develop and therefore prevent negatively affected research outcomes. I was concerned initially that my professional status, class and privilege (being a social worker and graduate student) may limit my ability to develop a working relationship with my participants. I was, however, relieved and in awe of the openness and honesty with which these women shared their life stories with me. Loppie (2007) describes her own experience with being a listener of stories. She writes “[I] positioned myself within a prevalent Indigenous epistemology by acknowledging the wisdom of Elder women and inviting their partnership in storytelling as a vehicle of teaching, learning, and sharing” (p. 277). As a listener, I positioned myself, as Loppie describes as a partner within the teller/listener relationship. I listened to these women’s stories from the perspective of someone who would be learning from a group of wise women. In order to be faithful to my chosen epistemology, I viewed my participants as Elder women who were sharing their wisdom with me. In no way was I the expert.

Fraser (2004) writes about the importance of properly *hearing the stories* as the listener is encouraged to “experience[e] the emotions of participants and interviews” (p. 186) and pay close attention to the following things: the woman’s body language; the story they are telling, and to look for “agreement and disagreement” among each participant’s story (p. 186). I was mindful of how each story was being told and asked myself the following questions: Why were they quiet at certain times during their interview? What specifically was causing certain emotions to surface? What was their body language saying in relation to their words? Why did they choose to tell a particular story? Why did they focus on certain experiences? It was through the transcription process that I was finally able to gain some understanding as to the meanings that the women were making about the questions they were being asked. Maintaining my dual roles as both researcher and as an Indigenous woman listening to the stories I was hearing was at times difficult. The dichotomy between remaining the objective researcher, and the subjective listener, forced me to confront my own preconceived notions as well as the social constructions that I had been exposed during my formal educational training. Relationships, as I have described previously, in Indigenous culture, is an integral part of our worldview. The interview process therefore, is the first step in developing a relationship with the women I interviewed. It is the relationship that I struggled with as an interviewer. As Loppie (2007) explains:

My learning also came from listening to, observing, and interacting with the women who partnered in this research and not necessarily from the literature that had previously shaped my perspective, nor from Eurocentric methods that assume the inferiority of experiential pedagogy (p. 277).

A review of the recorded interviews allowed me to pay careful attention to the way each woman expressed and talked about her experience. I was conscious of three general things: the story being told, my emotional reaction to the story and how the stories were similar and different. I could listen to the story in the moment as I knew that I would be reading and re-reading the transcripts several times.

As discussed previously, I struggled with my role as the objective researcher and the subjective listener; I also struggled to avoid engaging the women in a therapeutic counselling role. My '*insider/outsider*' dichotomy experience was quite apparent to me in the course of conducting the interviews my mind was competing with what my role was and was not. I was not there in the capacity of counsellor or social worker; I was there as a researcher and needed to maintain the appropriate boundaries. I was caught somewhat off guard with some of the emotional, psychological and even practical (technical difficulties with my recording device) implications that came about through this process. The women shared intimate parts of their lives and some disclosed things they reportedly had never told anyone. These moments in particular were difficult for me because the social worker in me wanted to side-step my role as researcher and take steps to counsel these women.

I realized the irony later as I was reflecting on my experience in my research journal. I wanted to challenge existing notions that positioned the women as victims and that their families were to blame for their victimization. I wanted to understand how their familial relationships contributed to their resilience by constructing them as being resilient. I was

challenged, as I had this urge to overlook these factors and somehow seek to protect them. It took a conscious effort to remain in the role of the researcher and listen to each woman tell her story and simply ask the prepared questions. I was not there to be their counsellor or to save them.

Once the interviews were completed, I sought the counsel of my thesis supervisor to help debrief my experience and to talk about certain aspects of the stories that had left me affected. In addition, I recorded my thoughts in a research journal and participated in several Cree spiritual ceremonies during this time to aid me in the process. Seeking the comfort of my cultural traditions was important for me, to be able to practice what I believe in and to remember the larger picture as to why I entered graduate school in the first place was valuable to my overall well-being. That is, I wanted to believe. In the end, listening to each woman's story and working through the transcription and analysis of their words left me both impacted by some of the tragedies they have experienced, but over and above this, in awe of the qualities strength, courage and resiliency that each one of them personified.

As stated, hearing the women's narratives was a particularly difficult part of my research experience as I struggled greatly with the dual perspectives of being both *inside and outsider* in conducting this research. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999:10) described the struggle of Indigenous researchers in manoeuvring through the world of academia, in the process of navigating their own cultural world, while doing research with Indigenous communities.

She suggests and my own experience reflects, there is underlying tension that exists between these dual roles (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999:10). My sense of being in the *insider/outsider* role begins with my core identity as a Cree woman, growing up with similar circumstances to those of my participants (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999:10). Experiences of racism, oppression, marginalization and a myriad of historical inequities lingering from the effects of colonization were a daily experience for me, and still continue today. There is a significant difference, however, in that today I am capable of addressing the poisons of oppression with the antidote of the pride I feel in my Cree heritage and participation in cultural ceremonies. Ceremony, for my people, is the lifeblood of our culture. For me, my life is my ceremony. The connection that exists for Indigenous people is within each other, it is our interconnection. I could not help but feel a deeper sense of connection with the women that I interviewed, taking the point of view of an insider who understands their struggles, hardships and small triumphs. At times, maintaining this vantage point requires a concerted effort to stay the course in navigating a dominant culture that often contradicts; our values and beliefs, our strong connection to the land, people and community.

Despite my ability to relate to my participants in this way, my “outsider role” of social worker and academic researcher nonetheless left me feeling set apart from them. This sense of division seemed to carry connotations of being of a different class; a class that allows me to participate in the privilege of pursuing higher education and to successfully navigate the dominant culture, or “white world”. It is mainly through my good fortune and opportunities that I am able to do this. Opportunities or good fortune did not appear

to have been accessible to the participants in this study. As a social worker, I felt a need to be many things to them, which included acting as both advocate and counsellor. In addition to my sense of professional identity associated with being a social worker, my newly emerging role of academic researcher required that I maintain an appropriate degree of detachment while conducting my research. This was difficult for me to maintain, but with effort, I was able to be mindful of the fact that I was there to respectfully ask them to share their stories and listen to what they said and document their voices. My boundaries needed to be clear, with an equally clear sense of what my role included and omitted. As a researcher, I was there to record their stories and learn from their life experiences and sought to understand what they told me within a certain context, not to introduce interventions or offer therapeutic suggestions. While my personal identity as a Cree woman and my social worker self, were with me all during the interview process, I had to remind myself not to lose sight of my role as a researcher. While the empathy and understanding generated through my sense of compassion and deep connection with my participants was ever present, my purpose for being with them was to act in the function of a researcher. The perspectives of the latter two roles informed how I chose to conduct my research and the purpose and intent behind choosing this particular topic. I found myself struggling to manage competing identities in relation to my research. While I did not anticipate this at the outset, this experience has been a critical aspect of my process in working to complete this thesis.

Narratives of Resilience

Ungar (2001:60) writes about the resiliency of high-risk youth in which the youth are constructed as being resilient despite other identities that are often based on their deficits.

By focusing on their resiliency, the youth are able to see themselves from a different perspective - a positive perspective. This is the perspective through which these women's stories are to be viewed. Although some of the women acknowledged difficulties in their lives, they also talked about their strengths and the strength they received from their families.

Each woman's story developed differently - one chose to talk openly without being asked questions while the others were more comfortable following the standard interview format (I asked specific questions and they responded). Thomas (2005:241-242) writes about the importance of carefully and respectfully listening to stories during the interview process, being aware of where your mind is, where your heart is and what you are hearing. The first time I heard these stories, it was with my heart open, my mind at attention and focused on what I was hearing. It was during the transcription process that I could take a step back and hear the stories from a different perspective. I could be detached and distant and at the same time I could rely on my memory and return to the time the interviews were conducted. Being able to do this helped me to understand, objectively, what was being said. There is a deeper purpose in storytelling beyond the personal need to account for one's experience. This is something that I came to understand more clearly as the process of my research progressed. All of the women interviewed expressed in their own way that their participation served a two-fold purpose in that "...sharing stories validates the various experiences of the storytellers, but also has the ability to give others with similar stories the strength and encouragement, and support they need to tell their stories" (Thomas, 2005: 252). On a side note, all five of the women

wanted to share their stories so that it might prevent other Indigenous women from entering the sex trade.

Transcribing the Material

Fraser (2004) explains that transcribing the interviews as an important part of the process, as it allows for “a more accurate record of the interview than memory alone” (p. 187).

During the actual interviews, I took very few notes in order to be attentive and present with each participant. Each interview was audio recorded as it allowed me to give all of my attention to the stories. It also provided me to return several times to review each session as many times as needed during the analysis stage. The second step involved the actual transcribing of the interviews. I chose to complete this task myself as opposed to hiring someone. In order to ensure accuracy I listened to the recordings several times, and found this experience to be highly beneficial as it required me to listen very attentively, paying close attention to tone of voice, pauses, silences, laughter. These subtle nuances cannot accurately be described in a written format, but can be heard in a recording.

In order to make the story more comprehensible and coherent, Fraser (2004) suggests making an allowance for a “cleaning up” of the speech (p. 187). I followed Fraser's advice, as I wanted to maintain the flow and consistency of each story so that each is presented and can be read in a similar fashion. Each story is documented as it was told to me, however; I edited in accordance with the way in which the interview questions were arranged while keeping edits to a minimum. It was critically important to maintain what the participants said or expressed regarding their respective stories. Furthermore,

reasonable attempts were made to offer each participant the opportunity to review her story's transcript to check for accuracy and to alter any potentially identifying information. Out of the five women, only one woman accepted the invitation to alter some of her original responses and made the changes she felt were necessary.

Interpreting Individual Transcripts

During the interpretation process I followed Fraser's (2004) advice in looking at "the types and directions of the stories, as well as any contradictions" as "narrators may tell stories that circle around particular themes or try to drive home a particular point" (p. 189). This allowed me to re-organize the transcripts into segments with the beginnings and ends of each story relating to the research topic (Fraser, 2004:189). This process was facilitated as the interviews were conducted via question and answer format, with the exception of one participant, who spoke freely without being asked the questions.

Scanning Across Different Domains of Experience

Fraser (2004) identifies the importance of the researcher scanning "stories for different domains of experience" (p. 191) and recommends that the focus not be on one particular story or transcript exclusively. As such, it is incumbent on the researcher to keep each story relevant in the context of the overall collection of data. In this process, the analysis has four main components as identified by Fraser (2004:1919-192); 1) intrapersonal: The "narrator self-talk"; 2) interpersonal: A story that may have occurred with another person; 3) cultural: Culturally-influenced beliefs; and 4) structural aspects: The influence of systems such as the child welfare system. Using this model as a guide

enabled me to think about the stories from the perspective of these differing levels of analysis.

Method

This next section outlines the methods and data collection process that was used for this study. This includes a discussion of the process of selecting the participants', such as challenges and issues, participant information, recruitment limitations, ethical considerations and approval, the interview process and organization of the data.

The initial selected recruitment demographic and process was to include interviewing five Indigenous female youth between the ages of thirteen and fifteen years old who have had involvement in the sex trade. Recruitment was to be conducted through a government-run residential care home for this population. A liaison person was arranged, and would screen all potential participants and forward their names and phone numbers once they agreed to participate. There was only one participant recruited via this method. And the specific population and selection process had to be altered. The reason for the change in recruitment and focus group is discussed further in the following sections.

Selection of Participants

The initial participant population was chosen based on interests stemming from my professional social work experience. I found that female youth, brought a unique insight and understanding of their familial relationships. It was unique and valuable as they held their families in high regard and truly believed their families would always care for them and support them unconditionally. The young women I worked in my practice

consistently reflected on a deep need to remain connected with their families, regardless of circumstance. Unfortunately, accessing a youth population became unrealistic and I made the decision to change my age range from female youth to adult women.

Recruitment strategies for adult women would allow me to use less restrictive sampling methods. Increasing the age limit allowed me to recruit participants much more quickly than the initial selected age limit. I was able to recruit four of the five participants in a very short period of time in comparison with my original design.

In November 2007, the selected age range was amended to include Indigenous women over the age of eighteen instead of a youth population. I was concerned that interviewing an older population might significantly alter the nature of my study. This was not the case as the stories these particular women told made a valuable contribution in understanding of they made meaning of their familial relationships and qualities of resiliency.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted through personal, face-to-face interviews.

The recruitment process was conducted through advertisement via posters. Poster advertisements were placed in two community based agencies, which will remain anonymous to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Recruitment for this study was a long and complicated process and began in the spring of 2006 and ended in December 2007. Two participants contacted me directly and the remaining three participants were recruited via the use of snowball sampling which proved to be the most effective recruitment method. Snowball sampling requires the assistance of one or more

people who meet the criteria selection who are then asked to assist in recommending others to potentially participate in the study (Trochim, 2005:43).

Participant Information

The age range of the participants is as follows: nineteen, twenty-six, thirty-two, fifty and, fifty-four years old. All five women self-identified as being Indigenous ancestry. The women came from both northern and southern Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan. All five women currently reside in Saskatchewan. Two women grew up on their respective reserves and moved to a city before the age of ten years old. The three other women grew up in an urban environment.

Recruitment Limitations

Using snowball sampling limited my ability to ensure anonymity among my participants. Beyond this, as far as I am aware, the three remaining participants do not know each other by virtue of their participation in my study. A second recruitment limitation was the failure to recruit the initial selected population consisting of youth. The literature review focused on the experiences of Indigenous youth and the sex trade and, some of the identified issues may not directly pertain to adult women involved in the sex trade. Nonetheless, additional resources were consulted in order to accommodate my shift in sampled populations, which complemented the literature review and research that I had already completed in this area.

Ethical Considerations and Ethical Approval

Obtaining ethical approval became an arduous process, as the preparations for this study were complicated by one factor; the initial age range of the participants. The following

section describes further this process. On a very fundamental level of ethical consideration, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity was of critical importance. As well, ensuring that any existing power relationships between the participants and I, be limited to a minimum as much as possible. At the beginning of each interview the women were made aware of any possible risks and were duly informed of their right to withdraw from the research at anytime.

While these issues were ultimately rendered moot, the ethical considerations with respect to youth are enhanced in comparison with participants sampled from an adult population. Authors Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles (2007:405) outline the complexities that exist in obtaining informed consent from children and youth to participate in research studies, the most important being that the youth does not endure any type of harm as a consequence of their participation. A second issue relates to developmental capacity and whether the youth have this and are able to make an informed decision. The question is posed: Are they able “to express their own agency within the research process, and that their ability to express their own agency arises from their competency at decision making” (Heath, Charles, Crow & Wiles 2007:404)? Furthermore, a second question arises as to whether or not the child/youth is fully able to comprehend and understand what is being asked of him or her? For the purpose of this study, a dialogue was going to be used as a guide during the informed consent process. This dialogue was requested by the University of Saskatchewan’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (I will explain further why I had to seek two university research ethic approvals). This was in addition to the ethics guidance provided by the University of Victoria. I received financial grant in the form of a grant

for my research through my place of employment with the University of Saskatchewan. As a result I was required to obtain a second, ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (U of S Beh-REB) under the supervision of Dr. Caroline Tait.

Attaining ethical approval from two university ethics boards prevented me from being able to begin recruiting participants until the spring of 2007, when the second university granted me approval. During this process, a disagreement between the two universities' ethics boards arose as they disagreed on some rather significant points. The University of Victoria required that I obtain written consent from both the youth and their parent(s) or guardians. Consent forms were developed and every effort would be made to ensure that both the youth and the parent or guardian provided written consent. I received the first Certificate of Ethical Approval from the University of Victoria's Research Ethics Board (UVic HREB) on October 12, 2006, Protocol # 06-274. Shortly thereafter, upon receiving a grant through the University of Saskatchewan, I applied for approval from their ethics board. The U of S Beh-REB requested I attend their month meetings and became interested in why I was required to get two types of written consent; one from the participant and one from the parent? Their rationale was that the youth participants were anticipated to be in care of the Ministry and would not be living with their families at the time of their interviews and, were not below the universities identified risk age range which is under 12 years old. Unsure as to which position was correct, I relayed to the board that it was my understanding that I needed to secure written parental consent as per the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (UVic HREB).

At this meeting, an important issue was identified and addressed, with particular reference to conducting research with a high-risk population: Is it more important to protect the rights of the child or protect the rights of the parent? I had debated this issue while writing the UVic HREB proposal. It was suggested that this was the course of action I take, and it was of concern to me to ensure that my research procedures were ethically sound. I was somewhat conflicted, however, as obtaining written consent from the parents of the youth I would have been interviewing could have posed many potential risks. Parents who have been involved with the child welfare system (such as having their child apprehended for any number of possible concerns) are not always receptive to having social workers telephoning or wanting to meet them, regardless of the reason (such as obtaining written consent for their child to participate in a study). Furthermore, by seeking parental consent, there is a potential risk that the youth may be put at risk of harm in the event that a parent may become abusive as a consequence of the request, particularly given the focus of the study. In the end, I was awarded a second certificate of approval from the UVic HREB which was received on October 12, 2007 and was revised to be in agreement with the U of S to reflect that I would only require verbal consent from the youth. The University of Saskatchewan awarded their Certificate of Approval on May 23, 2007, Beh # 07-58.

