

Local Entertainers in Cebu, Philippines

Entertainment and Sex Work: The Struggle for Empowerment



Judith Loyzaga Skoglund

University of Gothenburg, School of Global Studies

Bachelor Thesis in Global Studies

Spring Semester 2014

Tutor: Susanne Åsman



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine why local women in Cebu, Philippines, chose to work as entertainers and sex workers. It will examine how their occupation affect their daily lives, in regard to their economy and their social relations with their families, colleagues and customers. In addition, the thesis also examines what social and economic factors can be pinpointed, that lead these women to take up the entertainer occupation, rather than seeking other types of work in the Philippines.

For this research, a qualitative method was used, with semi-structured interviews that was conducted during my field studies in the Philippines over four weeks in the spring of 2014. The interviews was done with 13 local women working as entertainers. Additionally, a short participant observation also took place in local bars and clubs where the women were working in Cebu. The results have been analyzed from a feminist standpoint theory, with focus on liberal and radical feminist perspectives.

Due to poverty and unemployment in the Philippines, many women (and men), find it hard to acquire a sufficient livelihood to provide for the needs of themselves and their family. The conclusion of the thesis is that, for these specific women, the choice of working as entertainers is a pragmatic and rational choice. By taking on work as an entertainer, they are able to not only empower themselves, but also the people around them.

Keywords:

Philippines, entertainer, empowerment, pragmatism, stigmatization, sex worker, prostitution

Preface

Initially, I want to thank all of the women who participated in the interviews. They have all been very open-hearted and frank, and even though I was a stranger to them, I never really felt like one. Many of these women live in adversity and are in constant struggle to cope with their lives in terms of economic survival.

I sincerely hope this work can do their stories justice, and I am grateful for the insight they have provided me with. What I have learned from conducting these interviews reaches far beyond the empirical knowledge that will be treated in this thesis. The lessons I have learned will hopefully enlighten me in my desire to integrate epistemology and empirical knowledge.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
1.2. Aim	7
1.3. Question formulation	7
2. Background.....	8
2.1 Colonialism and prostitution in the Philippines.....	8
2.2 Poverty in the Philippines	9
2.3 Prostitution laws in the Philippines.....	10
3. Previous studies on Entertainers and Sex Work	12
4. Theoretical Framework.....	14
5. The Research Context and Methodology.....	18
5.1 Internal Validity / Credibility.....	18
5.1.1 Pre-understanding	18
5.1.2 Data Collection	19
5.2 External Validity, Generalizability / Transferability	20
5.3 Reliability / Dependability.....	21
5.3.1. External Reliability / Replicability	22
5.4 Ethical Considerations	22
5.5 Demarcations	23
6. Result and Analysis.....	24
6.1 Poverty	25
6.2 Empowerment.....	26
6.3 Pragmatism	30
6.4 Relations	32
6.4.1. Partners	32
6.4.2. Family	33
6.4.3. Colleagues.....	35
6.4.4. Employers	36
6.5 Stigmatization	38
6.6 Entertainers, their customers and sex work	39
7. Conclusion	43
References:.....	46

1. Introduction

Working as an entertainer probably means different things to different people, depending on where you live and where you come from. Depending on the context you are in, entertaining can be multifaceted. Therefore, to begin with, there need to be a clarification for what the word “entertainer” actually means in this research. The word entertainer means, in a simple form, a person who entertain others, like singers, dancers or comedians. However, in this study, we will focus on entertainers as a pseudonym for hostesses or bar girls, since this is what they are called in the Philippines. The entertainers work in this case is to provide company (and in many, but not all cases, sexual services) for customers, with the aim of encouraging them to spend more money at the bar or club. This is done by the costumers buying “ladies drinks” for the entertainers. To keep the customers happy and satisfied, the entertainers are supposed to please their customers in several ways. They dance and sing for the customers. They feed them with their bare hands, and they socialize. And sometimes they sell their body for money.

People who are involved in this kind of work are often stigmatized and marginalized. Most articles, discourses, research and feminist approaches describes a dark and sordid world for the women involved in sex work and entertainment. Numerous researchers have targeted on Asian women migrant workers, mail-order brides, military-related prostitution and sex-tourism globally.¹ It often describes the negative impact for the individuals employed in the business, with a focus on sex-tourism and its dark sides. Entertainers and sex workers are indeed exposed to dangers, and rights of sex workers are constantly violated in most parts of the world, and should of course not be diminished.

But instead of seeing these women as victims only, there is also the option to look at their occupation as a part of an instrument and strategy for survival for those individuals who have minimal, a few or non-existing options to seek other types of work. There are a lot of negative aspects with the sex industry, but by taking on work as an entertainer, many women also get the possibility to strengthen their agency in society. Instead of being a second class citizen because of their gender, the women might even become breadwinners for their family. Many times, people who are involved in the sex industry get stigmatized in society. However, in some cases they are also able to earn more money than their fellow Filipinas in a society where poverty is extensive. By doing so, the monetary value becomes a tool to benefit others, and for their family or relatives, they

¹ Tyner, James A (1996). *Constructions of Filipina Migrant Entertainers*, p.78-81

could become someone to look up to, a sort of a “heroine”. Instead of stigmatization, they could even be able to gain respect and status in society.² In a country as Philippines, 100 million individuals are constantly competing on the, in many cases, underpaid labour market. To objectify and see the people working as entertainers as merely victims, is not to do them justice.

Is it possible for a women to make a rational choice based on pragmatic and careful consideration when selling her body, and how much does the context they live in influence their choices and decisions when trying to find job opportunities? Can something that seems irrational for people in the western world, in fact be rational in other parts of the world?

This research will try to understand the issue with as little prejudices as possible, and maybe provide a new insight and comprehension to why these individuals commit to such kind of work. It will also attempt to scrutinize the subject on a domestic level in the City of Cebu, Philippines, rather than on an international level with migration in focus, as so much research has done before.

² Yrasuegui, Magnolia & Priya Esselborn (2009). *Philippines: Women struggling to achieve sexual equality*

1.2. Aim

The aim of the thesis is to reveal why some women in Cebu, Philippines choose to work, or end up in the entertainer business. Furthermore, the thesis want to illuminate how their occupation influences their daily life in regard to their economy and their social relations with their families. We will also, partially, discuss the relationship between the women working as entertainers, and their colleagues, customers and employers.

1.3. Question Formulation

- *What social and economic factors can be pinpointed, that lead these women to take up the entertainer occupation, rather than seeking other types of work in the Philippines?*
- *What is the role, and experiences for the entertainers in relation to their families, male-counterparts and friends, such as colleagues, clients, cohabitants, husbands, relatives and children?*

2. Background

2.1 Colonialism and Prostitution in the Philippines

For hundreds of years, since the sixteenth century, the Philippines and the Filipino people have defended themselves against Spanish, Japanese and American colonizers.³ In the nineteenth century the Philippines saw a rapid population growth, possibly vitalized by the Spanish religious authorities. In the nineteenth century, the Philippines had 99 days of holidays and different saints-days, and idleness was imposed on the inhabitants for 151 days a year on religious grounds.

Meanwhile, “Spanish legalization of gambling as a source of revenue added to the inhabitants’ demoralization”, and poverty-stricken husbands were known to induce their wives or girlfriends to engage in prostitution. Most Spaniards and other foreigners at the time came to the Philippines alone, without their women and wives, and in many cases formed temporary or permanent alliances with native women. For the destitute Filipinas, meeting a Spanish could bring benefits.⁴ However, if the Spanish member of the colonial force was transferred somewhere else, or decided to end the relationship with their mistress, the woman was left destitute and without livelihood.⁵

In 1898, the US won the Spanish-American war, and became Philippines new colonizers. In 1899, the Philippine-American war broke out, and the US government “played a key role in suppressing peasant protest and upheavals” from the 1930's to the 1950's. As a result of the war, the Philippine population was left in destitution. The Philippines became independent in 1946, but the colonial influence of the US continued.⁶ Brothels have been present near US army encampments since the late nineteenth century, and prostitution was also present close to Philippine military barracks. Up to 70 000 Americans was encamped in Manila in 1900, and gave rise to new possibilities and opportunities for entrepreneurs and prostitutes alike.⁷ During the Vietnam War and onwards, a rest and recreation (R&R) industry developed close to the US military bases in Southeast Asia. The US army had the two largest bases outside American soil, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines, until they both closed in 1991 and 1992.⁸

The recreation industry for the US servicemen was to a large degree made up by prostitution. At its heyday, the area around the two bases was said to be the home of 100 000 registered and

³ Hilsdon, Anne-Marie (1995). *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and violence in the Philippines*, p. 86