Considering the recruitment process (as mentioned earlier) was at a stand-still and I was unable to make progress, after careful consideration, I made the decision to change the ages of the participants, from thirteen to fifteen years old to women over the age eighteen

years. This decision allowed for the recruitment process to move along much more quickly. A third Certificate of Approval from the UVic HREB was received on November 27, 2007, and a second from the U of S Beh-REB on November 2, 2007 (See Appendix A).

A total of five women were recruited and gave verbal consent agreeing to participate in my interview. Each woman was ensured that any identifying information identifying would be kept confidential and their identities would remain anonymous. Despite this, one of the women indicated that maintaining confidentiality was of no concern to her as *[S]he had nothing to hide and was not ashamed* (Emily). Nonetheless I decided, for consistency, to use pseudonyms throughout the thesis. The following discusses the data collection process in greater detail.

The Interview Process

The interview process can be described as a “conversation with a purpose” and is aimed at understanding “the perspectives, interpretations, and meanings given by interviews by specific issues” (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005, p. 588). Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions regarding their relationship to their families, involvement in the sex trade, and to talk about who has helped them to overcome adversity. The questions were meant to allow the participants to talk openly about the topics at hand and to act as a guide during the interview process. In this study, the interview process had two purposes: The first was to gather stories about the families of Indigenous women who have been involved in the sex trade; and, second was to gain an understanding of how the familial relationships of these women have contributed to their resilience. As authors,

Enosh and Buchbinder (2005) describe, the interviewer can be “active” in the interview process; however, he or she, must be aware of the power dynamics during the interview process (p. 589) and aim to ensure that the words or stories have empowered the interviewee (p. 614). After the first interview, I knew that I had to stay in the role of researcher rather than be the social worker or counsellor. My tendency was to revert back into my role as a helper.

Upon completing the first interview, I returned home and asked myself how the interview could have been conducted differently? Did I get the information I was looking for? Should I revise my questions? It was during this reflection period, that I noticed how I could easily fall into the role of a counsellor. I asked the participant specific questions about feelings, such as how she felt about a certain situation, leading me to begin drawing out solutions for them. I know this was not my role, nor was it my initial intention. I understood my role entering the interview and later felt like I could easily lose sight of this during the interview process. There were two more interviews in which I continued in this way. Being an interviewer was not an easy transition for me. I had to remind myself what my role was and I did this by having internal discussions in my mind, reminded myself of my role as a researcher by referring to the interview questions during these times.

Each participant was requested to participate in a one-hour interview. All five interviews were under the one hour range; from eighteen minutes to fifty-five minutes. A digital recording was made during each interview that I later transcribed. Participants were

asked a series of five main questions and several prompting questions if needed (See Appendix A for the list of questions). The purpose of the questions was to gain an understanding of their familial relationships, to gain an understanding as to whether or not these relationships contributed to their resilience and, if they identified with their culture. I added the last question after the first interview and also asked the participants what they thought would assist social workers in helping to intervene with youth at risk of entering the sex trade (see Appendix A). Participants were asked where they felt comfortable being interviewed, options were provided if they did not specify a preference and the locations of the interviews were based on this. Two of the interviews were conducted at community agencies, one was at the participant's home and two were in an office setting. Prior to the interview starting, each participant was notified of her right to refuse to answer any question that she felt was too personal or emotionally risky. Only one participant requested to not answer one section of the questions - this was the shortest interview. At the end of each interview, each the participant was offered a list of support services provided in their home community in the event that the discussion evoked some unforeseen emotional response. Each participant expressed that the list was unnecessary because they either had their own support systems or they felt they did not need additional supports.

Establishing credibility from the research participants is an important part of the research process (Trochim, 2005:126). As such, all attempts were made to ascertain a sense of credibility of the research from the participants who participated in this study. Attempts were made to return each participant's transcripts to her for review. In the end I was only

able to return four transcripts, as the fifth did not provide me with any contact information to follow up with. One participant made minor revisions and additions to her interview. The remaining three participants' transcripts were returned to them but did not reply to the request any alterations or amendments.

Organization of the Data

Each woman's story is organized and follows a logical format that allows the reader an opportunity to gain some understanding of the women's experiences in her own words and voice. In some instances, some of the language has been slightly changed in order to follow the "story" format, and certain use of the vernacular has been omitted or changed, such as the use of "um" and "you know," which were often used at the beginning of a sentence. As I have explained, the purpose of stories in this context is to tell a different type of story, one that offers an alternative perspective. The focus of these women's stories was to highlight their narratives about strength, courage, and their resilience.

Conclusion

For the purpose of this study I chose narrative analysis as this methodology emphasizes how a story is told. The stories these women tell and the meanings associated with it, can then be incorporated into a larger story that allows the reader to gain a sense of the commonalities and differences. This chapter outlined the methodologies used in this study and included sections describing the participant selection, data collection, participant information, recruitment limitations, ethical considerations, the interview process, and data organization. Stories play a significant role in Indigenous culture, as

was explained in this chapter and lays the foundation for the following chapter that will recount the stories, as told by each of the participants and an analysis of their stories.

Chapter Four: Stories and Making Meaning of Stories

This chapter introduces the storytellers as they share stories of their time in the sex trade, talk about their familial relationships and, how these relationships have contributed to their resiliency. Using narrative analysis has allowed me to understand how they made meaning of their familial relationships and how they provide caring, loving and long lasting relationships (Bella, 2006:1). It also provides an opportunity to challenge the current discourse that positions women involved in the sex trade as being “victims” (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:15) by focusing on their positive attributes, such as their resiliency.

What’s in a Name?

In Cree culture, my brother-in law, Peter Gladue, who is a ceremonial person and respected Elder in my community, has told me that names are very important as they hold significant spiritual meaning. It is believed that a person’s traditional name is to be protected and called upon when engaging in ceremony. Tradition holds that praying to your name will help guide you in whatever you do (P. Gladue, personal communication, October 13, 2007). As discussed in the previous chapter, I felt it was important to protect the identities of the participants. Although the older participants allowed me to use their names, the younger generation requested that their identities remain anonymous in order to protect their families. In consideration of these particular women’s wishes to protect their identities and to maintain confidentiality, as well as respecting the value of names in Cree culture, pseudonyms are used. The first participant specifically requested the name Molly as her pseudonym. For the remaining four women, I used the names of my

grandmothers, three of whom are deceased (Katherine, Emily and Rose) and my only living grandmother (Gladys) has given me permission to use her name. I wanted to use my grandmothers' names in homage to their wisdom, courage, strength and teachings. This for me is what the notion of a *kokum* embodies. It is with regard for the five women's spirits and life experiences that I frame them in this way.

The Storytellers

As stated earlier, each story is presented in a manner that protects the identities of each woman and follows the established interview questions (see Appendix A). These questions include topics relating to their involvement in the sex trade work (At what age and how did they become involved in the sex trade? And at what age did they exit the sex trade?); family relationships (How have they made meaning of their familial relationships?); stories of resilience (Who provides them support? What are the risk and protective factors?); and culture (Do they identify with their culture? Do they “know where they come from”?).

The life stages of the women appeared to play a significant role in the way in which each woman shared her story. Molly, the youngest storyteller, reflected on her involvement in the sex trade as a ten year old pimp. That is, she coerced, forced, and lived off the avails of other's sex trade work (she admitted it was usually her friends) and reported that she stopped working as a pimp at the age of twelve years old. Gladys and Katherine represented those in their middle years and were the only two who acknowledged that they were still actively engaged in the sex trade at the time of their interviews. Emily and

Rose, the two elder of the women (both of whom are in their 50s), reflected on their time in the sex trade and provided reasons why they exited.

The stories are presented and arranged in four main narrative themes:

1. Involvement in the sex trade;
2. Family;
3. Narratives of resilience;
4. Cultural affiliation or understanding.

Molly

I say my son saved my life.

Molly's was the first interview I conducted. Her interview was one of the longest in duration and her story was thematically characterized by loss and grief. She spoke of the significant loss of her sister's suicide and reflected on what she learned from the tragedy. For Molly, this experience helped her to gain a new perspective about the importance of life and inspired her to try and provide her own children with a better life than what she had.

Involvement in the sex trade

Molly was the youngest participant interviewed. Her interview took place at a liaison agency in Saskatoon. She indicated that she began pimping at age ten and stopped because she was arrested shortly after she turned twelve. I asked Molly how she became involved in the sex trade, she replied by talking about how her older sister *used to work the streets*. Molly thought *that was kind of gross* and instead of her engaging in prostitution herself, she stated she would *get girls to work for her so that she wouldn't have to do it* but that she *used to go in the car with them and make them prostitute* and would then *take their money*. The money was then used to buy alcohol for her sister, her friends and herself. Molly's ability to pimp these young women happened through threats of violence made by her older male friends. Molly made promises of providing the older male friends with alcohol and drugs in exchange for their help.

I had guy friends...I'd say 'k' I'll get you guys drunk if you come and help me...And they'd say to those girls 'look at her she's so small. If you girls

beat her up, then us boys will beat you up' and then so when they didn't listen to me I'd tell them to beat those girls up and then they would.

Prior to Molly's twelfth birthday, the local city police became suspicious of her behaviour as a pimp, however legally they could do nothing until then. Shortly after her birthday, she was charged and convicted of pimping and she attributed the conviction as a direct factor in her leaving the sex trade.

During our interview, Molly spoke of growing up in an environment where young girls and women worked in the sex trade:

I just grew up around it, I like, it doesn't seem wrong when you, if you grew up around that if you like those kids in Afghanistan that they're getting taught to shoot people...They don't know it's wrong, so if you grow up around stuff like that and you know don't know it's wrong, you don't know it's wrong to hit people. Like my mom used say if your gonna fight somebody make sure you don't, they get you on the ground make sure you beat them up that's what my mom used to tell me so then you don't get taught it's wrong so then you don't think wrong...Those girls were just hooking all the time and you see girls working the streets all the time.

For Molly, this lifestyle was a normal and daily part of her childhood experience.

Later in the interview, Molly expressed feeling remorse about being a pimp and credits her new found understanding of the consequences of her actions to the teachings she

learned while in the care of the state. Molly lived in and out of foster care throughout her childhood, but it was her time living in a residential facility from age twelve to sixteen that had the most impact on her life. This, she says, is where she learned right from wrong. She came to understand that her behaviour was harmful and reportedly tried to make amends and apologize to the young women she used to pimp. Molly seemed remorseful during this part of the conversation. Her remorse was reflected in her tone of voice and facial expressions as she described how forcing some of these young girls to work may have been the first time they had had sex or prostituted and how this may have led to the development of a drug addiction.

Family

I have one mom and one dad and two sisters and two brothers. And my older sister... And my oldest brother...Passed away...I have a little brother. I have two kids, my other family. My own family. My auntie is really close to me. She's like my mom, and my cousin.

Molly's relationship with her mother and father was tenuous. She talked about growing up in and out of foster care due to her mom's alcohol addiction and physical abuse.

Speaking on the nature of their relationship, Molly indicated that they *we were never really that close cuz, I was always in foster homes and stuff and then I would have to make visits with her, instead of her making visits with me.* She was the one who took responsibility to maintain their connection in this way. Her involvement in the child welfare system was frequent and as a result of this, she had incredible survival skills.

Molly knew of local resources where she could get food and be provided shelter from the time she was a young girl.

Molly has two young children and she talked about them with great pride. She credits her children for her desire to do more with her life and to provide for them in a way that she never had.

I say my son saved my life. If I didn't get pregnant I probably wouldn't be, wouldn't have stayed with [boyfriend], I probably would be a druggie or something or, I don't know on the streets working or dead like my sister. So that's why I always call my son my little lifesaver.

For Molly, her children were a source of inspiration. Through mothering, she learned how it was important for her to teach her children right from wrong and to be respectful of people, something she said she was never taught.

Narratives of Resilience

For Molly, her risk factors began as a child growing up in a violent and dangerous environment, both at home and in her neighbourhood. The loss of her sister to suicide had a devastating affect on her. Growing up in and out of foster care and not being close to her biological mother had a significant influence on how she how she learned to deal with her problems. Molly's protective factors included supportive family members such as her aunt, cousin and her own children. It was the influence of these people that motivated her to want to improve her life. The following highlights an example of how Molly's aunt as a support has helped her:

My auntie always tells me positive things and stuff and then when me and (boyfriend) were going through a hard time and then she would tell me

stories like old stories of her and her husband when they used to go through hard times.

In addition to this, she attributes the experience of living in residential care facilities and having a positive relationship with her foster parents as integral to her learning how to respect others and to talk about her feelings. Molly described how these were life changing experiences. She says in the following:

They [the staff members] taught me how life was supposed to be, how your parents are supposed to treat you and stuff and then I stayed there for a long time and so then I like totally changed the way I acted and everything.

The time Molly spent away from her family and in the child welfare system was, for her, a positive experience, as it offered her a different perspective on what life can be while allowing her to question some of the more problematic aspects of her environment that until that time was the norm.

Culture

I asked Molly where she was from; she named her reserve even though she admitted to never having lived there. I asked her whether or not she identified with her culture, she replied that she did not. Molly follows her aunt's Christian beliefs. With this in mind, the following is what she said about Indigenous culture: *That's not the right way to follow or something, that's what she [her aunt] said and I don't really like smudging and stuff.* Molly's understanding of her Cree culture has been negatively affected by her aunt's influence and religious belief system and as such, she has been provided little opportunity and expressed minimal interest in learning about her culture.

Gladys

We all grew up together. Everybody on the street

As an interviewer, it was difficult for me to hear Gladys' story. During our interview, Gladys shared many intimate things in her life. Things that she said she had never told anyone before, such as her experiences of violence and sexual assault. As I listened to Gladys' interview, I noticed how I was particularly tempted to revert to my social work role and engage in a counselling dialogue. As I have previously discussed, I was challenged by the pull between my multiple roles of researcher, social worker and an Indigenous woman. Gladys' story, not unlike the other women interviewed, describes growing up on the street, observing the sex trade and her close relationship with her family.

Involvement in the sex trade

Although Gladys reported that she did not actively begin working in the sex trade until she was in her late twenties (disclosing that she has been actively engaged in prostitution for the past two years). She described growing up in an environment in which most of her friends, at the time, were involved in the sex trade and that she *always hung around girls who did that* and she would go with them...*If a vehicle came...And you know try to keep them safe.* Gladys continues with:

I've been around girls like that all my life. I was used to it...But you know I grew up with it all my life because my friends, my younger friends were the ones on the streets, so I was like hopping into cars with them just to, you know, watch over them. And then I eventually ended up working.

At thirteen years old, she became pregnant and the street life became less appealing as she now had to care for a child. Gladys credited a large biological and extended family as influences in deterring her from becoming actively involved in the sex trade at an earlier age. As she says:

I didn't do it. Because I have like a big family and a baby, and I didn't want them thinking bad about me...Cuz, I have family everywhere and they just always hear bad things about me and I just didn't want them knowing that I worked the streets, but now they do, so...A lot of them don't think too highly about me.

Gladys entered the sex trade much later than the average age (she was twenty-six years old), it was around this time that she started abusing drugs. There were two influencing factors that contributed to Gladys's decision to enter the sex trade; a drug addiction and peer pressure, sex trade work became a choice she was willing to make:

I got into drugs and you know I needed money, so you know, I thought that was an easy way to get money. Like it was fast, and it was a fast way to get money. But there's always consequences when you jump into a strange vehicle. Bad things happen.

Gladys continues to work in the sex trade whenever she is able and it has become a consistent source of income for her. *I still do it every chance, yeah, when I sneak away, I go, when I need the money. So...I still go and walk around on the streets.* I asked if this

was a way for her to survive, she agreed. Money made from prostitution has become a means of survival a way to provide for her family:

For food and just the little things that you do need. Like I use it for food when my kids come and visit, you know, just to have something for them, you know while they're here and for drugs, yes. Eventually I do get drugs after I get everything that I do need first then I'll spend it on drugs... That's how I was paying my rent, though, with working on the streets, like to stay at a friend's place I was helping her pay rent, so I'd work the streets for that and to get our food, clothes and stuff for myself, so I did a lot of that this past summer and last summer, just mainly to survive.

Family

I asked Gladys about her family and if she could identify who she sees as sources of support. She was quick to talk about her large biological and extended family. *My family. I have a huge family.* Gladys has children of her own and explained that they live with her father and stepmother close to their reserve. She explained that she is close to her father and stepmother, but admitted that it has not always been a positive relationship *say's dad quit talking to her for a while because she got back into the drugs.* The relationship Gladys has with her stepmother is:

Someone to talk to, just to make me feel better, cuz she always has the right things to say to me, cuz she's a Christian woman. Um, she always makes me feel better when I need someone to talk to in my family.

Gladys was able to speak about her father and step-mother with ease, but as the discussion turned to other aspects of her family, she became very emotional and requested to break from the interview temporarily. When we returned to the interview, she requested that we not discuss further her relationship with her family. Gladys then talked about how her current partner supported her in her attempts to leave the sex trade, she says; *He supports me and he got me off the streets.*

Narratives of Resilience

Gladys' sources of support were identified in those she trusted, even if she felt that they may have judged her for her work in the sex trade. Her biological father and stepmother offered her unconditional love and support. She mentioned that they were the caregivers of her children (as she had involvement with child protective services) and that when she was feeling down or needed someone to talk to she would call them. At times, her father struggled with her lifestyle choices which negatively impacted her relationship with him. It is Gladys' stepmother and their relationship that she finds the most supportive as she feels she receives the unconditional love and support she craves because her stepmother tells her; *That everything will be all right.*

Culture

I asked Gladys if she identifies with her culture, to which she replied that she did not. Although Gladys speaks her Indigenous language and has the resources available to learn about her culture from her father and grandmother; their attempts to share their teachings and traditional ways of living have failed. She stated, *I haven't grown up with my [Indigenous] culture all my life.* Gladys indicated that the reason for this stems from her

father's approach to teaching her and described how her father would tell her what she could and could not do within the context of culture. *I don't know nothing about my culture. My dad tries to tell me but you know I don't really want to pay attention to it when it comes to that cuz I haven't grown up with my culture all my life...He just tells me what I can and cannot do - like when I ask him about things, he just 'oh you can't do that', 'you can't do this'.* She expressed that she did not feel the reasons given were adequately explained to her. Simply being given a list of rules for conduct has not allowed her the means to understand and embrace the traditional ways and has ultimately manifested as an obstacle and prevented her from wanting to learn her about her culture and its traditions.