⁴ Dery, Luis C. (1991). Prostitution in Colonial Manila, pp. 476-477

⁵ Ibid, p. 478

⁶ Kirk, G & C. B. Francis (2013). *Redefining Security: Women Challenge U.S. Military Policy and Practice in East Asia*, p. 237

⁷ Dery, Luis C. (1991). Prostitution in Colonial Manila, p.481

⁸ Hilsdon, Anne-Marie (1995). *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and violence in the Philippines*, , p. 96

unregistered prostitutes. The base tourism that developed came to be an important economic factor also for the Philippines, placing it on fifth place over the most important sources of income for the country at the time.⁹ There were several ways to attract new customers, and even though live sex shows had been banned, 'foxy boxing', where women box and wrestle with each other, was a popular entertainment for the soldiers. If the women did not draw blood or showed bruises, they did not get paid.¹⁰ One effect of the boxing show was that more women were taken out of the club by the customers. All female employees, bar girls, go-go dancers or entertainers, would earn money by letting costumers buy the women drinks, or by dancing for them in the club. However, if they wanted to earn some real money, the only way was if the customer paid a bar fine to the owner (who in almost all cases was a foreigner). By doing so, he could take the entertainer out of the club and use her sexually.¹¹ According to the feminist Kathleen Barry, prostitution was being industrialized in the Philippines. The sex industry in the Philippines was set in motion by the military, and the sexual service that grew up around the U.S. Subic Naval Base and the Clark Air Force Base.¹²

2.2 Poverty in the Philippines

In a country with so much poverty as the Philippines, money is of course a very important aspect when you choose what kind of work you want, or need, to do. In her book "Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and violence in the Philippines", Anne-Marie Hilsdon explains that even though there is huge risk involved when working as a prostitute, many sex workers regard their work as 'a good job', since the pay is good as opposed to other types of jobs an unskilled worker can make in the Philippines.¹³ The average wage in the Philippines for a worker in the manufacturing sector was \$1.4 per hour according to International Labour Organizations (ILO) Global wage report of 2012-2013.¹⁴ The monthly average wage was \$279 (12 243 Philippine Pesos), placing Philippines in the bottom three countries out of the 72 countries listed in the ILO report.¹⁵ Many people are forced to survive on far less than the already low average wage. In Manila for example, three million people, a quarter of its total population, lives on a dollar a day.¹⁶ In her book *Poverty*, Ruth Lister mentions

⁹ Hilsdon, Anne-Marie (1995). *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and violence in the Philippines*, p. 97

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 99

¹¹ Ibid, p. 100

¹² Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*, p. 50

¹³ Hilsdon, Anne-Marie (1995). *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and violence in the Philippines*, p. 102

¹⁴ Conditions of work and Employment Branch (2012). *Global Wage Report 2012/2013: Wages and Equitable Growth*

¹⁵ Agbayani, Apa M. (2012). *PH at bottom 3 of 'world's wages'*

¹⁶ South China Morning post (2013). *Manila's dark face of grinding poverty*

the 'feminization of poverty', and points out that "poverty all too often wears a female face".¹⁷ The solution to poverty, and the powerlessness associated with it, is 'empowerment'. Individual empowerment is important when it comes to making strategic life choices. However, Lister indicates that the word empowerment is a chameleon 'feel-good' term, and means different things to different people depending on the context they are in. Empowerment need, according to Lister, to be about citizen power and not consumer rights, where choice masquerades as power. If empowerment is limited to only a few individuals, the community as a whole might not benefit at all.¹⁸

According to the United Nations, some estimates say that women represent 70 percent of the world's poor.¹⁹ As a sex worker, the women are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, violence and social isolation. However, they also have far greater economic independence than unskilled and uneducated Filipina women working in factories.²⁰

2.3 Prostitution Laws in the Philippines

Profiting from sex work, which in the Philippines is defined as vagrancy, is illegal. Vagrancy, and soliciting for sex can give a penalty for sex workers for up to 30 days imprisonment, and six months for repeat offenders.²¹ The *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003* (also called Republic Act No. 9208) states that it is "an offence to recruit, transport, transfer, harbour, provide, or receive a person by any means for the purpose of prostitution, or to maintain or hire a person to engage in prostitution."²² According to The Code of Sanitation, which was published by the Department of Health in 1976, everyone working at a massage parlour need to have a health certificate issued by the local health authority.²³ Health insurance however, is usually not provided to the entertainers by the establishment they work in. Employers claim that sex work is commission-based, and they should therefore not be treated by the laws that govern regular employees.²⁴ Prostitution is illegal in the Philippines.