Katherine

My family means a lot to me, I wanna be able to do the right thing, make them happy.

Katherine's interview took place in a community agency; she indicated that she felt comfortable there. This became apparent as Katherine shared intimate details of her life, something that I was not expecting. Her story tells of what I called her "inner strength" as it has been a critical factor in her ability to overcome dangerous situations. Katherine talked about her family in terms of wanting to please them by becoming someone other than herself. Becoming another person, a person her family could be proud of was a common theme within her story.

Involvement in the sex trade

Katherine grew up on her reserve in northern Saskatchewan and lived there until she was three years old, at which time she moved to a nearby town. She described her childhood as *sheltered* and she lived in and out of foster care due to her biological parents divorce.

For Katherine, foster care was a positive experience and she describes her life as being good. It was not until she moved to the city at the age of fourteen that her life drastically changed. At first she says *everything seemed like fun you know, there's the freedom. You start working, stuff like that, having fun partying...Running away from my mom when I was fourteen years old.* With the influence of her peers who had been working in the sex trade, Katherine saw this as an opportunity to make enough money to be able to survive. The following describes Katherine's decision:

I moved to [city name] actually, that's where everything started - meeting friends and they were doing it and then so, I did it. You know it was easy money and then the drugs too came into the...Cuz then I started intravenous [drugs] and things like that...

She continued to describe her first time:

They said...It's easy. Just pretend you're not there, you know. Just close your eyes and think of something else they told me and the first time I did it. I just closed my eyes and did what they said, and from there, it kept me going for awhile. I had quit for a long period of time, started up again, cuz of the addiction.

For Katherine, involvement in the sex trade served one purpose: Survival – make enough money to buy food and have shelter. She said working in the sex trade gave her the opportunity for her to find:

A place to stay...Give them money for a place to stay, this girl in [city name], I'd give her money, just to stay there; I would make sure that I had

that and then ok, everything's good there. I got the money for that and then do the other part for the drugs for me and my friends.

Second to survival, she said she continued to work in the sex trade *for the drugs*.

Katherine stated that her drug addiction continues to be a motivating factor in her involvement and she acknowledged during our interview that she continues to work in the sex trade as a means of supporting her addiction.

Family

Katherine attributes the brief periods of time she left the sex trade to having the support of her boyfriend, her mother and grandmother. When Katherine was asked what her family means to her, she began to describe what her ideal family situation would look like:

Well everybody sitting together talking, supper together, talking doing stuff together, you know like 'how's your day' and stuff like that. Doing stuff like playing games together and that's how I look at it, but that's how I always wanted myself to have a family. And like, it's just [not like that]. I don't wanna be there, it's just uh, a dream I guess.

Initially, it was difficult for Katherine to understand and conceptualize what I was asking her, when she described the previous scenario. Further clarification helped her to be able to describe what her family means to her and is reflected in the following statement:

What does family mean to me? They mean a lot to me, you know, I wanna be able to do the right thing, make them happy. I wanna be able to make them happy, but it seems when I try to do it, it's not good enough.

Katherine talked about her boyfriend as being helpful in keeping her away from the sex trade. She says with him *I don't go out as much. I don't go running around or doing stuff, going to the bars.* Although Katherine believes this strategy to be helpful at times, she also admitted that he can be controlling and had a history of being physically violent towards her. *He used to abuse, he used to abuse me.* She says he has stopped. *The guy that I'm with, he used [to be physically violent towards me], he quit. That's something.*

For Katherine, having her family around was a significant part of her life because she felt they provided her with support and guidance she felt she needed. She described her relationship with her mom as *really good*, although she admits that they have had their difficulties and struggles. According to Katherine:

We had a really good [relationship], really good. We always talked and everything when I was younger and as I grew older, I was never listening to her and she finally, its tough love now. She just doesn't care no more. That's the way she looks at it, pushes me away and stuff, tries to get me to smarten up and stuff you know.

Katherine also talked about her grandmother as being a positive support for her. She described her grandmother as being a “confidante” and at one point, suggested that contact with her tends to be healing for her. Her grandmother provides her with the opportunity to talk about her problems and she acknowledged that after talking with her:

It felt really good to get it all out.

Narratives of Resilience

Katherine identified her mother and boyfriend as being both a protective factor - supportive and loving - and a risk factor - judgmental and unsupportive of her choices. When Katherine wanted to attend a treatment center for her addiction both parties were unsupportive. The following statement illustrates the judgmental attitude Katherine feels her mother has towards her involvement in the sex trade. Katherine stated that her mother tends to say things to her such as:

Oh there's your corner or something, she'd say like that. But you know, it'd, in a way I think it's like being mean about it. Maybe you won't do it kind of thing again. That's how I looked at it...She makes me feel ashamed of myself.

Despite this, Katherine's inner strength, her ability to overcome life's adversities (such as the threat of being harmed by a *john*) came through in her interview. Her “inner strength has proven to be life-saving for her as she has been confronted with the risks that many sex trade workers face. I asked her if she has ever been threatened and if yes, how she reacted, and she replied:

I did a couple times actually. I talked my way out of that. That really scared me because um, he was looking at me in my face and I was really telling him something was wrong with him and stuff like that, you know, really and he just said 'I got a baseball bat' and I said 'go ahead use it.' I just made myself look him in the eye and he just pushed me out so I was lucky then....So when you've got the power, I guess you can use it.

I asked Katherine to elaborate on where she found her courage or what gave her the strength, which I called her “inner strength” to stand up to this *john*? She replied that she *did not know*. Instead she talked about her hesitation to trust people in what she described as holding herself and her *heart away* as a way of protecting herself. Over periods of time in her life, Katherine’s resiliency, self-motivation, attempts at self-control and, desire to exit the sex trade have helped Katherine to stay off drugs for certain periods of time. She says,

I try to think, 'ok I can do good' and I can do this; I just try to tell myself, 'I gotta just get up and go and do it' ...I guess it's me trying to control it, instead of letting it control me. That's how I look at it too...I don't know where I get that strength from.

Culture

I asked Katherine if she identified with her culture as an Indigenous woman, she replied that she did not. When I asked Katherine where she was from she answered by giving me the name of her reserve. Although Katherine acknowledged that she knows very little

about her culture, her boyfriend is Indigenous and expressed an interest in learning more if she had the resources.

Emily

My father was my driving force... [who] was an advocate for his people.

Emily's interview was the only unstructured interview that took place. Emily spoke freely and was not asked any specific questions. Our interview took place at her home on a Sunday afternoon. I had intended to ask Emily the interview questions, however, once I explained to Emily my research interest and what I hoped to learn, she began to talk openly and without the formalities of being asked questions. Emily was one of the older participants and was a widow for over 25 years. She described this period as being one of independence. Eventually remarrying, Emily acquired several stepchildren in her new marriage. At one point she said she had to choose between her career (she did not say what her career was) and her marriage. Emily described herself as a Métis activist and was actively involved in Métis politics and leadership. For her, being an activist was an important part of her life and identity.

Involvement in the sex trade

Emily was open and honest about her reasons for her involvement in the sex trade. She was adamant that she had *no regrets* and *is not ashamed* and, *that she did what she did to survive*. Sex trade work allowed her make the money she need to buy food, pay her rent as well as support her drug habit. She described her life in the sex trade as being her own choice and has staunchly taken responsibility for her actions. Emily said that she *doesn't blame anyone* for the choices she made.

When Emily was a youth, she spent some time in *reform school* in another city and upon being discharged she *did not return home* but rather she chose to stay in the city.

Homeless, hungry and without money or a job, she said she tried *panhandling* but found this to be an insufficient way to meet her needs. She found herself needing to make a choice and she made the decision to enter the sex trade. For Emily, involvement in *prostitution was the only way I knew how to survive*. During our discussion, Emily described her transition into the sex trade as though it was only a matter of time, as she *knew a lot of prostitutes* because she had been *living on the streets*. Continuing to live in another city allowed her to protect her family from knowing about her involvement in the trade.

Emily later described her decision to exit the sex trade. During this time I observed her mannerisms and it appeared as though she was back in that time. Her memory seemed to be clear and vivid, her facial expressions seem to support the story she was telling, and it was as though she was reliving the events as she recounted them during our interview.

The following describes her impulsive decision to leave the sex trade:

[I]t was 9 AM, I was living in (city name), when a john approached me, we didn't agree on a price and instead I asked him to give me a ride to the highway and I came home.

Upon returning home to her community, Emily recalled thinking to herself that *there has to be more than this*, which would become a motivating point of inquiry for her.

Throughout our interview Emily repeated this theme; it was as though this became her mantra and helped her to eventually leave the sex trade for good.

Family

I asked Emily to talk about her family and the people who she felt provided her support.

She was quick to attribute this role to her deceased father. Emily described her relationship with her father as *strong and significant, a driving force for me and my family was always there for me unconditionally*. There was a sense of great pride in Emily's voice as she talked about her father, especially as she talked about his work as an advocate; *My father was an advocate for his people and to remember that we needed to help each other out, to be proud of who you are*.

Emily described knowing that *I could always go home* and that *no matter what I did I could go home*. For her this was a comfort as she talked about knowing *other people who didn't have the choice*. During Emily's time in the sex trade, she recalled that she always called home to let her family know how she was. After awhile, she began to realize the effect her lifestyle had on her family and began to contemplate leaving the sex trade.

Narratives of Resilience

Emily described how she struggled in her decision to permanently exit the sex trade. She admitted to occasionally returning to the sex trade which was necessitated by her need for survival. Sex trade work provided enough money for food, shelter and basic necessities; it took some time before she finally permanently exited the sex trade. Emily's mantra and desire to live a better life were critical factors in her motivation to pursue a better life.

For Emily, her strong will to live became more prevalent in our interview as she talked about knowing many people who had died while living the street life. She indicated that she was worried that she too would die on the streets because of her life as a sex trade worker.

Grief and loss were common themes throughout Emily's interview as she talked about losing many friends to the street life. This was another motivating factor in her decision to exit the trade as she continually asked herself: *Why are we still here?* (Referring to a conversation she had with a *street sister* - a woman with whom she has maintained a close relationship with while she was on and off the street). This is a question that still plagues Emily.

On a related note, she broached the issue of suicide, stating that she *had felt down* but *never thought of suicide* despite the most harrowing circumstances. She stated that suicide was something that she could not understand and was even more determined to do something better with her life. Emily knew that *there was more to life* than what she was living.

Emily described herself as being a *survivor and a fighter* and described her will to survive as being a part of her *life's lessons*. She repeatedly said throughout the interview that she had *no regrets* and *was not ashamed* about the *choices she made* and took *responsibility for these choices*, which was simply a way to *survive*. Emily's view on life was that *things happen for a reason*.

Culture

Throughout the interview, it was apparent the pride Emily felt about being a Métis, an activist and advocate of her people. Her culture was always a positive thing for her as it was important for her to *hold her head high* no matter where she was.

I asked if there was anything more she would like to add to our interview, she replied that *if I could help just one person it will be worth it.*

Rose

My mom was the salt of the earth.

In comparison with the others, my interview with Rose offered a detailed insight into the inner workings of the sex trade and those who were involved in this lifestyle during her time there. Rose's story tells about growing in and a street culture environment; its social structure, unwritten codes of conduct and, the people she called her family. The perspective Rose offers provides insight into the realities of the street life, but it also highlights how resilience and maturing can greatly affect a person's life.

Rose's story talks about many dysfunctions that are common among Indigenous people; sexual abuse, violence and her struggle to exit the sex trade. Although Rose experienced sexual abuse as a child at the hands of some of her uncle and made the comment that some *would pay me*. She contends that the sexual abuse was not a contributing factor in her decision to enter the sex trade, but it is mere noteworthy as the literature suggests (Gorkoff and Runner, 2003:20; McIntyre, 2002:26).

Involvement in the sex trade

For Rose, life on the street was *normal*.

From the time I was like, six years old, old enough to remember and until I actually hit the street myself. Those were my family that was, those were my people right there. I would grow to love, honour and, obey.

This notion of *it's all that I knew* was reflected throughout Rose's story and will be discussed more in the analysis section of this chapter.

Rose's biological family and street family existed in a complex sub-culture where sex trade work and non-sex work (various illegal enterprises) co-existed. Rose explained that her father and brother had regular paying jobs, but that her brother had also *pimped* women (it was not clear if it is the same brother, she is referring to in both instances; she did not specify). The roles for men and women who lived a street lifestyle were discussed. The men's roles were to *pimp* the women as Rose describes in the following:

[A] pimp, is someone who goes and gets the tricks for the women, they were called, back in the day....A rounder was a man who had some influence or power on the street that is old school. Women were the wives. They were the mothers of the children...They were the hookers, the ones who looked after the family, cooked, cleaned, just like a normal family. It was the norm. It was the way we did things. It was just a normal, normal kind of life. They were they were breadmakers. There is honour among thieves -that's what it was like for us. We never stole from each other...The only people we might have stolen from were white people

because white people back in the days were bad...That's who most of the tricks were, were white men.

Along with discussing gender roles, Rose talked about a moral code, a code that was strictly followed by those who lived on the street and who maintained what was known as their *honour among thieves*. *You didn't mess with anyone, you didn't...You didn't steal each other's women. You didn't take drugs from each other. You didn't...You had to live a certain way and you had to be honourable.* There was respect for the community and the people within her community followed and abided by this code. She sums it up by saying: *Yah... lived together and died together.*

Rose entered the sex trade in her late teens. Instead of entering the sex trade at any early age, Rose's ability to survive was her talent as a *thief*. Stealing, for Rose was the equivalent of having a job. She described waking every morning to go to her *job* as a thief and talked about it as being the only way she knew how to survive, to buy *all the things a young woman wanted*. As she became entrenched in an addiction, stealing was a means of supporting her drug habit as well. Rose reflected that this was *the only way I knew because no one showed me there was another way.*

Rose realized that she could only steal for so long:

I was a good thief. I started out being a thief. I didn't start out right; I didn't come out right from the gate being a prostitute. It took some time. So, I was stealer. I could steal. I could steal the shirt right off your back

with you sitting there in your face...I'd have your wallet already and be outta here...that's the way it was. So, I was a good thief. I used to steal all kinds of shit and sell it. That is how I made my money. I could steal anything, anything, absolutely anything that wasn't nailed to the floor. That's how I made my money, right. Then I started gettin' scared. So, I thought, 'what am I gonna do now. How am I gonna make my money now?' And I remember this older prostitute, this older hooker, she said, 'you know' she said, 'I think it's time for you to wing out a little bit and do something different.' And I said 'well what?' She said, 'well, you owe a lot of people money. They're gettin' mad at yah,' cuz I always borrowed money...She said, 'well I got this old guy called Mr... 'He's dead now...She said 'He's a good trick. He'll give you twenty bucks and...You just do for him whatever he wants you to' and I was seventeen or eighteen. Eighteen I think. I thought... awe. I just got all shivery and...I have to lower myself....I thought, you know, because that's what I always thought back then 'oh, I'll never do that,' but it was inevitable, my life was inevitable.

From the time she entered the sex trade at eighteen years old, and until she was approximately the age of thirty-five, sex trade work was a viable option. With a grade eight or nine education (she could not remember what grade she was in before she stopped going to school) and no knowledge of how to find work, other than stealing, sex trade work was the only option she thought she had. Her financial needs were

compounded by the fact that she had accumulated a number of debts (money she had borrowed from people on the street) and now needed to make money in order to pay back these people. *I started turning tricks so I could pay my debts back...I was so disgusted from that one time that I can still remember it like it was yesterday.* Although Rose was disgusted with the idea of prostituting and suggested that she believed she deserved better. Ultimately, Rose was left with few options as to how she was going to repay her debts and support her drug addiction. Her drug addiction allowed her to continue to work in the sex trade, she says, *so I stayed high. I just thought 'ok, this is the only way I'm going to be able to do this is if I stayed stoned'*. Rose explained that she *never had a pimp* herself because she was *freelance and once in awhile I would fall in love and give some mooch, money, but it would never last because what was mine, was mine and I didn't like sharing.* Her honesty was refreshing and at times shocking.

Street life and sex trade work were a part of Rose's daily childhood experience as her family members and caregivers were often involved in some aspect of the sex trade in various roles. This is reflected below:

[I]t was all that we knew. Yeah, we all were. My sister was. My sister worked the streets...My brother was, had women on the street...I don't think my dad ever did...It was like being recruited by not really. It was just meant to be. I mean, you know, that is life with street people.