¹⁷ Lister, Ruth (2004). *Poverty*, pp. 55-56

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 173-174

¹⁹ United Nations for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Economic Empowerment*

²⁰ Hilsdon, Anne-Marie (1995). *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and violence in the Philippines*, p. 106

²¹ Godwin, John (2012). *Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific*, p. 147

²² The LAWPHiL Project (2003). Republic Act No. 9208

²³ Department of Health, Manila, Philippines (1976). *The Code on Sanitation of the Philippines*

²⁴ Godwin, John (2012). *Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific*, p. 152

Nevertheless, the government seem to have an ambiguous approach to prostitution. In *the Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 1998*, entertainment establishments are required to:²⁵

1. Make available and affordable prophylaxis (e.g. condoms) within the establishment and provide the proper guidelines on its correct and consistent use;
2. Have information material on STI/HIV/AIDS prevention and control available in the establishment and provide such information material when requested by customers, especially on guidance on the correct and consistent use of condoms;
3. Make IEC posters visible within their premises particularly in comfort rooms and dressing rooms
4. Have at least one trained peer educator.

In Cebu City, it is required of all establishments, hotels, motels, lodging houses and sauna to make condom use available, and to provide guidance on the correct and consistent use of condoms.

Entertainment establishments with no condoms are penalized.²⁶ Sex workers who are street-based are commonly charged for vagrancy offences. Sex workers in different establishments instead risk arrest when the police raids different establishments, conducted under the anti-trafficking law.²⁷

When discussing AIDS and laws concerning prostitution, it is worth to point out that United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) argues that criminalization of sex workers have failed to prevent HIV epidemics among sex workers and their clients. Instead, UNDP indicates “that the approach of defining sex work as legitimate labour empowers sex workers, increases their access to HIV and sexual health services and is associated with very high condom use rates”. By decriminalizing sex work and by treating it as a legitimate form of work, the exploitation of sex workers can be prevented according to the UNDP.²⁸

²⁵ Godwin, John (2012). *Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific*, p. 149

²⁶ Ibid, p. 149

²⁷ Ibid, p. 151

²⁸ Ibid, p. 28

3. Previous Studies on Entertainers and Sex Work

In the following section we will examine previous studies related to the thesis question formulation and the entertainer industry. The different studies addresses the situation for women involved in sex work in different parts of the world, in addition to Filipina women working as entertainers in the Philippines and as migrants abroad.

According to Sherlyne A. Almonte, the author of *The Plight of Filipino Women in Japan: Limitations and Challenges for the Philippine Education*, the entertainers primary reason to take up the occupation was because of the Philippine government's deficiency in provision and management of making policies to develop adequate living standards, and to develop enough employment possibilities for people in the country. The majority of Filipina entertainers in Japan were generally motivated by the sense of concern for the welfare of their families, and for economic and social mobility. High expectation of remittances from the family back home in many cases made the women decide to migrate and work as entertainers. Unemployment and low wages in the Philippines has also driven women to travel and work abroad rather than staying and trying to find an employment in their home country.²⁹

When Adrian Franklin talks about sex workers in Thailand, in the book *Tourism: An introduction*, he describes how a large portion of the bar girls and sex workers choose their occupation on a voluntary basis. They prefer it to other forms of work because of the lifestyle it brings. They get to eat at good restaurants, and they are bought fine clothes and gifts. They also get to stay for a long time at the luxury hotels and the exciting touristic centres. When Franklin describes the sex workers in Thailand, he explains how many of them earn more money than they would have done otherwise.

By this, they become “to a degree, independent free agents”.³⁰

Empowerment is also important in the stories of the women working as sex workers in the red light district of Dalian in Northeast China. According to Tiantian Zheng, who conducted a participant observation in Dalian, noticed that the women had conflicting feelings about their work. They felt wearied because of their work in the city, but when they visited their rural homes, the feelings were different. Tiantian explains that when they were confronted with the harsh reality of rural living, they were able to rationalize their decision, which encouraged them to feel pride about their work in Dalian, and the wealth they had obtained. One of the respondents said that “at least my life is better

²⁹Almonte, Sherlyne A. (2001). *The Plight of Filipino Women in Japan: Limitations and Challenges for the Philippine Education*, p.160

³⁰Franklin, Adrian (2003). *Tourism: An introduction*, pp. 262-263

than theirs”.³¹ According to one of the women, it is better to work as a hostess than stagnating in the countryside. When comparing the work as hostesses and the livelihood of women their age in the rural areas, they also “feel some contentment with their choice of the city”. Another reason for the ambivalence about rural home town is that despite of supporting their families, they only got despised in return. Their family was willing to take their money, but did not show any respect in return. The money and remittance the sex workers sent home made their families among the richest in their home villages. They paid debts that the family had, paid for siblings wedding ceremony, and also gave start-up capital to relatives so they could open a vending stall.³²

Denise Brennan, who visited sex workers in the Dominican, explains that they were not working as sex workers as a survival strategy only, but also as an advancement strategy. By selling sex, the women are able to earn much more money than they would otherwise have, if they worked in the ordinary Dominican export-processing zones or with domestic services. Working in the domestic service yields less than 1000 Dominican pesos a month in average, while sex workers are able to charge 500 pesos for every encounter with their clients. And their customers was not seen as clients only, but as potential springboard to marriage and migration of the island. With marriage comes a way to leave poverty behind, even if leaving poverty was not the only reason sex workers wanted to meet a foreigner. Marriage with a foreigner can also be a way for the Dominican women involved in sex work to reach greater gender equity than they can hope for with Dominican men, according to Brennan.³³

In the Philippines, it is estimated that there is about 800,000 prostitutes. The sex industry is the country’s fourth largest contributor to the gross national product. Even though prostitution is illicit in the country, the Philippine authorities turns a blind eye to the industry in many cases. With a constantly rising foreign debt, the more than 150 million dollars that women send back home to families every year is a welcome addition to the economy, as well as the profit from selling licenses to clubs and the tax revenues they provide.³⁴ In ILO:s publication *Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia* from 1998, they refer to a report published by the Geneva-based International Labour Office, that points out that the sex business in Southeast Asia has “assumed the dimensions of a commercial sector”, which “contributes substantially to employment and national income in the region”.³⁵

³¹ Zheng, Tiantian (2009). *Red Lights: The lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China*, p. 155

³² Ibid, p. 156

³³ Brennan, Denise (2002). *Selling Sex for Visas*, pp. 154-157

³⁴ Yrasuegui, Magnolia & Esselborn, Priya (2009). *Philippines: Women struggling to achieve sexual equality*

³⁵ International Labour Organization (1998). *Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia*

4. Theoretical Framework

For this research, a theoretical framework with a feminist perspective is necessary to understand the women working as entertainers. However, there are several different orientations and traditions that make up the broad theory of feminism, for example:

Liberal, radical, Marxist, third world, post-colonial, cultural and eco-feminism.

As Joey Sprague points out, feminists are a heterogeneous group and have disagreements on various subjects. But on the other hand, there are two aspects that intertwine divergent standpoints of feminists, which is *gender* and that *understanding how things work is not enough*. For Sprague, it is necessary to take an active position in order to make a progressive social change in an effort to create a more equitable world.³⁶ One area where feminists disagree is on the subject of prostitution, or sex work. Some feminists argue that prostitution is exploiting women and want to see it eradicated, while others claim that it might even be empowering women and demand reform rather than abolishment of prostitution. For this research it will be beneficial to analyze the issue with a perspective that uses parts from not only one feminist tradition, but a few. Still, the focus will be on liberal feminism and radical feminism, since these perspectives could be said to be in contrast to each other.

Liberal feminism argues that women working as sex workers can be seen as free agents and independent contractors, and not simply as victims. Freedom and autonomy is important ingredients in liberal feminism, and it rejects “unwarranted restrictions by others”.³⁷ The freedom liberal feminists’ talk about can in many cases be seen as freedom from prejudice or the bonds of customs, and also the freedom to pursue their legitimate economic interests.³⁸ The woman is seen as an agent of her own life, and she can autonomously choose to engage in sex work.³⁹ By treating sex workers as victims, they are dehumanized and seen as commodities without a free will. The pro-sex worker perspectives rejects the status of sex workers as victims, and the notion that sex workers are passive and naive actors in their own life-course.⁴⁰