Family

Rose's family consisted of her biological family; mother, father, one sister and two brothers, all of whom are deceased, except for one brother. Rose was the youngest in her

family. When I inquired about her street family, she described them in the following way: Those were *the people I hung around with on the street*. [They] *were a part of my family...My brothers were out there. My sister was there. My dad hung around downtown. My mom didn't.*

I asked Rose about her mother, and she replied with saying: *[M]y mom was the salt of the earth!* She goes onto say:

She was very, very beautiful. She was a beautiful woman. She was very accepting. You know, every time someone came around to our house she had room for them. You know, she was just that kind of a woman that would never say 'no', never say 'no' to you and if you needed a bed; she'd give you a bed. And if you needed food; She'd give you food...I don't know if she, I don't know if she knew anything because I was sexually abused from the time I was three until I was eleven. It stopped kind of abruptly when I was eleven. I started my period when I was eleven. All that stopped.

Rose suggested that her mother provided as much of a stable and protective environment for her as she could. This included doing her best to ensure that her children had food, shelter and necessities. Rose described how her mother *did everything for her*. She went on to talk about how her mother took care of her:

My mom gave me everything that she thought that I needed, because, I don't know if she felt sorry for me? I grew up with my mom. I don't

know if she knew anything about me. But I know she died when I was young, but she did most of the support. She had charge accounts at stores for me and so you know she was trying to help me.

Poverty was a contributing factor for Rose in what she described as her *destiny* as a thief and a sex trade worker. Stealing was a means of acquiring the things that most teenage girls desired: *makeup, cigarettes, clothes and later, alcohol and drugs.*

In her story, Rose talked about her family's breakdown which occurred when she was a child:

[M]y mom left my dad when I was very young for reasons that are usual for many Indian women, but it was the way life was to be. It was my destiny to have the events happen that happened. It was craziness, but it was all the way it was supposed to be you know.

Later in the interview, Rose acknowledged that the reason her parents separated was due to domestic violence. *My mom had to run away cuz my dad was violent. Violence and sexual abuse were a common part of her experience. She says, you know I lived with a lot of abuse, from all ends...it was like every time I turned around someone had their hand up my pants or whatever.*

Despite family dysfunction, violence and prevalence of sexual abuse; she also described her biological and street families as providing her with a sense of belonging. This sense

of belonging was created and felt among those who did not have families of their own or their families were struggling with their own issues:

[T]he sense of belonging is like, when you don't have a family... You may have a family, but they're all messed up. And you know, our family wasn't healthy, I mean ...My mom and dad had split up...So there was really no one to look after us, so we kind of fended for ourselves. My mom took me back and looked after me until she died...Even if you didn't have your mom or dad, there was always somebody there for you. You always had somebody else...There was always someone to fall back on. There was always someone to guard your back and be there if yah needed it.

Narratives of Resilience

Rose's story identified a number of adversities and risk factors. Her life story includes enduring a life of abuse and addiction. In the end, she indicated that these risk factors became her *drive...It's the drive for life and her family who are deceased that have been my drive...And my kids*. Rose's drive for life and her ability to forgive herself have helped to make necessary and positive changes in her life. It was important for Rose to *make amends* to those she had hurt or harmed in some way as it was a process that provided her the opportunity to learn from her past and her mistakes. She talks about this further in the following:

I keep my past very close because I don't want to ever forget where I come from and if I can use it to help somebody, then that's what I'm all about.

You have to forgive yourself; otherwise you're going to stay there.

Remembering who you are and where you come from is what motivates Rose to live a different life, away from and out of the sex trade.

Protective factors for Rose included her mother and the women she met on the street who helped her; this included the older sex trade workers she came to know. She was adamant that it was her mother who she received the most support from as she gave her guidance and unconditional support and love. At one point during our interview Rose rhetorically questioned: *What her life would have been like if she [her mother] had lived.* Rose credits her mother for her current accomplishments and life changes. She also recognizes the support that her brother and sister-in law have given her over the years to which she says, *I know that they're really proud of me and I know that they're really supportive of me.*

Rose talked about her street family, and the support and guidance she felt from the older sex trade workers. It was her street family that she felt she belonged to and accepted by:

I think, I think just being accepted, being a part of a family that is going to accept you no matter what...No matter how many times you've been in jail or, or how many times you beat up your wife. You, you're still going to get the help, you know.

Culture

Rose had little knowledge of her culture growing up. Although Rose wanted to learn about her culture, she struggled with the teachers she encountered. These teachers, Rose says enforced stringent rules upon her, telling her what to do and how to do it without

explaining why these protocols were in place. The stringent cultural rules she says, *reminded her of back in the day when people was telling me what to do*. Despite her hesitation in learning about her cultural traditions and teachings, she continues to practice the spiritual traditions she knows, such as prayer and attending ceremonies. Cultural belonging and a strong cultural identity are not essential to Rose's sense of who she is, however, it does compliment her journey in continuing to work on herself.

Conclusion

Stories provide many things: teachings, the passing of cultural traditions and providing an opportunity for a population to share what they know in their voice (Fraser, 2004:181; Thomas, 2005:242). Stories can convey all aspects of a person's life, and as a method it can hold a holistic perspective of the experience of individuals, families, communities and nations (Thomas, 2005). This chapter told the stories of five women who agreed to participate in this study. Molly, Gladys, Katherine, Emily and Rose's stories were shared as a way of staying true to an Indigenous epistemology. It allows for the reader to be a part of the story. Once something is made known, there is no unknowing it. Stories that are shared can and have affected us; they can change us and ultimately become a part of us.

Chapter Five, uses a Fraser's narrative analysis as a means of closely examining the data told in this chapter by the five participants. The aim of the next chapter is to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis, which seeks to understand how Indigenous women involved in the sex trade understand their families and how their families contribute to their resiliency.

Chapter Five: Analysis

In this chapter, Fraser's (2004) narrative analysis is used to examine each woman's story in what Fraser (2004) refers to as "scanning across different domains of experience" (p. 191). A "scanning across different domains of experience" (Fraser, 2004) focuses on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural and structural realms (p. 194) while challenging narrow "popular discourses" that inform common perceptions of sex trade work among Indigenous women (p. 193). An analytical process of this kind draws attention to the broader themes identified throughout the interviews and calls for a deeper examination of each domain in greater detail. I have drawn out the main themes from each story for essentially "the sets of ideas they contained" (Fraser, 2004, p. 190). Along these lines, the analysis is primarily concerned with the overarching themes that inform the purpose of this study: which is to gain an understanding as to how Indigenous women who were involved in the sex trade make meaning of their familial relationships and how these relationships have contributed to their resilience. In some instances certain stories or quotes are repeated. A repetition of quotes became a necessary part of the process during the analysis, as it highlights multiple themes that were derived from the woman's collective stories.

Popular discourse often presents two embedded assumptions about the experience of Indigenous women involved in the sex trade. It is commonly assumed that sex trade work is a result of being *victimized and abused* (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003, p. 15) and that the women's families are to blame for their involvement (Kingsley & Mark, 2000:13;

Nixon & Tutty, 2003:70). In and of themselves, these claims are valid but partial. I am challenging this by presenting a perspective that broadens beyond the *victim and abuse* paradigm. The women who participated in this study described feeling connected with their families whether or not they were actively engaged in, leaving or had ceased working in the sex trade work.

In challenging the *victim and abuse* paradigm and the discourse that surrounds it, this study aims to show that families, despite the dysfunction, play a significant role in the resiliency of this population. The role of families became clear in the stories the participants told as they talked about how their families had contributed to their resilience. Family roles have given credence to challenge the existing notion that families are solely to blame for these women's involvement in the sex trade. These familial relationships have been integral in constructing new identities and are more inclusive as to how important and valuable families are in the lives of these women.

The following sections further describe the themes of the women's narratives as they discussed their relationships with their families. The following is a list of the themes derived from the participants' interviews:

1. Relationships, support and context.
2. Economic violence.
3. Familial Relationships
 - a. Family bonds.
 - b. Connection to family.

- c. Strength, courage and unconditional love.
4. Narratives of resilience
- a. Challenging the victim and abuse paradigm.
 - b. Constructing new identities: From the old to the new.

Relationships, Support and Context

Consistent with the main theme of this study which focuses on the familial relationships of women who are involved in the sex trade, one of the main questions each participant was asked was to describe: What their family means to them (See Appendix A)? All five of these women described both the positive and negative aspects of their familial relationships (their inter-connections). As is common among many Indigenous families, each story told of the difficulties related to struggles with addictions, domestic violence and other forms of abuse. While these factors are significant and contribute to the dynamic aspects of their lives, they point to a part of the broader view or the societal narrative. Historically, popular discourse has reduced this dynamic to the negative aspects of these women's experiences without accounting for the much more subtle but incredibly significant positive factors that they attribute to their familial relationships. As such, for the purposes of this study, I was more interested in understanding how these women made meaning of their relationships with their family and how this in turn contributed to their resilience.

Fraser (2004) suggests the analysis be done by "scanning across the domains of experience" and key among these domains are intrapersonal and the interpersonal relationships (p.191) it is a means of understanding how the teller is making meaning of

her familial relationship. As previously indicated, popular discourse suggests that women's involvement in the sex trade is a consequence of various factors that are often attributed to their dysfunctional familial relationships (Gorkoff & Runner, p. 25; Nixon & Tutty, 2003:70; Kingsley and Mark, 2000, 13). Gladys, Katherine, Emily and Rose's intra-relationship (Fraser, 2004:191) can be observed in the way in which these women wanted to protect their families from knowing about their involvement in the sex trade. The interpersonal narrative of these four women described keeping their families in the dark about this part of their lives. In some cases, this involved simple measures such as taking steps to limit the frequency of contact and/or moving to another city and/or province which led to further interpersonal difficulties with their families. For example, Gladys admits in the following *[M]y family. I have a huge family, actually most of them I don't really talk to them because of the things I do do, like I was into drugs and working the streets.* In Emily's interview, her intrapersonal narrative is better understood as she talked about wanting *to protect [her] family.* It was commonly suggested among these women that their families did have some knowledge of their involvement but sought to avoid furthering whatever knowledge they may have had. As time went on, Emily realized that her involvement in the sex trade was affecting her family, stating that she *began to realize how the effects of her lifestyle impacted her family.*

Shame was also a recurring theme, suggesting that their intrapersonal relationships and their internal struggles were because of their work in the sex trade. Feelings of shame were often associated with their desire to protect their families. Gladys talked about how her father had little contact with her because she had returned to using drugs, *but my dad*

quit talking to me for awhile because I got back into the drugs. For Gladys as with many of the women, drug use preceded sex work. In order for them to sustain their addiction, sex work became a viable option. Rose spoke about entering the sex trade as way to access things that she wanted:

I needed to work. To get what I wanted; and I wanted drugs; and I wanted to drink; and I wanted pretty clothes; and I wanted make-up; and I wanted all those things that young women wanted; and that's the only way that I knew because no one showed me there was another way.

The women who were interviewed for this study struggled to describe issues related to sex work and how it affected their familial relationships. For example, Gladys became emotionally distressed and requested to change the subject as we talked about her relationship with her family. I asked what her step-mother said to her that makes her feel better she responded with the following: *Just to tell me that everything will be alright or...* At this point Gladys requested the interview be paused and we did not return to this section of the questions. She later reported that her anguish was a result of factors in two domains of experience: the shame and guilt she felt for being involved in the sex trade (intrapersonal) and the shame she brought upon her family by virtue of her involvement (interpersonal). This can be observed in the following:

My mom visited it was just here a few days ago actually I went to see here. I was kinda eerie about seeing her because, you know I figured she didn't want nothing to do with me for things I did...My family. I have a huge

family, actually most of them I don't really talk to them because of the things I do do, like I was into drugs and working the streets.

But I didn't do it [in reference to sex work] because I have like a big family and a baby and I didn't want them thinking bad about me. But, cuz I have family everywhere and they just always hear bad things about me and I just didn't want them knowing that I worked on the streets, but now they do so. A lot of them don't think too highly of me

Having an attachment to their family members and the value that these women placed on their relationships with them is evident in the following discussion. Rose explained how her mom was *the salt of the earth*. Emily described how her father was *a driving force* for her. Each woman expressed positive regard for their families, despite challenges and difficulties, reflecting that their families provided them with strength and support. Take for example Rose's interpersonal narrative, as she talked about growing up in a world of dysfunction, yet within this dysfunction she felt a strong sense of belonging. She says:

[T]he sense of belonging is like, when you don't have a family. You know, you may have a family, but they're all messed up and you know, our family wasn't healthy, I mean my, my dad, um, and my mom had split up you know so there was really no one to look after us so we kind of fended for ourselves. My mom took me back and looked after me until she died and um, but it was always having, you, even if you didn't have your mom or

dad, there was always somebody there for you. You always had somebody else.

Gladys, Katherine, and Molly each described their interpersonal familial relationships as being unconditional to an extent, as they talked about being loved, supported and of the long lasting relationships (Bella, 2006:1) they had with their parents. It is these interpersonal relationships that helped them to survive the many adversities they had experienced in their lives. In the following examples, Gladys, Katherine and Molly describe situations where they felt supported. Gladys says that being able to reach out to her stepmother has been significant to her:

*I call her my mom so, I just talk to her whenever I need you know.
Someone to talk to, just to make me feel better, cuz she always has the
right things to say to me, cuz she's a Christian woman...Um, she always
makes me feel better when I need someone to talk too in my family.*

Similarly, Katherine described the support she received from her grandmother, saying:

*I'm staying with my grandma for awhile and I did a lot of confiding in her and it felt
really good to get it all out.*

Molly described being able to rely on an aunt in this way and credits her with providing unconditional love, support and someone she could rely on when her mother was unable or unwilling. In the following excerpt, she reveals this:

[M]y auntie always does everything for me. Like if I, she took me to school and registered me in school and she bought me school supplies and stuff. And she always drives me everywhere like she does for her own kids and stuff. And um, I always go over there.

The support that Molly received from her aunt positively contributed to her working to leave the sex trade and to believe in the possibility of a better life for her and her children. In the following she describes her hopes and dreams for her children (moving into a societal narrative):

Just to grow up like normal people and have stuff that they want and not to just be waiting for the next pay check to come. So that I can buy them something. So I can buy them all nice clothes, like um, like other kids have. Like you know the expensive brand name clothes and then, have him [refers to her son] not just have me give them to him, but have him do chores do work for stuff like that. Have him then... to have them go to high school and then get a good job.

The next theme refers to the societal narratives as outlined by Fraser (2004:191) which refers to one of the main reasons why these women entered the sex trade. It is an exploration and discussion of the impact poverty has had on these women.

Economic Violence

From the beginning of this journey, I have been reminded of a conversation I had with a youth that I had worked with in my practice. She was the first young woman to openly

acknowledge her involvement in the sex trade and explained the reasons why she entered prostitution. She stated that she needed money to buy food and other necessities so that she would be able to provide for her four younger siblings. Emerging research on sex work has identified this type of experience as *economic violence*. In a place of desperation and presented with a set of constrained choices, young and adult women make the decision to sell sex. As Phoenix (2008) writes it;

[P]rovides them with a means to acquire money to buy things that they cannot otherwise afford (such as consumables), to fund drug and alcohol problems (both their own and their partners) and [allows them to support] themselves and any dependents they may have whilst avoiding begging and other criminogenic activities which attract (up to now) much harsher and higher levels of punishment. In short, younger women are often turning to sex work for much the same reason as older women—rather than as a result of exploitation and coercion. (p. 38)

Desperation leading to make a constrained choice to enter the sex trade has become “a gendered survival strategy often used by poor women trying to create a better future for themselves and their dependents” (Phoenix, 2008, p. 38). This type of choice is perhaps not easily made, but becomes one of very few viable options, in light of a lack education and procurement of scarce resources proves unattainable.

Four of the women (Molly was the exception) talked about their experiences with economic violence (their societal and structural narrative), having turned to sex work as a

means of providing basic necessities, to make enough money for food, rent and in some cases, to buy drugs or alcohol. Gladys and Katherine both suggested that food and rent needs were met before they sought to purchase substances that feed their addictions. In the following, Gladys explains her reason for continuing to sell sex:

For food and just the little things that you do need. Like I use it for food for when my kids come and visit you know, just to have something for them you know while they're here and for drugs yes, eventually I do get drugs after I get everything that I do need first then I'll spend it on drugs.

Rose reiterates this sentiment in the following:

It was survival. It was my job. It was how I paid my rent. You know I lived in hotels. You had to pay your rooms right. You couldn't live in a hotel free. I had to eat.

In Katherine's story she talked about entering the sex trade as young woman, *[W]hen I was younger I was in (city name) and I had nowhere to go so I chose that. You know to survive to eat.* In a situation where options are limited and significant needs risk going unmet, becoming involved in the sex trade was perhaps the only available option. Each participant in this study had some degree of sex trade involvement prior to becoming a sex worker themselves, for example they grew up in an environment where sex trade work was actively occurring and/or had close friends who were actively involved.

Gladys describes her experience in the following *[B]ut you know I grew up with it all my life because my friends, my younger friends were the ones on the streets, so I was like hopping into cars with them, just to, you know, watch over them and then I eventually ended up working. Again in Molly's interview which she admitted to soliciting other young women to prostitute for her:*

I used to get girls to work for me so that I wouldn't have to do it. But I used to go in the car with them and make them so they would come and then I would take their money then... Then I would go drink, cuz my sister uh, uh help me become an alcoholic and stuff when I was younger, so, and then I used to drink all the time and then. Then I used to make them work for me.

All five of the women talked about growing up in an environment where sex trade work was something they perceived as normal. As Rose points out:

[W]ell the street was my family. Those people. Those, that's um, the people I hung around with on the street, were a part of my family. I knew my brother's were out there. My sister was there. My dad hung around downtown...It was all that we all knew.

This notion of normalcy was a common theme among the women, although not the focus of this study. Although a valuable theme, it is not the focus as I wanted to look at other aspects of these women's lives.

Left with no other means to survive, many women have turned to prostitution in order to provide for themselves and those who depend on them. The term of *economic violence*

illustrates the harm that commonly befalls women in the sex trade and the embedded issues of marginalization, oppression and poverty that are inherent to the issue. As

Mackay (2009) points out how:

Research shows that those working in prostitution are some of the most vulnerable in our society, children, survivors of rape and abuse, immigrant women, women of color, those fleeing domestic violence, mothers struggling to provide for their babies. Society... considers it acceptable to provide them with the choice of poverty or prostitution and then treat them like criminals when they take the latter. This ultimatum is not and can never be a real choice. (p. 1)

Indeed, it is a constrained choice.

Take Rose's answer as an example as she was asked if she became a sex worker because it was a way to feed her drug addiction or was it for survival, she replied: *It was survival. It was my job. It was how I paid my rent, you know I lived in hotels, you had to pay your rooms right, you couldn't live in a hotel free. I had to eat.* In scanning across the domains of experience (Fraser, 2004:191), the structural factors related to economic violence are significant issues that the women in this study have experienced by virtue of their involvement in the sex trade. In spite of these issues, the women who participated in this study showed how their ability to endure and carry on was a protective factor in and of itself.

The concept of economic violence refers to the instrumental damage inflicted on individuals by society, with injury manifesting as racism, marginalization, oppression and poverty. It is sadly ironic that a society would create the conditions whereby the expectations of many women and children are out of reach for the few. The few women, who exist on the margins, have had their means by which to meet those expectations systematically rendered impotent by historical and structural factors put in play by society. Society then in turn, fixes blame on the marginalized and despises them for not meeting the out-of-reach expectations of the dominant culture. Then, when individuals have no other options to survive except to turn to socially unacceptable means as a way of making an income, they are further marginalized, pathologized and punished for stepping outside of the established rules. The degree of absurdity described in this scenario may appear hard to believe at first glance, but accurately portrays the day-to-day life of many Indigenous people, particularly those who have found themselves working in the sex trade as an attempted means to survive.

Familial Relationships

Family bonds

Listening to these women's stories, I came to a greater understanding of the bond that exists between these women and their families. Each woman described her familial relationship (their interpersonal relationships) in a different way. Rose spoke of both her biological family as well as her *street family*, which she mentions in the following:

[Y]ou know and there was a bunch of, they were either Indian or white and the odd black was thrown in there but, most of my family that's who I grew up with, that's all the people I knew. From the time I was like six years old, old enough to remember and until I actually hit the street

*myself. Those were my family that was; those were my people right there.
I would grow to love, honour, and obey.*

It is through these family bonds that meaning is made, dictating the degree to which their relationships hold specific importance for the women. From this perspective the families of this particular population can be discussed in a positive light, rather than just the negative depiction often portrayed in the literature (Kingsley & Mark, 2000:13; Nixon & Tutty, 2003:70). As Rose says:

I think that if my, you know I hear a lot of people are always blaming, you know they blame their parents for what they became or they blamed their families, they always blaming someone, I became what I became because it was my choice my mother didn't tell me to go be a whore, my dad didn't tell me to go be a whore. You know no one told me, my brothers tried to help me, tried to save me, but I wouldn't listen to anyone. Because I knew better, right, I was young. You can't tell me what to do, I'm gonna do what I want to do. You know my mom tried to help me, she tried to save me but she couldn't.

Sex trade work was a choice; a constrained choice that she was willing to make and no one could deter her from making it.

Family bonds are essentially the connection the women described having with their families. McCormick (1996:178) described this connection as consistent with the interconnection that exists within the Indigenous worldview, which is relates to the

cultural domain of experience (Fraser, 2004:192). Sustaining and maintaining family bonds are integral to the resilience of the women who participated in these interviews and can be directly attributed to their resilience. Molly and Gladys both spoke about being able to rely on a family member in times of need or if needed emotional support. Molly's story reflected this during her interview when she was asked what her family means to her, she succinctly replied; *someone you can talk to and lean on when you are having problems if you need somewhere to stay you can go stay with them.*

Gladys' step-mother is a significant support to her in this respect:

I call her my mom so, I just talk to her whenever I need you know, someone to talk to, just to make me feel better, cuz she always has the right things to say to me, cuz she's a Christian woman. Um, she always makes me feel better when I need someone to talk too in my family.

For Molly and the other women, how they made meaning of their familial relationships is based on the bond they feel with members of both their biological and extended family members. Katherine talked about the positive relationship she has with her grandmother; *[w]ell, I'm staying with my grandma for awhile and I did a lot of confiding in her and it felt really good to get it all out.* Being able to confide in a family member has helped her to learn how to trust again and to share some of her experiences.

Rose's story also express to the bond she felt with her mother, referring to her as *the salt of the earth* and says *my mom did everything for me* and how her... *[M]other did*

everything for us. You know, she, there was food on the table all the time...She gave us. She gave us right til the end. She [was] a really, really good woman. These family bonds (the interpersonal narrative) that were identified by Rose and the other participants have helped them to overcome adversity and are contributing factors to their resilience.

Connection to family

In my literature review, I indicated that the literature often portrays the families of Indigenous people (both young and adult women, and men) who are involved in the sex trade in a negative light, taking the position of blame (the structural narrative) (Kingsley & Mark, 2000:13; Nixon & Tutty, 2003:70). I also noted that in my experience, having worked with this population, the “blame” perspective was not entirely accurate in its appraisal of the nature of these relationships. I worked with a number of young women who had been involved in the sex trade and yet went to considerable lengths to maintain their family system and stay connected. In these instances, the young women I worked with displayed how their families provided them as being a source of support and love, providing a sense of belonging. While the literature suggests that women who are involved in the sex trade for a significant amount of time begin to lose “social support from informal social networks that included meaningful connections with family” (Williamson & Folaron, 2003, p. 282), this was not directly supported in this study. There were struggles among the women interviewed for this study during their time in the sex trade, however, these women continued to have a contact with their families, even if it was periodically.

In fact, these women commonly spoke of the importance of maintaining meaningful connections with their families (the interpersonal relationships). Take for example, Emily's story, as she talked about knowing she could always go home, saying, *I would call them [family] to let them know how I was* and knowing that her father would always be *there for her*. Rose also spoke of the strong connection she had to her family, with her mother in particular, who she described as being *the salt of the earth*. Or Gladys calling her step-mother during times she was feeling down, *I call her my mom so, I just talk to her whenever I need you know, someone to talk to, just to make me feel better, cuz she always has the right things to say to me, cuz she's a Christian woman. Um, she always makes me feel better when I need someone to talk too in my family*. Both Emily and Rose indicated that it was the support and unconditional love found in their respective familial relationships that motivated them in exiting the sex trade.

As was previously indicated, it is not necessarily immediate family members who provide support and guidance for these women who participated in this study. These particular women who were parents reported that their role as a parent was an additional source of unconditional love and a sense of belonging. Molly identified the bonds she feels with her children in the following, *well in my family. Like the family that I made... I just love my kids. I don't see how people can give their kids up for adoption and stuff*. Molly's relationship with her aunt, which is described in the following, signifies the bond that she feels towards her aunt. She says my aunt is *really close to me...She's like my mom*. Rose also talked about how her children were a positive factor in changing her life around, she says *[A]nd my kids. And my kids*.

Molly and Katherine's stories had similarities in that they both struggled in their relationships with their mothers and absent fathers. Molly described her relationship with her mother as tenuous and can be observed in the following, *[W]hen I was younger how I grew up I didn't like it, like having a drunk mom all the time and always getting beat up by her.* Katherine's relationship with her mom was positive during the time she was growing up, however their relationship deteriorated, as she got older:

Oh, we had a really good [relationship]. We're good. We always talked and everything when I was younger...I don't [know] as I grew older... I was never listening to her...She finally...It's tough love now. She just doesn't care no more that's the way she looks at it. Pushes me away and stuff. Tries to get me to smart' in up and stuff you know.

Despite their struggles, both women continued to maintain a relationship with their respective mothers, rather than removing themselves from the relationship. Despite their struggles, they were able to establish relationships with other family members who were then able fulfill their need for a mother.

In addition to the information that Katherine shared about her family, unlike the other women, she also talked about her ideal family situation:

[W]ell everybody sitting together talking, supper together, talking doing stuff together, you know like 'how's your day' and stuff like that. Doing stuff like playing games together and that's how I look at it, but that's how I always wanted myself to have a family and like, it's just I don't wanna be

there, it's just uh, a dream I guess...it would feel good. It, it's happened once, one Christmas and it felt really good that one time.

Bella's (2006:1) work on the "family making" process is described as the ability for family members to develop caring, enduring and intimate relationships. Katherine's family making process is, on the one hand, based upon an ideal family. On the other hand, she is aware that her family is not perfect and as she struggles with this she realizes this cannot be easily resolved.

Katherine has made meaning of her familial relationship through the connection she has with her children and her grandmother and it is within these relationships that she was able to develop caring, long lasting and intimate relationship. It is the foundation she needs to be able to trust again. Katherine identifies her trust issues in the following; *I close my heart off and everything*. Her narrative focuses on the difficulties she has trusting those who are supposed to be closest to her, her boyfriend and mother.

Katherine's description of her interpersonal relationship with her mother is idealized, though not mirrored in reality. This can be observed in her description of an ideal family system. The qualities in these relationships still allow for the family building process to develop and so she draw upon them for the support that she needs to foster her own resiliency. For Katherine her familial relationships helped her to overcome life's adversities and to overcome the ongoing struggles she has with her mother.

Strength, Courage and Unconditional Love

The subjects of strength, courage and unconditional love have already been introduced in Chapter Two: The Literature Review, and originate from the Indigenous cultural belief that it is the family that bestows the child with the source of these qualities. Indigenous cultural tradition suggests that children are gifts and as such, unconditional love is bestowed upon them and, fosters their development of strength and courage (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3. 2:13). The five Indigenous women who participated in this study, each reflected this sentiment in their own way as they described their familial relationships.

Strength is a quality that each of these woman possessed as was a crucial factor in saving them from the highly dangerous situations they experienced throughout their lives. When I was interviewing Katherine, she described her courageousness or “inner strength” as I called it. I asked Katherine where she think she got this “inner strength” from, to which she replied, *I don't know where it's coming from, maybe it's from my mom, I don't know you know, you know, I don't even know where it's coming from.* This “inner strength,” Katherine say's has helped her in getting out of potentially life-threatening situations. She previously described being physically threatened on two separate occasions; one was by a *john* and the second was when she was a house party.

The following describes each situation and how she was able to escape each situation unharmed.

I did a couple times [experience violence] actually. I talked my way out of that. That really scared me, because um, he was looking at me in my face. And I was really telling him something was wrong with him and stuff like

that. You know, really, and he just said 'I got a baseball bat' and I said 'go ahead use it' I just made myself look him in the eye. And he just pushed me out so I was lucky then. And I seen him again, but, um I just basically just hit his car and everything, yuh. That was I think the only time that's happened. I know I was a party one time and two guys came in there. I don't know if they found out I was working cuz, oh, 'get on her' two guys with baseball bats. Baseball...? Whatever you call those things. Yeah. Came in there and tried to, but they never did. I fought them off. So when you've got the power, I guess you can use it, so I've been lucky that way.

She goes onto say:

I talked him, I talked him out of it and I couldn't believe I could do that, that day. That time, I was young at the time, but it's never happened again.

This statement highlights her courageousness, determination to live, and more importantly her resiliency.

Emily talked about her relationship with her father as being a source of strength for her and said that he was always *there for her*. Emily also described having a “street family,” particularly her *street sister*, with whom she continues to have a relationship and identifies her as being a source of support for her while she they were living on the street. Emily also talked about knowing that *no matter what she did she could go home*.

As with Emily, who described the unconditional love she received from her family, Rose's story expresses similar experiences as she described how much she adored her mother. Her mother was not the only family Rose had who offered her unconditional love, she talked about her "street family":

You know...And there was a bunch of [us], they were either Indian or white and the odd black was thrown in there. But, most of my family that's who I grew up with, that's all the people I knew. From the time I was like 6 years old, old enough to remember and until I actually hit the street myself. Those were my family that was...Those were my people right there. I would grow to love, honour, and obey.

The examples provided, discuss themes that are commonly overlooked in research and what is currently missing from the literature. Despite the dysfunction, the families of these women continued to support and love these women throughout their time in the sex trade. Even during the most difficult times, their families continued to provide each of them strength, courage, and unconditional love that has ultimately helped them to overcome the adversities. Along with other qualities, the women in this thesis have talked about, their own inner strength, courage, and resilience. It is a combination of these attributes that has provided them with the motivation to come to a point where they could entertain the possibility of leaving the sex trade and embark on the beginning of a life outside of the sex trade.

Narratives of Resiliency

Challenging the *victim and abuse* paradigm

Since the beginning of this study, I have struggled with the concept of resilience, just as I struggled with the literature on sex trade work and the discourse surrounding this topic. My concerns were articulated in Ungar's (2004) work on resilience and youth at risk, which helped me to understand resilience from a framework that lent itself to the perspective that I developed in my practice in working with this population, as is presented throughout this document. The work of Gorkoff and Runner (2003:15) contributed my understanding of the issues surrounding youth and sex trade work as the authors described as deriving from a *victim and abuse* paradigm. Consistent with the results of my study, Wahab's (2004) study found that, "None of the study participants identified themselves directly or indirectly as victims" (p. 146). This is a significant point that has been often overlooked in the dominant discourse. If women who are involved in the sex trade do not view themselves in this way, then it is incumbent upon those who examine these issues and work directly with this population to be able to account for their perspective in their conceptual framework. As Gorkoff and Waters (2003) indicated,

[O]ne can argue that it is not the girls that need to be fixed, but rather the material conditions that give rise to the choice to prostitute and the governments that are mandated to service and protect the best interests of the girl child. This requires some innovation on the part of those institutions to understand that the decision to engage in sex work by youth goes beyond issues of victimization into issues of social and economic marginalization. (p. 145)

The women's stories in this study echo that their decision to engage in sex work stretches beyond victimization as commonly understood. Four of the women reported engaging in sex work because they needed to be able to eat, have shelter and clothing and provide for their families. As Emily described her reasoning for her involvement in the sex trade was *a way to survive*. Katherine echoes this sentiment, she says *when I was in Edmonton and I had nowhere to go, so I chose that, you know to survive, to eat*. Simply, they needed to survive. It is through their means of surviving that we can witness their perseverance, strength, and courage, their will to survive, and foremost their resiliency. This point does not discount the violence that these women faced on a daily basis, (with respect to for the dangerous situations as well as the economic violence creating the conditions whereby prostitution became necessary for survival), but is intended to draw attention to another dynamic that is often overlooked or dismissed.

Gorkoff and Runner's (2003:15) work with youth involved in the sex trade identified that the majority of the literature is of this type is not incorrect as much as it is a partial point of view and left unchallenged, then other dimensions related to this population are left unexamined. Further, it has been presented that the women in this study specified making the choice to engage in the sex trade, albeit a constrained choice given the identified societal structural conditions. Take for example Gladys' story, where she acknowledges that she *always hung around girls who did do that so I [she] would go with them you know if a vehicle and you know try to keep them safe...I've been around girls like that all my life*.

Molly's story is also reflective of this, as she too grew up in an environment where sex work was common; her sister and her friends had been involved in the sex trade. She states, *when I was younger I used uh, my sister used to work the streets and used to always hang out with her and stuff...I used to get girls to work for me so that I wouldn't have to do it, but I used to go in the car with them.* Being around this type of environment was not new, nor was it shocking, rather it viewed as a common occurrence.

Rose also spoke of growing up in this type of environment:

[W]ell the street was my family, those people, those, that's um, the people I hung around with on the street. Were a part of my family, I knew, my brother's were out there my sister was there, my dad hung around downtown... It was all that we all knew...It was like being recruited but not really it was just meant to be. I mean you know that is life with Street people..

The participants did not see themselves as victims per se, as in Emily and Rose's interviews they spoke of their sex work as a way of surviving and as a choice, as discussed above. Emily talked about her involvement as a *choice* and *doesn't blame anyone*. Rose's description can be partially understood in the above quotes, however, she also spoke of her childhood in the following, *[I]t was the 'norm' it was the way we did things, it was just a normal, normal kind of life, you know, like you and I get up now, that's normal right?* She goes on to say in the following quote how she did not know that

there were options available to her and that living on the street was the only life she had known.

You know I had an argument with my friend, um the other day, um, a few weeks about, um making choices and her daughter is not making good choices. I said 'well, you know, just because you didn't drink or just because you didn't do something, doesn't mean she's gonna make good choices'. She say's 'well you made a choice'. I said 'well yeah, I made a choice, but it took me a long time to make a choice'. 'Yeah, but you still could have made a choice back when you were on the street'. I said, 'no, how, how am I going to make a choice when that's all I knew'. So my argument was that I was so wrapped up in it and so involved, I had, that's all I knew was the street, right. So that was my choice, but she didn't get that right, she, and the argument didn't go anywhere, we're still friends. But some people just don't know, right. Is it nature or nurture you know that old argument but I believe it was Destiny so it was definitely nature the way things were to be. I mean really my parents didn't 'nurture' me to be a whore right, no way.