Laura María Agustín is a feminist and sociologist who is critical of what she calls the “rescue industry”. Within a postcolonial framework she argues that the rescue industry consistently is

³⁶ Sprague, Joey (2005). *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, p. 3

³⁷ Beasley, Chris (1999). *What is Feminism? An introduction to feminist theory*, p. 51

³⁸ Ibid, p. 52

³⁹ Cavalieri, S (2011). *Between Victim and Agent: A Third-Way Feminist Account of Trafficking for Sex Work*, p. 1429

⁴⁰ Hayes, Sharon, Belinda Carpenter & Angela Dwyer (2012). *Sex, crime and morality*, p. 116

denying working-class women agency. Instead of treating sex workers as passive subjects, Laura argues that they could be seen as “normal people looking for conventional opportunities, conditions and pleasures, who may prefer to sell sex to their other options.”⁴¹ In the book *Sex at the margins*, Agustín points out that people who are involved in sex work are not easy to categorize. 'Migrant sex workers', 'prostituted women' or 'victims of trafficking' are categories that according to Agustín, are inappropriate to use on people “who desire to travel, see the world, make money and accept whatever jobs are available along the way”.⁴²

In line with Laura María Agustín, the feminist Kamala Kempadoo, who has investigated the global sex trade since the late 1980s, argues that the global sex trade is portrayed in only one dimension, and that sex workers are seen as victims of male sexual violence. Kempadoo rejects this notion, and requests a framework that “embraces the realities, contradictions, and intersections of various global relations of power”.⁴³ According to Kempadoo, sex work is often one of few options that “women of color” in a postcolonial society have to survive in a highly unequal distribution of wealth and power. Women involved in sex work are able to earn more money than women working in a less lucrative trade. Free Trade Zone work, domestic service, export processing, farm work and other hard manual labour do not pay as well as the sex trade does. By selling sex, the women can become the breadwinners. With the money earned from sex work, the women are able to buy clothes and food, pay bills and support their children’s education. They could also be able to purchase a plot of land. Kempadoo emphasize that where social services and pensions are non-existent or minimal, the possibility to buy land and build a house for elderly or unemployed family members is highly important. Sex workers also have the possibility of paying health bills, where in many developing countries, national public health care is expensive and out of reach for many poor people.⁴⁴

Sex workers who chose their occupation based on a rational choice should, from a liberal feminist lens, be helped by “legal reforms which protects women and minors from discriminatory and exploitative practices”. Instead of criminalizing sex workers, the states should prosecute pimps.⁴⁵ In liberal feminism, women are also in large the same as men, and should therefore be able to have the same rights and choice as men, instead of being denied opportunities just because of their gender.⁴⁶

Radical feminism can be seen as the opposite to liberal feminism when it comes to the view on sex work, or prostitution as they prefer to call it. In radical feminism, the oppression of women depends

⁴¹ Agustín, Laura María (2007). *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*, pp. 7-8

⁴² Ibid, p. 2

⁴³ Kempadoo, Kamala (2001). *Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade: Transnational Feminist Perspective*, p 28

⁴⁴ Ibid, p 33

⁴⁵ Truong, Thanh-Dam (1990). *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia*, p. 48

⁴⁶ Beasley, Chris (1999). *What is Feminism? An introduction to feminist theory*, p. 53

on their sex rather than on their social class or other groups they might belong to. In radical feminism, the focus is on women's similarities, and “one of the basic tenets of radical feminism is that any woman... has more in common with any other women – regardless of class, race, age, ethnic group, nationality – than any woman has with any man.”⁴⁷ Men are considered to have power over women, and inequality is derived from patriarchy, a social system of male supremacy.⁴⁸

The male supremacy is sustained by society’s failure to distinguish between positive sex, and sex that is exploiting women.⁴⁹ The radical feminist Kathleen Barry argues that all forms of commercial sexual activity should be classified as rape, to which no women can consent.⁵⁰ All sexual labour should therefore be treated as trafficking and in violation of women's rights, even if there is no coercion involved.⁵¹ According to a study done by Evelina Giobbe, 53 percent of the women interviewed was brought to prostitution by a pimp. In the whole world, estimates show that 80 to 95 percent of all women working in prostitution are controlled by a pimp.⁵²