Gladys and Katherine's use of language and the way they referred to their work as sex trade work, reveals some indication as to how they view themselves. As an example; at no point in our interview did they name their work as sex trade work or prostitution, rather they referred to it vaguely as *doing that* or having *worked on the streets* or other similar diffused descriptors. Juxtapose this with statements made by Rose in which she

refers to herself as a *whore*, a term that has been generally condemned as derogatory. In the following quote she talked about becoming involved in the sex trade as a choice (which has previously been discussed) as well as using the word “whore,” *I became what I became because it was my choice my mother didn’t tell me to go be a whore, my dad didn’t tell me to go be a whore.* For Rose, however, the unabashed use of this term is a part of her vernacular and did not appear to be self-deprecating, rather it seemed to be empowering in the sense that she has taken back the negative connotation that has been ascribed to the word by using it on her own terms. In an article by Queen (1997), the author discusses the term whore from what she describes is a “sex-positive feminist perspective” in which “most whores are available and sexually active *on their own terms* [author emphasis] (p. 132). For Rose, perhaps this statement resonates with how she viewed her time in the sex trade, not as being a victim, rather as someone who had some control over her body and her choice to become a sex trade worker. Her time in the sex trade was not dictated, as with the other three women (the exception is Molly who was the pimp), by a pimp; it was her choice to be there.

Positioning women involved in the sex trade is highly difficult, creating more complex questions than answers. It is important, however to note that by positioning this population within the *victim and abuse* paradigm, there is often a failure to acknowledge or understand the more serious issue: women are entering the sex trade because there are “broader economic push and pull factors not limited to whether and how much money women can earn through paid employment” (Phoenix, 2008:36). For the women who participated in this study, sex work was a quick and viable means of making the money.

They needed to survive while living in the ominous shadow of an economically violent and marginalizing society. Gladys confirms this in the following ... *it was fast, and it was fast way to get money.*

Critical of this type of categorization, Gorkoff and Runner (2003: 144) suggest that research on those involved in the sex trade needs to include an examination about other aspects of sex work. This includes factors such as working conditions, support services, an understanding the risks and possible a closer look as to the environments in which these women described growing up in and what type of support systems are available for this population.

Constructing New Identities: From the Old to the New

Ungar (2001:70) found that high-risk youth identities tend to be formulated on a presumption of pathology or psychiatric diagnosis. Rather than taking the perspective that youth who are involved in deviant behaviour construct their own identity and independence, and aim to gain a sense of social power via these means. This holds true for the women participating in this study; for them identity, independence, and empowerment have been a consequence of finding their sense of identity, and developing a more positive sense of self worth. All of which ultimately leads to becoming empowered in making future choices (McIntyre, 2002:29-30).

The imposition of identity by external sources that categorizes based on delinquency serves not only to marginalize individuals within society, but also confines their sense of self to these definitions. Consistent with the theme of this study, there are other

dimensions that need to be accounted for in order to establish a more inclusive understanding of the population in question. To be able to appreciate the sources of their resiliency in the context of their familial relationships there is a need to return to the philosophical framework that is based on a Cree epistemology. We are reminded that knowing where we comes from, with respect to who we are in relation to our community and culture, and remembering these origins of interconnectedness are an integral part of identity and critical to the development of narratives of resiliency. This interconnectedness with our identity and interlaced with our connection to family is how we make meaning of our families and connection to the greater community (Bella, 2006; Graveline, 1998:55; McCormick, 1997:178). It is through these processes that the women who participated in this study described their connections to their families in conjunction with the construction of a resilient identity.

Constructing a new identity amongst sex trade workers is challenging as society generally harbours a negative perception of sex workers. The women who participated in this study struggled with their changing identities, both within society and within their own familial relationships. Leaving an old identity is a process and can take many years to develop and change, however, these adversities can lead one develop a resilient identity. Ungar (2001) writes that “[T]he real challenge for high-risk youth is taking their new story about themselves back home and into their communities,” (p. 70). The same can be said for the adult women who participated in this study.

Of course, personal growth is seldom as linear as previously presented.

More often, old narratives compete with the new, and people experience

temporary and cyclical returns to outdated stories they used to tell about themselves as they confront conditions that put them at risk. (Ungar, 2001:70)

Emily and Rose were the oldest of the women who participated in this study, and as such have had the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences. Their stories reflected growing up in an environment where street life and the sex trade were part of daily life as discussed in previous themes. Making a constrained choice that allowed these women to meet their basic needs became a definitive character in their identities. It is through these experiences that Emily and Rose expressed that they learned the most about themselves; how to survive anything and any circumstance. These adverse situations fostered their inner strength and resiliency. In Emily's interview she recalls questioning to herself; *why are we still here when others are dead?* And how she came to a point in her life where she understood that *things happen for a reason and views life differently today*. More importantly, Emily sees her time in the sex trade and living the street life as giving her *the survival instincts has given her strength today...a will to live...[and to be able to] pick herself up*.

Similarly, Rose reflects Emily's sentiments and spoke about having to forgive oneself for the things they did in the past, she says; *[o]h you have to forgive yourself, cuz if you don't your going to stay there...So you learn to bury your past, you learn to bury it in a good way, but you keep, I keep my past very close because I don't want to ever forget*

where I come from and if I can use it to help somebody, then that's what I'm all about. You have to forgive yourself otherwise your going to stay there.

Rose specifies that self-forgiveness is the key to being able to wield the resiliency that it takes to survive and exit the sex trade and to develop a new identity that honours this resiliency. Keeping her past *close to her* contributes to her resiliency and, while it informs her present sense of identity, it also reinforces a sense of self that is not defined by this past. For Rose, her resilience and her past have helped her to share her wisdom in assisting others who identify with her experiences.

I think it's for other young women that are on the street, I think as long as they know that when the time is right there's someone that they can go to. Make sure that there's resources for them, make sure that they know that they that there's somewhere to go, make sure that they know how to live safe, right. If they're gonna be a whore, they're gonna be a whore, you can't change that, if that's what they wanna be, that's what they gonna be. Because maybe they were born into it, right, maybe that's all they know. So as people, who are try'in to be helpful, maybe we need to give them some, give them some ground rules, right, of how to look after themselves. When it's time to get out, they have a place to go, you know, otherwise it's stuff. It's a different world out there, because a lot of those women are out there because they have to be. You know, they're moms may be forcing them, their men, their...it's gang initiation. You know. It's a different world out there. I wouldn't want to be out there today.

For these two participants having already left the sex trade, they were able to reflect on the means by which they were able to make their departure from it. Williamson and Flaron (2003:272) noted that women who leave the sex trade go through a process of reflection, as they began to think about where they will go, how they will survive and their personal motivation to leave. For Rose, she points to several critical factors:

I think it's my drive, I think it's my drive, I think it's the drive for life, um, I think it's that if my mom and dad were here they would be so proud of me and my sister and my brother, they would be just tickled pink that they could, that they could see me go this far. You know um, just all of those, I think it, I think it's been my family who are deceased that have been my drive. Right. And my kids. And my kids.

Leaving the sex trade was a significant part of these two women constructing a new identity. Both women could describe in exact detail the moment they decided to leave the sex trade. Emily describes her exiting in the following, [i] *t was 9AM, she was living in Edmonton and a John approached, they didn't agree on a price, [so she] asked him to give [her] a ride to the highway and [she] returned to [names city]. [During this time she thought to herself] 'there has to be more than this'?* Rose was also described specific details of her last interaction and decision to leave the sex trade. *I was 34 when I turned the last one... Um, well, I was getting older. I was getting older. And um, I know for the most part that uh, men like young women. Like young girls, you know. And, and it was*

just, it was just getting harder and I thought... 'You know?' Cuz I was try'na sober up and, and um, the last trick I turned I was sober and I thought 'whoa'!

The development of these inner qualities related to resiliency (intrapersonal domain), described by Rose, which are fostered by familial relationships (interpersonal domain) and informed by cultural perspectives on identity, community and belongingness (cultural domain) are instrumental in challenging the societal imposition of the narrow, delinquency-based labels (structural domain) in the drive toward the development of a new identity. This new identity allows for the lessons derived from this process to be offered as teachings to those who are in a position to be empowered by Rose's example. This is consistent with Ungar's (2001:70) suggestion that the stories, the narratives that arise out of these experiences, be taken back to the homes and communities so that others can be inspired to draw upon the same qualities of resiliency to improve their own lives as well. Given the potential benefits that could come out of the narratives being shared within families and communities, meaning and purpose can be found in the suffering that is embedded throughout the stories of these women. As Emily reflectively stated...*things happen for a reason.*

The Findings

Fraser's (2004) narrative analysis process calls for the researcher to connect "plots, events and/or themes [as they] may be clustered together for analysis" (p. 194). I followed Fraser's (2004:191-193) framework that describes how the intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal, and cultural domains were used as an umbrella for the analysis. To recapitulate, I argued in this chapter that there are four overarching themes which

were derived from these women's stories about their familial relationships and resiliency. The first was entitled *relationships, support and context* and identified how the women made meaning of their familial relationships as they discussed both the positive and negative aspects of these relationships. The second theme was *economic violence*, referring to the survival-based economic reasons why women enter the sex trade. The third theme was *familial relationships*, which looked at the importance of the family bonds, the connection to family and the value of strength, courage and unconditional love. The fourth theme drew upon the *narratives of resilience*, in which I challenged the *victim and abuse* paradigm, discussed how the women are attempting to or have constructed new identities and the struggle they endured in their shifting of these identities.

My discussion of the findings aims: First to gain an understanding of the familial relationship of Indigenous women who have had involvement in the sex trade and second, to gain an understanding of how these relationships have contributed to their resiliency. Concomitant to this, I wanted to better understand how the women who participated in this study make meaning of their familial relationships. My research found that while all of these women talked about the unconditional love, support and care they received from someone in their family, whether this is from their aunt (Molly), or mother (Rose), or father (Emily), or step-mother (Gladys) or grandmother (Katherine), they also talked about the struggles they had with their families. My interest in the familial relationships was to focus on the positive aspects, as various social science disciplines have primarily focused on the negative issues. I draw upon the interviews of

Emily and Rose, whose relationships with their father and mother, respectively, were described as a constant source of inspiration for them. Their resilience can be directly attributed to these relationships where they received unconditional love, support within the context of a long-lasting relationship that provided them with the security of knowing that they could rely on them in this way.

Drawing upon my own upbringing within the context of my own family and culture, I have always known that family bonds among my people and within my family are strong. I am very close with my immediate family, and grew up visiting my extended family regularly on my reserve several times a week. I have fond childhood memories of playing with cousins, seeing my *kokum* (grandmother) and *moshom* (grandfather) while being exposed to our spoken native Cree language. My paternal grandparents were culturally traditional and I recall participating in ceremonies at a young age at my *kokum*'s house on a regular basis. My interest in families deepened in my work with Indigenous female youth while practicing in a residential care facility for children and youth who were temporarily separated from their families due to government based protective services. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, I repeatedly noticed that these young women continued to remain connected to their families despite the most difficult circumstances.

Related to this, I have learned that perseverance and personal motivation are critical to personal change. I have come to understand the importance of family and unconditional love that a loved-one brings to these relationships and how they will serve to support this

change. Moreover, the point often made in the stories that were shared with me by the young women with whom I had previously worked and by the women who took part in this study: that there is a strong sense of agency over their lives, and they tend to take responsibility for their choice-making. Even in situations where those choices are of a constrained nature. In essence it was a way for them to survive. It was the economic violence that led them to make these decisions. Take for example, Emily and Rose's stories who both talked of knowing they had *a choice* (Emily) and Rose's comment;

So my argument was that I was so wrapped up in it and so involved, I had, that's all I knew was the street, right. So that was my choice, but she [she is referring to an argument she was having with a friend] didn't get that right, she, and the argument didn't go anywhere, we're still friends. But some people just don't know, right. Is it nature or nurture you know that old argument but I believe it was Destiny so it was definitely nature the way things were to be. I mean really my parents didn't 'nurture' me to be a whore right, no way.

This sense of agency and the economic violence that surrounds it, such as making the constrained choice to enter the sex trade, offers one level of understanding why a woman enters the sex trade. Gorkoff and Runner (2003) found that women who make a constrained choice by engaging in sex work, is a form of survival (p. 33-35) it is the economic violence that leads them to make the choice to enter the sex trade. Katherine says; *when I was younger I was in Edmonton and I had nowhere to go so I chose that, you know to survive to eat.* Emily states, it was the *only way she knew how to survive.*

Rose's story describes making a choice of her own volition and talked about extenuating circumstances such as poverty, lack of opportunity and childhood abuse: *You know I lived with a lot of abuse, from all ends, right. It was like every time I turned around someone had their hand up my pants or whatever, so it all lead to one thing, the Street.* In fact, it was reported in some instances that this choice was made in spite of attempts by family to intervene, as is described by Rose in following:

I think that if my, you know I hear a lot of people are always blaming, you know they blame their parents for what they became or they blamed their families, they always blaming someone, I became what I became because it was my choice my mother didn't tell me to go be a whore, my dad didn't tell me to go be a whore. You know no one told me, my brothers tried to help me, tried to save me, but I wouldn't listen to anyone. Because I knew better, right, I was young. You can't tell me what to do, I'm gonna do what I want to do. You know my mom tried to help me, she tried to save me but she couldn't. Cuz it was my destiny. I was destined to be who I was, that's just the way life is.

Rose, along with the other participants, reported that they were not forced or unduly coerced into the sex trade. Rather, they suggest that their involvement could be attributed in part to the community and environment in which they were brought up. All of these women's stories spoke of growing up this type of environment. Molly describes how being a "pimp" was better than being a prostitute.

I don't know I just grew up around... I like, [it just] doesn't it just seem wrong when you, if you grew up around that. If you... like those kids in Afghanistan that they're getting taught to shoot people and stuff. And they don't, and they don't, that's wrong. So if you grow up around stuff like that and you don't know it's wrong. You don't know it's wrong to hit people like my mom used say 'if you're gonna to fight somebody make sure you don't they get you on the ground make sure you beat them up'. That's what my mom used to tell me. So then you don't get taught it's wrong. So then you don't think it's wrong.

Gladys said; *I always hung around girls who did do that. So I would go with them you know, if a vehicle...And you know try to keep them safe.* Katherine said; *I moved to [names city]. Actually, that's where everything started, meeting friends and they were doing it, and then, so I did it.* Rose talked about how normal this type of environment was for her growing up. *It was 'norm' it was the way we did things. It was just a normal, normal kind of life, you know. Like you and I get up now. That's normal right? Well that was normal back then.*

They lived in a confined space where there was little economic and educational opportunity, instead addictions and other life struggles prevailed. Survival in the midst of the prevalence of poverty and economic violence limited their ability to become “successful” in the traditional sense and has left them with few options available. Despite these deterrents each of these women, in their own unique way, and to varying

degrees, has overcome their adversities. This was made possible by virtue of the unconditional love and support they received from their various family members. Coupled with the strength of their familial bonds, each woman described how these attributes greatly contributed to their ability to endure and persevere despite adversity. This by any other definition refers to the quality of resilience that is possessed by each of the participants as evidenced in each of their narratives.

Discussion

What we have also learned from working with Aboriginal children and youth is the unconditional love that children and youth have for their family, despite the dysfunction or abuse they may have experienced.

(UNYA, 2002:38)

Thus far, I have argued that the women who participated in this study are resilient and are capable of overcoming their adversities, thereby challenging the common discourse surrounding Indigenous women involved in the sex trade as being solely within the constraints of the *victim and abuse* paradigm (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:15). Through the lens of an Indigenous epistemology, along with the work of Graveline (1998:55) on self-in-relation and McCormick's (1997:178) on interconnectedness, I was able to accomplish this in the analysis of the data. This was greatly enhanced by the work of Bella (2006), as it allowed me to tell these women's stories in a way that conveyed how they understand and made meaning of their familial relationships.

I had two specific interests and motivations in choosing this topic. The first was to demonstrate that despite the fact that these women often have tenuous and dysfunctional in their familial relationships; this does not preclude critically important bonds. The bond that these women share with their families provided the emotional support and unconditional love necessary in fostering their resiliency. Secondly, the stories these women told shed light on the how they were able to make meaning of their familial relationships and how these relationships, in turn, have contributed to their personal resilience. Taking the perspective that acknowledges the familial relationships of these women is consistent with an anti-oppressive approach to social work practice. (This will be further explored later in this section, but is acknowledged here to acknowledge the point).

All of the women who participated in my study spoke of their family's dysfunction at some point during their interviews. My purpose of this study was not to focus on this aspect, rather I am discussing it here as a means of providing context and to acknowledge their families issues. Additionally, some of the women spoke about how they felt ashamed for their involvement in the sex trade. In the following excerpts Katherine, Molly and Gladys share their stories of their family dysfunction. Katherine shares;

[A]s I grew older and I was never listening to her and she finally, it's tough love now, she just doesn't care no more that's the way she looks at, pushes me away and stuff, tries to get me to smart' in up and stuff you know.

Molly's story tells of the struggles she had with her mother, *when my mom never used to be home. I used to always have to go into foster homes and stuff. Cuz my mom would never let me in. She was drunk all the time.* Gladys' story talked about both the shame she felt as well as the strain that her involvement had put upon her familial relationships. *My family. I have a huge family. Actually, most of them I don't really talk to them because of the things I do do. Like, I was into drugs and working the streets.*

Despite the struggles these women faced, they also described receiving love and support from their families as being essential in overcoming their adversities. Emily and Rose's stories specifically told of how without the unconditional love and support of their parents, they would not have been able to have left the sex trade, let alone have the desire to strive for a better life. For example, Emily talked about how she knew she *could always go home* and how her father was a *strong and significant, a driving force for [her]* and knew *[her] family always there for [her] unconditionally*. Or Rose talked about the adoration she felt for her mother, saying:

[M]y mother, my mother did everything for us. You know, she, there was food on the table all the time...She did all that, my mom was that the 'salt of the earth. She gave [to] us, she gave [to] us right til the end. She's a really, really good woman.

I am, therefore, arguing that the women who participated in this study can be described as resilient. They have overcome significant adversity in part due to the support they received from their families (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000:543; Ungar, 2004:27).

The following discussion demonstrates how these women have been able to overcome their adversities.

Emily takes the position that she has *no regrets and is not ashamed*, while indicating that she has taken responsibility for the choices she made and regards these experiences as life lessons. Along these lines, Rose described the importance of remembering her past as a way of remembering and learning from her mistakes. She says:

Oh you have to forgive yourself 'cause if you don't, you're going to stay there'. Like I've done some horrible, horrible things to people. Horrible things. I've never killed anyone. I've come close to it. But I've done some horrible things to people and I've had to forgive myself. A lot of those people that I've had to make my amends too are deceased now. So I wrote them letters right, telling them how sorry I was for what I did to them. And there's been the odd person that I've talked to, that were alive that I've said; 'Hey, you know I need to tell you something'. So you learn to bury your past, you learn to bury it in a good way. But you keep it...I keep my past very close because I don't want to ever forget where I come from and if I can use it to help somebody, then that's what I'm all about.

The ability to be self-forgiving, and to accept responsibility, perseverance, and family support were key factors that these women identified as being integral to their resilience. As indicated in Chapter Two: Literature Review, the importance of familial relationships within Indigenous cultures cannot be understated, with reference to the role of

interconnectedness as outlined in the works of Graveline (1998:55) and McCormick (1997:178). This traditional belief suggests that all things are connected to one another - the land, the animals, the people, the living and non-living to Indigenous culture. This concept of interconnectedness is observable in the narratives of each of these women stories. In the spirit of this, an Elder consulted in the course of my research remarked that, “[T]o value yourself is to know where you come from” (D. Musqua, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

As simple as this statement may appear, it points to a perennial truth that is fundamental to a Cree epistemology: One’s origins are inseparable from identity and the value of the latter hinges on knowledge of the former. For the women in this study, their origins lay with their family. Some of the women in my study have simply managed to survive their experiences. Others have been able to establish and maintain significant changes for themselves and their families. In all cases, they each emulate their resiliency in their own way and are derived from the value they are find within themselves. This is made possible by virtue of their relationships with those they call family. However, I cannot talk about Indigenous families without acknowledging the cultural contexts that surrounds the stories these women shared.

One of the questions I asked the women was whether or not they identified with their culture. I was curious to know how these women understood their culture. Four of the women described not identifying with their culture at all and only Emily proudly stated her Métis heritage. This was surprising in some regard, and not in others, as the effects

of colonization (specifically the introduction of the residential school system) have greatly affected the cultural connection that once existed for Indigenous people. Boldt (1993) describes this process as ‘deculturation’, in which Indigenous people have had;

The compounded impact of forced cultural and institutional assimilation, economic dependence, and isolation *Indian* cultures have undergone a process of cultural degeneration or ‘deculturation’; that is many traditional social systems, normative patterns, and practices of surviving and living have disappeared as a result of government repression, and others have progressively been rendered irrelevant by dependence, leaving cultural voids which have gone unfilled. (p. 174)

‘Deculturation’ and a sense of disconnection from their culture can be readily observed in the comments of some of the women interviewed for this study. The following is a discussion of how the women who participated in my study experienced deculturation.

One of the questions asked during the interview process was whether or not they identified with their Indigenous culture. Initially this was not one of the formally developed questions; rather this question arose out of the interviews, as it was something I began to realize during the interview process was important to explore as I was interviewing Indigenous women. The answers were interesting as only one woman, Emily, positively identified with her Indigenous culture as a Métis woman during her interview and was proud to call herself a *Métis activist* who is *active in Métis politics and leadership*. The remaining four women said they did not identify with their Indigenous culture. Molly’s reply to the question was simply *no*. Followed by her reason as to why,

I don't cuz my auntie she's a Christian and she says that that's not the right way to follow or something that's what she said and I don't really like smudging and stuff. Gladys' response was *No, I don't. I don't.* Katherine say's, *I've never really gotten into my culture.* And finally Rose's response was *I don't have any, I don't have, I don't have.* However, there are contradictions in their responses. They may have answered that they did not identify with their culture (with the exception of Emily) they further went onto explain and talk about either why they did not identify with their culture or what changed their minds about learning about their culture.

Molly said she did not identify with her culture due to her aunt's influence and belief system, yet she went on to talk about learning how to dance powwow. *I danced powwow for little bit when I moved to (names city) used to perform at schools and stuff in (names city).* Gladys also did not identify with her culture but fluently speaks her language: *I know how to speak my language and stuff* and Katherine, whose First Nations partner I met at our interview, also sought community services that had a significant Indigenous population. (I know this as I met and interviewed Katherine through this particular community agency). Lastly, Rose spoke of learning about her culture, practicing her cultural traditions, however, her cultural teachers or those she was learning from she felt were stringent that she follow strict cultural protocols that ultimately led to her not wanting to learn more or to follow the cultural traditions she was learning about.

I've gone to sweats lodges, I've participated in different ceremonies and I find it hard to be a part of something that I've never been a part of. And I think I was doing it to try to please everyone else so I stopped. I'm not

traditional. I smudge with sweetgrass, sage and cedar every day, when I remember. I don't go to ceremony anymore. It's just not something that I've done. But if someone wants to know about it I'll sure steer them in the right direction and I'll still promote it. But it's not something that I'm gonna start now, cuz it's just...I don't know. I find, I think it's just too late. If someone wants to take me to a ceremony I'd probably go, but technically I really don't need too. You know. Cuz I'm ok the way that I am and, and I guess I've had people try throw it in my face and tell me that 'oh you have to do this and have [to do that]'. Like I wear...I quit wearing pants for a long time...these were...I used to wear pants and stuff all the time. Then I got really heavy so I started wearing skirts and stuff again. But then I had people tell me well 'you should be doing this'. No! I'll tell you something Sherri, I got really tired of that real fast. Because that reminded me of back in the day when people was telling me what to do, you know what 'fuck-you! I don't have to do nothing'. I'm serious. Don't tell me what I have to do. I know I swear to much but I keep praying to stop you know...But culture I know it's a beautiful thing and I try teach as much as I can. I've gotten, I've talked to Elders and I've asked them, there's certain things I need to know and can I teach them in my classes? What can I teach? Well of course you can. You're an Indian woman you can do whatever you want, right.

Rose may continue to struggle with her Indigenous identity, she continues to practice certain traditions, such as smudging, prayer, talking with elders and to share with other's what she has learned.

Although four of these women talk about the deculturation that has occurred in their lives, they still spoke of some form of connection to their culture, whether this be Gladys' ability to speak her own language, Rose continuing to practice her cultural traditions or Katherine and Molly's social connection with other Indigenous people. What is clear is that these women have some understanding of where they come from and who they are as Indigenous women.

Anti-oppressive practice and Implications for social work practice

Dominelli (2009) defines an anti-oppressive approach to social work practice as,

[A] form of social work practice which addresses social divisions and structural inequalities in the work that is done with 'clients' (users) or workers. Anti-oppressive practice aims to provide more appropriate and sensitive services by responding to people's needs regardless of their social status. Anti-oppressive practice embodies a person-centered philosophy, an egalitarian value system concerned with reducing the deleterious effects of structural inequalities upon people's lives; a methodology focusing on both process and outcome; and a way of structuring relationships between individuals that aims to empower users by reducing the negative effects of hierarchy in their immediate interaction and the work they do together. (p.6)

One of the most important aspects of anti-oppressive research is its emphasis on relationships and the power dynamics that exist between the researcher and participant. Potts and Brown (2005) identify that the building of relationships is an on-going and long-term process (p. 262). Furthermore, it is important for the researcher to be aware of this power dynamic and to remember that it is the participant, and not the researcher, who is the rightful owner of the knowledge (p. 262).

This study was conducted in this spirit and is consistent with the anti-oppressive research model as Potts and Brown (2005:260) have outlined, emphasizing a social justice approach that challenges the status quo while “looking for meaning, for understanding, for the power to change” (p. 261). There were two primary efforts made to ensure an anti-oppressive approach was taken during my research study. The first was to ensure that the women maintained control over the interview process. One of the ways this was done was to include the women’s stories as they were told to me. (The exception was Emily’s story. In this case, I had to take notes during her interview as I had an equipment malfunction). Secondly, I challenged the current literature tendency to position women who are involved in the sex trade within a *victim and abuse* paradigm as outlined by Gorkoff and Runner (2003:15). Instead, I sought to provide an alternate perspective on this population in focusing on the positive aspects of the lives and relationships of this population. Moreover, the study focused on the familial relationships and found that their families often were able to provide the women with support, unconditional love, strength, courage and a connection to their families who have directly contributed to their

resiliency. The assumption held in much of the literature that families are often blameworthy for individual women's involvement in the sex trade was found contradicted in many respects.

As I have previously stated, I am interested in how social workers engaged with this population practice and the way in which policies and programming are developed. Some of these women find that there are many barriers in accessing services resulting in a failure to pursue the services that might have otherwise helped them to meet their various needs. Further to this, the literature suggested that a significant barrier affecting youth is that youth are often perceived singularly as in need of protection from themselves and their family. While this is not to suggest that protective services are not highly appropriate in many instances, it is the failure to acknowledge the agency of this population and the capacity for self-sufficiency that that many have developed as a consequence of their life experience. Gorkoff and Waters (2003) found that “[w]hile many service providers see street youth both in and out of the sex trade as victims of child abuse, the youth do not always self-define in that manner, but rather see themselves as empowered and surviving independently” (p. 127). Service providers and programs are well-advised need to consider the self-perceptions of the youth they are working with, and understand that they need to have some sense of control over the decisions being made in their lives and know that their point of view is important in meeting their specific needs.

This study also revealed that social workers also need to understand the implications for the experience and ramifications of those experiencing economic violence in some

manner, and ultimately resorting to making the constrained choice of entering the sex trade as a means of survival was for these women a last choice. Entering or engaging in the sex trade is a way for these women to meet their basic needs, be it to pay their rent, buy food, and support their families and other life necessities. Further to this, concomitant to economic violence and marginalization in its many forms, are issues related to addiction. As such, as a consequence of the oppressive forces in society, sex trade workers commonly develop addictions and their chemical dependency can further entrench their involvement in prostitution. Those responsible for the provision of social services, from the front line social worker to federal and provincial cabinet ministers, need to be keenly aware of the ‘bigger’ issues that relate to economic violence and its consequences if they want to affect meaningful change for these women. Anything short of this will prove inadequate.

On a more basic level, it is also important for social workers working with this population to strive to maintain a non-judgmental, caring, and patient attitude toward women such as Molly, Rose, Katherine, Gladys and Emily. Gorkoff and Waters (2003) wrote that individuals in their situation requested three important things: “[A] safe environment in which to sleep, eat and clean up; ...a time out; ...a worker that is caring, understanding and patient” (p. 135). Simply stated, they are asking for their basic needs of sustenance, safety and respect to be met.

The interviews conducted for this study contain a number of tips for social workers on how best to work with in a practice dedicated to serving this population in an anti-

oppressive fashion, which includes identifying gaps in services. Molly suggested in her interview to *try and understand them and where they come from, listen to them and try to help them*. Gladys reflected that a non-judgmental attitude and having a place to share their experiences was deemed as very important to them urging that we, the social worker, *get to know the person first*, [she goes on to say] *cuz you know I just don't open to just anybody. Because of social services I have had, like a bad experience with them too through my children... I just need more people to trust*. She goes on to discuss the lack of services for sex workers over the age of eighteen, specifically suggesting the usefulness of support groups. *That's what I think you know. Just more support groups support groups...Cuz I feel comfortable with those girls, those girls, they you know, they're all like my family...we all know what each other's been through*.

Emily and Rose's response to this question came from a place of reflection and maturity. Emily suggested a stronger police presence in the areas where children and youth are known to be sexually exploited, which would then reduce the number of johns driving around in these areas attempting to solicit them.

Rose suggested ensuring there are resources available for those who are actively involved in the sex trade: *Make sure that there's resources for them. Make sure that they know that they that there's somewhere to go. Make sure that they know how to live safe, right*.

She goes onto say,

[M]aybe we need to give them some, give them some ground rules, right, of how to look after themselves. When it's time to get out, they have a

place to go, you know. Otherwise it's tuff. It's a different world out there, because a lot of those women are out there because they have to be.

The participants in this study shed light on the general needs that women in their situation may share by virtue of their common experience. The following is a list of guiding principles and are based on the interviews of the women who participated in this study. These guiding principles are aimed at helping the social work profession and other services providers working with this population be allies to those they are working with.

Guiding Principles

- Challenge existing assumptions about Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals who are involved in the sex trade by examining our own prejudices and beliefs about this population that perpetuates an exclusive subscription to a *victim and abuse* paradigm. This can be fostered by taking a perspective that appreciative of the qualities of resiliency as described throughout this document.
- Take a holistic perspective while working with this population with the knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultural traditions and values, with specific reference to their familial relationships and the notion of *interconnectedness*.
- Attempt to understand how these women make meaning of their familial relationships with an understanding that the dynamic lives of these individuals are far more complicated than might appear to be the case. Stated otherwise, do not assume that things are how they might appear on the surface.

- Provide culturally based programming in which the staff members and service providers are of Indigenous ancestry. If at all possible, have Indigenous women with pertinent experience assist in providing programming and services while contributing to the policy development process.
- Continue social advocacy work that addresses the current needs of Indigenous women who are involved in the sex trade. This includes a safe environment where they can access services that will assist them in exiting the sex trade.
- Further research should move away from the *victim and abuse* (Gorkoff and Runner, 2003) discourse surrounding Indigenous women involved in the sex trade. Research is needed that looks at the strengths and resiliency of this population and the protective factors that surrounds them, such as familial relationships.

Strengths and Limitations

My interest in interviewing youth participants, stemmed from my previous work as a social worker working with this population. Often the families of those who are involved in the sex trade are blamed for their involvement, reasons such as dysfunctional home life where sexual and/or physical abuse, domestic violence and substance abuse issues within the home exist (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003:20; Kingsley & Mark, 2000:12-13; UNYA, 2000:16-17). I wanted to challenge this narrow perspective and sought to focus on the positive familial aspects. Two of the participants identified experiencing or witnessed abuse and violence within their families. However, this did not deter them from the bonds that these women felt from their family members. For all of the women, in their

unique and individual contexts, these bonds helped them to seek a better life, make different choices and move towards their departure from the sex trade.

The women who participated in this study spoke positively and openly about how a mother, father or aunt had provided them with unconditional love and support, were non-judgmental when they called home to check-in or had given emotional support when they needed someone to talk to. And in Emily and Rose's situations, their families played an integral role in their decisions to leave the sex trade. These are the stories that are missing from the literature reviewed and were recorded in the process of this study.

Age played a significant role in this study as initially I viewed this as a limitation. Now that I have completed this study, I have come to understand that the age range of these women as a strength rather than a deterrent. The stories of Emily and Rose who were the oldest participants, (both of them are in their fifties) offered a maturity and gave their stories a deeper degree of insight into their experiences. Their ability to critically reflect on their lives, which was done with honesty and integrity, provided an insight that was present among the younger women. They viewed their life experiences from the vantage point of having *no regrets* (Emily) and finding meaning in a sense that it was their *destiny* (Rose). This is a topic that could generate a wealth of further studies, exploring factors related to development and maturity within this population.

The weakness of this study is the lack of representation of the voices of the youth, with respect to this topic, which was what I initially sought to present in this study. I return to Shaw and Butler's (1998) statement:

The relative absence of young people's own accounts of prostitution in the literature is a further indication of the relative powerlessness of children and young people to intrude their awareness and understanding of social phenomenon into adult consciousness, including that of researchers.

(Shaw & Butler, 1998, p. 181)

There are a number of studies about youth prostitution in which women over the age of eighteen were interviewed and asked to reflect on their experiences as youth (Gorkoff and Runner, 2003; Kramer and Berg, 2003; O'Neill, 2001; Wahab, 2004). As has been described, attempts were made to interview a younger population, but this proved to be prohibitively difficult. I allotted for as much time as I could during the recruitment stage and despite having everything necessary in place, the plan did not come to fruition. Sadly, their voices remain absent from the literature. Hopefully, future studies will be more successful in this regard as the stories that those of younger generations have to share need to be heard.

Another limitation extends from the fact that I originally intended to use storytelling as a methodology in order to hold true to my Indigenous Cree cultural belief system.

Unfortunately, due to the way in which I developed and posed the research questions, the stories followed more of a qualitative interview style and format, which proved to be

more suited to a narrative analysis. In four of the interviews I proceeded to ask the questions and the participants responded to each in turn answered. The exception to this was Emily. As I began to interview her, I informed her of what I was studying and she proceeded to freely describe on her experience in the sex trade and her life with her family. It was, for the most part, an unstructured and free flowing narrative. The other women appeared to feel more comfortable with a question and answer format.