Kathleen Barry, who also is the founder of Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), writes in her book *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, that “sexual exploitation objectifies women by reducing them to sex; sex that incites violence against women and that reduces women to commodities for market exchange”. Prostitution is, in the eye of a radical feminist, comparable to sexual slavery.⁵³ In *Female Sexual Slavery*, Barry points out the use of sex and sexuality as power to dominate, and as a condition of oppression. Prostitution is the cornerstone of all sexual exploitation, and women involved in prostitution are treated as expendables and throwaways.⁵⁴ Henceforth, sexual exploitation is the base from which all discrimination against women come from, and the foundations of women’s subordination.⁵⁵ Prostitution is therefore seen as a part of the male dominance over women. Barry also refers to the term “sex work” as a way to try and normalize prostitution. According to Barry, the term has been adopted out of despair in a desperate attempt to give dignity and respect to the women involved in prostitution.⁵⁶

In *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, Barry identifies four different stages of sexual exploitation: Trafficking in women, military prostitution, sex industrialization and the normalization of

⁴⁷ Beasley, Chris (1999). *What is Feminism? An introduction to feminist theory*, p. 54

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 55-56

⁴⁹ Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*, p. 57

⁵⁰ Cavalieri, S (2011). *Between Victim and Agent: A Third-Way Feminist Account of Trafficking for Sex Work*, p. 1419

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 1431

⁵² Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*, p. 198

⁵³ Ibid, p. 1

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 9

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 11

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 296

prostitution.⁵⁷ In the words of Julie Bindel, a journalist, feminist and political activist, prostitution is “the oldest oppression, not the oldest profession as often claimed by those who believe prostitution is too hard to eradicate”. Prostitution abolitionists argue that women who work as sex workers are stigmatized even if their work is legal or not, and that prostitution never can be safe.⁵⁸

According to the NGO Anti-Slavery International (ASI), prostitution should be redefined as sex work. The outcast status of sex workers denies them protection to abuse that other citizen, women and workers have. The sex worker then becomes vulnerable to exploitation because of its social exclusion, marginalization and stigmatization. ASI argues that a labour perspective is necessary for making sex work “a part of the mainstream debate on human, women's, and workers' rights at local, national and international level”.⁵⁹ Besides the recommendation from ASI to redefine prostitution as sex work, the word prostitution has historically inherited negative connotations. Therefore, this thesis will use the terminology sex worker instead of prostitution where it is suitable to avoid further stigmatization.

⁵⁷ Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*, p. 50

⁵⁸ Bindel, Julie (2006). *Eradicate the oldest oppression*

⁵⁹ Bindman, Jo (1997) Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda, p. 4-5

5. The Research Context and Methodology

Reliability and validity are important factors for quantitative research. However, its importance has been debated when it comes to qualitative research, and some writers argue that the meaning of the terms need to be altered when discussing qualitative research. According to Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, there are two alternative criteria that can be used to describe a qualitative research's reliability and validity, which is *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*.

Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria. *Credibility*, which parallels *internal validity* in quantitative research. *Transferability*, which parallels *external validity*, *dependability* which parallels *reliability*, and *conformability*, which parallels *objectivity*. Guba and Lincoln is critical of the view that there are "absolute truths" about the social world, and they argue that in qualitative research, there can be more than one "truths", and possibly even several accounts.⁶⁰ In the research context and methodology chapter, we will therefore use both the traditional criteria and the alternative criteria for judging qualitative research. However, the impact of authenticity (which is defined by *fairness*, and *ontological*, *educative* and *catalytic authenticity*) on research is controversial, and have not been very influential. Hence, for this thesis, we will only focus on the criteria trustworthiness and the traditional criteria of reliability and validity.

5.1 Internal Validity / Credibility

5.1.1 Pre-understanding

There are three significant components that make up an actor's pre-understanding, which are language and definition, personal experience and beliefs and notion.⁶¹ As humans, we never look upon the world impartially. Pre-understanding is necessary to comprehend different context. In this regard, it is worth to point out that I have my origins in the Philippines, but moved to Sweden in 1996, almost 20 years old. The language spoken, which is called *Binisaya* or *Cebuano*, and *Tagalog*, was therefore not a hindrance since it is my native language. This was an advantage to me in understanding the respondents better, and maybe it might also have helped me to earn their trust easier.