Reflections

I have positioned my own subjective voice throughout the thesis itself as I came to see the process of preparing this document has become a part of my own story. There are stories within the stories and while some were told, others were not. Through this exploration, I wanted to challenge social workers, myself included, to reflect on their own values and beliefs around Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in the sex trade. The completion of this component of my MSW certainly caused my own values to be challenged and beliefs questioned.

Initially, I assumed that those involved in the sex trade are always forced, coerced, bullied or pimped into prostitution. While all too often this is the case, after listening to these women's stories, I came to better appreciate the fact that meeting basic needs and mere survival seemed to be behind this more than any other factor, which is related to societal pressures, economic violence and various forms of marginalization. This was somewhat surprising to me. I had some degree of insight into the realities of women who have found themselves in this situation as a consequence of my professional experience. After completing the interviews with these women, I feel that I have a much better

appreciation for the dynamics that contribute to their entry in the sex trade. Perhaps more importantly, I was able to clarify the relationship between these women's resiliency and the relationships that they maintain with their families. While on the surface, difficulties and obstacles may characterize many of the family systems that were discussed; the positive and supportive aspects of these relationships can be easily overlooked if the focus is solely on the negative.

These women's stories reflected the stories so many Indigenous families - stories of violence, sexism, oppression, marginalization, and more importantly of resilience. We, as Indigenous people, continue to struggle to overcome violence, racism, and the marginalizing oppression that arose as a result of colonialism. There is no shortage of tragic stories. There are even a few significant stories of major successes according to mainstream society's terms. My hope in setting out to undertake this study was neither to re-examine the lowest lows nor to highlight the highs.

Indigenous women who have experienced the sex trade are among the most marginalized in our society and their stories are among the most heartbreaking. Learning to see the relationship between family and resiliency allows for the "small victories" to be better appreciated. The five women that I interviewed have all lived through some of the most horrific experiences imaginable, yet they continue to live each day in the best way that they can. Perhaps this, in and of itself, should be seen as successful. After all, their ability to overcome the adversities they experienced has resulted in a resilience identity and it is a significant reason why they have been able to continue to survive. Other

stories of this kind are characterized by overcoming addiction and finding and exit out of the sex trade. It could be argued that *Emily* and *Rose* have become successful beyond anyone's expectations. Their successes might not be grandiose in nature. Their stories are of quiet triumph and yet nonetheless monumental. I wondered if those who knew these two women from their time on street would have predicted the course their lives have taken.

I return to the young women who originally inspired me to complete this study and in this light, I am hopeful for them as well. I am optimistic that this study has been able to highlight the strength, courage and wisdom that these women possess and that social workers who do not yet share this perspective will come to see them in the same way.

The subjugation, oppression, impoverishment and marginalization that these women face are not rightfully theirs alone. The burden must be shared. It is incumbent on us as a society to take responsibility for the conditions that allow for the tragedies to continue. As Mohandas K. Gandhi poignantly remarked, "poverty is the worst form of violence."

Conclusion

This study has been many things. Academically and personally I have come to understand the issues and experiences of those who are involved in the sex trade. I have been challenged by these women to think about my own assumptions about why they have entered the sex trade and what helped them leave it. As I had hoped, their stories taught me a great deal about their resiliency and their relationships with their families. I found was that although they described the dysfunctions that existed within these

relationships, there was another dimension that is equally worthy of consideration. I had an appreciation for this prior to conducting my study, given both my experience in professional practice and with my own intimate knowledge of Indigenous culture and family life. Beyond anecdote, I wanted to determine if this could be demonstrated through established research methods. Furthermore, this topic was not something that was readily in the body of available research literature. The often-ignored “other side” of this issue was the strength; support and unconditional love that various members of their families were able to provide for them, and greatly contribute to their resiliency and can foster an ability to make changes within their lives. In some sense, their connection to family allowed them to be their own persons, to have their own agency – despite the choices that they were making.

One of the biggest challenges the women faced was their desire to exit the sex trade while certain members of their families or significant people in their lives were unwilling to let their past actions remain in the past. After working in the field of social work, I can recall co-workers who struggled to move past the label that was ascribed to them as they read their case history. I too fell into labelling the individual based on what I read, rather than getting to know them first. After talking with the five women I interviewed, I realize that their actions are only one aspect of who they really are. I did not intend this study to be about identity; I had anticipated it to be about families and familial relationships. As I came to learn, the two are so closely related in the context of Indigenous culture that it was indeed about both.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your family?

Prompt Questions:

A. How many people are in your family?

B. Where is your family from?

2. What does your family mean to you?

A. Why are they important to you?

3. How did you come to be involved in the sex trade?

A. How long have you been involved?

B. How did your family learn you were involved? And what did they do or say about your involvement?

4. Is there someone in your family who supports you when you are having a difficult time?

A. How do they (your family) help you?

B. What makes you strong?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

My Life is My Ceremony: Indigenous Women of the Sex Trade Share Stories about their Families and their Resiliency

Thank-you for agreeing to meet with me, my name is Sherri Pooyak, I am from Sweetgrass Indigenous, in Saskatchewan. I am currently doing my Master's degree with the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia. This research project is part of the requirements for my degree and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Leslie Brown. If you have any questions or concerns about this project you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Brown at (250) 721-6275 or myself at (250) 886-8744.

I would like you to participate in this study which looks at how you understand your family as a Indigenous young person, as someone who has had involvement in the sex trade.

The purpose of this research project is to gain *an understanding of the relationship between Indigenous youth who have had involvement in the sex trade and their family members. Secondly, it is to gain an understanding as to how these relationships have contributed to their resiliency.* Resiliency can be described as factors or things which have helped you get through difficult times, such as family member or members, a friend or believing in your culture. I am interested in hearing, in your own words, your stories about how you understand your family and how your family has given you strength when

times have been difficult. It is an opportunity to talk about your family from your perspective, to talk about how you understand them and to share with the outside world what your family means to you. As a Cree woman from Sweetgrass, Saskatchewan and having worked extensively with youth, this topic is of great personal interest in me.

The types of questions I will be asking are about your relationship with your family, such as the number of family members, where they live, what they mean to you and if there is someone that has given you support during a difficult time. I will be asking you about your previous involvement in the sex trade and how you got involved and for how long you were involved.

I realize that some of the questions may be difficult for you and if you want to stop the interview we will. It is your choice to be involved in the study and can withdraw from the study at anytime and I will respectfully follow your wishes and privacy. It is also important for you to know that you do not have to answer question(s) that you do not want to. Should you choose to withdraw you will still receive the gifts I am offering and this will in no way influence you time at Red Willow or the services you are being offered. In regards to the information I have collected from our interview, it is your decision to decide whether or not I can use the information from the interview this would include information we have talked about prior to, during and after the interview is completed. For example if you decide to withdraw I will ask you if can/cannot use the information I have collected up to that point. This decision is yours to make. If you allow me to use the data I have collected (up to that point) then we will amend this consent

form to indicate that you are or are not allowing me to use the data. I will provide you and your parent/guardian a copy of the amended consent form in the instance where you have opted out of the study. All aspects of this project are voluntary.

As we will be talking about some personal things, there is a chance you may experience emotional or psychological discomfort, as there may be tension or on-going conflict with family members. I will assist you in seeking support from the staff member/ contact person, to talk with an Elder or with a trusted adult if this occurs. I will also give you a list of free agencies within Saskatoon to which you can access counselling or support in case you need it and will be available to assist you in accessing these services.

This tape recorded interview will take approximately one hour and I realize that this may be an inconvenience for you. I would like to honour Indigenous traditional protocol by offering a gift of sweetgrass, blanket and \$20.00 as a thank-you for your participation in this project.

All information will be kept confidential and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor. One exception is if you reveal information that must be disclosed by law. You need to know that under the law, if you tell me about past or current and potential child abuse, harm to self or others, and crime, I am legally bound by duty to report this information to the appropriate authorities (city police and child and protective services).

Your anonymity will be protected and will be replaced with an alias for both the interview and when I write out the interview. Any other identifying information will be removed from the written out interview. You need to know that your identity may be compromised in two ways: 1) the liaison person will know you may be participating in this study 2) if you tell your peers you may be participating in this study. The liaison person has signed a confidentiality agreement so they will not tell anyone that you may be participating in this study. If I knew you from before (from my job) I will have to kindly decline your willingness to participate in order to respect our previous relationship.

All data (written part of the interview) from this study will be used to complete my thesis. A copy of the thesis will also be given to: The Government of Saskatchewan (Red Willow Center). Once the research study is completed all of the data will be erased from my computer and any paper (such as notes taken during the interview and copies of the consent forms) will be shredded.

This project has been approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee (See copy of approval form). Should you wish to further verify the authenticity of the research project, please call Dr. Richard Keeler, Associate Vice-President Research, University of Victoria (250) 472-4545.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Yes, I am willing to participate in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signed	Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix C

Parental Consent Form

My Life is My Ceremony: Indigenous Women of the Sex Trade Share Stories about their Families and their Resiliency

Thank-you for agreeing to meet with me, my name is Sherri Pooyak; I am from Sweetgrass Indigenous, in Saskatchewan. I am currently doing my Master's degree with the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia. This research project is part of the requirements for my degree and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Leslie Brown. If you have any questions or concerns about this project you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Brown at (250) 721-6275 or myself at (250) 886-8744.

I am requesting your child to participate in a study which looks at how Indigenous youth who have had involvement in the sex trade understand family and how their families have contributed to their resiliency.

The purpose of this research project is to gain *an understanding of the relationship between Indigenous youth who have had involvement in the sex trade and their family members. Secondly, it is to understand how these relationships contribute to their resiliency.* I am interested in hearing, the stories your child has about how they understand family. It is an opportunity for them to talk about their family from their perspective, to talk about how they understand them and to share with the outside world

what their family means to them. As a Cree woman from Sweetgrass, Saskatchewan and having worked extensively with youth, this topic is of great personal interest in me.

As we (your child and I) will be talking about some personal things, there is a chance they may experience emotional or psychological discomfort, as there may tension or on-going conflict with family members. The types of questions I will be asking are in regards to the kind of relationship your child has with their family, questions such as the number of family members they have, where they live, what do they mean to them and if there is someone in their family which have played a significant role during a difficult time(s). I will be asking your child about their previous involvement in the sex trade and how they got involved and how long they were involved for. If you would like I can provide you a copy of the questions I will be asking. I will be available to assist them in seeking support from the staff member/ contact person or an Elder. I will also provide them a list of free agencies within Saskatoon to which they can access counselling or support in case they need it and will be available to assist them in accessing these services.

I will be tape recording the interview which will take approximately one hour. I will be honouring them with a gift, as per Indigenous traditional protocol a gift of sweetgrass, blanket and \$20.00 as a thank-you for their participation in this project.

All information will be kept confidential and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor. One exception is if your child reveals information that must be disclosed by law such as past or current and potential child abuse, harm to self or others, and crime, I

am legally bound by duty to report this information to the appropriate authorities (City Police and child and protective services).

Their anonymity will be protected and will be replaced with an alias for both the interview and when I write out the interview. Any other identifying information will be removed from the written out interview. I will be informing that their identity may be compromised in two ways: 1) the liaison person will know that they may be participating in this study 2) if they tell their peers they may be participating in this study. The liaison person has signed a confidentiality agreement so they will not tell anyone of your child's participation in this study. If I have known your child from before (from my job) I will have to kindly decline their willingness to participate in order to respect our previous relationship.

Your child's involvement is completely voluntary and will be given the choice to participate or not in the study. Your child also has the choice to end their participation in the study at any time. Should your child choose to end their participation this will no way affect the services they are receiving at Red Willow in any way. I will discuss with her whether or not I can/cannot use the data I have collected during the process of this study, including during the interview process should they decide to withdraw during this point. If they consent to me using the data up to that point I will amend the consent from to reflect their decision and provide you and your child a copy of the form. They may find some or all aspects the questions difficulty they will be can choose to end the interview. Your child will can decide as to whether or not they want to continue the

interview and I will respectfully follow their wishes and privacy. It is also their decision as to whether or not I can use the information from the interview. Just so you know your child does not have to answer question(s) that they do not want to. All aspects of this project are voluntary.

All data (written part of the interview) from this study will be used to complete my thesis. A copy of the thesis will also be given to: The Government of Saskatchewan (Red Willow Center). Once the research study is completed all of the data will be erased from my computer and any paper (such as notes taken during the interview and copies of the consent forms) will be shredded.

This project has been approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee (See copy of approval form). Should you wish to further verify the authenticity of the research project, please call Dr. Richard Keeler, Associate Vice-President Research, University of Victoria (250) 472-4545.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Yes, I am willing to participate in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant's Parent	Signed	Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D

Letter of Information

I will read this letter to each potential participant and allot time periodically for her to ask questions, for me to offer explanations (if she doesn't understand something).

The purpose of this study consists of two parts; 1) to gain an understanding of the relationship between Indigenous female youth who have had involvement in the sex trade and their family members and, 2) to gain an understanding as to how these relationships have contributed to their resiliency. Resiliency can be described as things in your life which have helped you get through difficult times, such as family member or members, a friend or believing in your culture.

I would like you to participate in this study which looks at how you understand your family as a Indigenous person, as someone who has had previous involvement in the sex trade and how your family has helped you to deal with life's difficult situations. It is an opportunity to talk about your family from your perspective, to talk about how you understand them and to share with the outside world what your family means to you.

There are some things you need to know, if you agree to participate: feelings of embarrassment, sadness, angry, or any other emotion which you can't explain because of the interview, you can choose to stop the interview, at which time I will encourage and assist you in seeking support from the liaison/contact person, Elder once the interview is over. Also, if you decide not to participate or wish to withdraw from the project, your

decision will not affect your stay or treatment plan at Red Willow. Here is a list of free places that will help you if you need it once we are done the interview. I am available to help you, if you would like.

I will be asking you about how your family helped you to be strong. Some of the things I will be asking are: the number of family members you have; where they live, what they mean to you and if there is someone that has given you support during a difficult time. I will be asking you about your previous involvement in the sex trade and how you got involved and for how long you were involved. I know that some of the questions may be difficult for you and if at some point you want to stop the interview we will. It is up to if you want to continue. I will respectfully follow your decision and privacy. You can decide as to whether or not what is to be done with the data, for example if you want me not to use (then it will be destroyed) or I am allowed to the information we talked about. Once my paper is completed, all the information will be kept in locked storage for 5 years and then destroyed by erasing it from my computer or shredding it. If at any point during the interview you do not want to answer a question, you don't have to. This project is voluntary, meaning you don't have to do it if you don't want to.

I will be audio recording our interview. Take as much time as you need. I can tell you it may take an hour or more. It is up to you. I realize that this amount of time may be an inconvenience for you.

You will be given a gift of sweetgrass, blanket and \$20.00 as a thank-you for you talking with me.

All information will be kept confidential, viewed only by the research team, Sherri Pooyak and my supervisors, Leslie Brown and Caroline Tait. The only exception is if you reveal information that must be disclosed by law.

If you tell me about past or current and potential child abuse, harm to self or others, and crime, I am legally bound by duty to report this information to the appropriate authorities (City Police and child and protective services).

No one will know who you are. I will be asking you to give me a 'fake' name, which will be used when I write out our conversation and in my paper. You need to know that your identity may be compromised in two ways: 1) Jean knows and 2) if you tell your friends you talked with me. Jean has signed a letter, which means she can't tell anyone you talked with me.

It is important to note that I was a staff member of Red Willow from 1999-2004 and if I have known you from my work at Red Willow or have met you in relation to this position as a social worker, I will have to kindly decline your willingness to participate in order to respect our previous relationship.

If you have any questions you can ask:

Caroline Tait at 966-2997
or by mail at Department of Women's
and Gender Studies
University of Saskatchewan
9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5

Steven E. Franklin: Vice-President
Research at 966-8514
Office of the Vice-President Research
University of Saskatchewan
Room 302 Kirk Hall
117 Science Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8

Appendix E

Letter of Confidentiality

This is a letter to ensure that the identity of the participants of this study will be protected.

As a liaison/contact person for the research study, which is being conducted by Sherri Pooyak (University of Victoria, MSW Student) entitled: *My Life is My Ceremony: Indigenous Women of the Sex Trade Share Stories about their Families and their Resiliency*

By signing this document you are agreeing to protect the identity of the research participant and will not inform any person, other than the parent/guardian of the participant, of their involvement in this study.

Name of Liaison/Contact Person

Date

Appendix F

Counselling and Support Services

EGADZ Youth Center: 931-6644 Cell: 221-3719

Safe House: 384-0004

Kid's Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Crisis Line: 933-6020

Sexual Assault Center: 244-2224

Crisis Nursery: 242-2433

Catholic Family Services: 244-7773

Victim Services: 975-8400

Tamara's House: 683-8667

Appendix G

Do you want to talk about your family?

My name is Sherri Pooyak and I am currently going to university to study the following:

1. How Indigenous women involved in the sex trade understand their families.
2. How their families have given them strength.

If you are interested in volunteering for my study please see (contact person's name) for more information or questions.

- ❖ In order to participate, you must meet all 4 of the following: be

Indigenous (including Métis), female, over the age of 18, please see contact person for the last criteria.

- ❖ There will be approximately a 1 hour interview.
- ❖ Participation is voluntary.
- ❖ All information about your participation will be kept confidential and your anonymity will be protected.
- ❖ There are some risks involved if you decide to participate. The contact person will be able to tell you what these risks are and answer any questions you may have.