My pre-understanding of the Filipino society have also assisted me to interpret the respondents' life situation and circumstances better. However, an actor's pre-understanding is also revisable and can change when the actor gets new experiences from the world around her. If the pre-understanding

⁶⁰Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, p. 377

⁶¹Gilje, Nils & Harald Grimen (2007). *Samhällsvetenskapernas förutsättningar*, pp. 180-183

was not revisable, mutual understanding between humans would be impossible.⁶²

5.1.2 Data Collection

When collecting data, insider researchers may gather more complete data than outsiders. Respondents might see an insider of their own race or gender (as myself), as more trustworthy than they would have with an outsider. Insiders are also likely to get more valid data, since respondents might feel more at ease revealing information to someone from their own context and culture. When it comes to Western scholars, it is possible that they “have generated knowledge that, however unintentionally, legitimates Western domination over other countries.”⁶³ However, it is worth to point out that I too could be considered an outsider in the entertainer industry, in the eyes of the respondents, and because I have spent half of my life in a Western society. Inside researchers also report that when doing research in their communities, they are expected, due to their loyalty, to analyze the situation uncritically since they share membership with the community and the respondents.⁶⁴

For this research an in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview strategy was elected. It was held on a micro-level with thirteen individuals within the local population of the City of Cebu, Philippines. The research has a lot to gain from a qualitative method rather than a quantitative approach. Since it is hard beforehand to know exactly who is going to be interviewed, and from what conditions the interviewees will come from, the quantitative method would not have been appropriate for this research. However, the unpredictable nature and diverse aspects of qualitative research normally tends to be unorganized. It demands that the investigator uses “his or her experience and imagination to find (or fashion) a match for the patterns evidenced by the data”.⁶⁵

Semi-structured interviewing is also an important method of data collection within a feminist research framework. By conducting a semi-structured interview, where the women interviewed also are able to ask the interviewer questions if they want to, the relationship between the interviewer and the respondents becomes a non-hierarchical relationship, or at least a less hierarchical one.⁶⁶

⁶² Gilje, Nils & Harald Grimen (2007). *Samhällsvetenskapernas förutsättningar*, p. 184

⁶³ Sprague, Joey (2005). *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, pp. 63-64

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 64

⁶⁵ McCracken, Grant (1988). *The Long Interview*, pp. 16-19

⁶⁶ Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, p. 463

The women are, in this method, able to express their thoughts in their own way, without the interviewer influencing their ideas and thoughts.⁶⁷

All interviews (except one) was recorded on a hand-held audio recorder aside from taking notes with pen and paper. By recording the interviews, taking notes, and conducting an observation as a sort of triangulation, the credibility (internal validity) of the research's method is increased. Also, a short-time participant observation where you "hang around" and "soak and poke", to use the words of Richard Fennos, was conducted to accumulate a better understanding of the context that these women work and live in, and to reduce any misleading preconceived notions one might have as an observer.⁶⁸

McCracken speaks about the importance of 'manufacturing distance' for investigators who do research in their own culture, to avoid "assumptions that can create a treacherous sense of familiarity".⁶⁹ The classic, but in most cases not practical method according to McCracken, is to go off to another culture for an extended period of time, and then return to one's own culture.⁷⁰ The 18 years I have been living in Sweden since my departure from the Philippines, is indeed an extended period of time, and might have helped to apprehend the Filipino way of life in a nuanced way.

Nevertheless, since the participant observation that took place only lasted for four days (or four nights to be exact, but in three different bar and clubs), the thesis will use the observations only as a secondary complement to the interviews, which will be the primary source of empirical data for this thesis.

The interviews have been conducted in three different languages, English, Cebuano and Tagalog. Interviews done in Cebuano or Tagalog have been transcribed in original texts, and later translated to English. The respondents also used different aliases as work names. However, none of their real names or aliases will be used in the result chapter. As a source protection, they will be called respondent 1, respondent 2 etc.

5.2 External Validity, Generalizability / Transferability

External validity might be a hard criterion to meet in qualitative research. It is impossible to 'freeze' the context in which the interviews and observations was conducted, making the study hard to

⁶⁷ Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, p. 464

⁶⁸ Esaiasson, Peter, M.Gilljam, H.Oscarsson & L.Wängnerud (2012). *Metodpraktikan*, p. 303

⁶⁹ McCracken, Grant (1988). *The Long Interview*, p. 22

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 23

replicate.⁷¹ Hence, with a qualitative approach, the main aim of this research is to let the respondents tell their story, and the thesis does *not* claim to be able to do any larger generalizations of how entertainers, sex workers or Filipina women have it in general. The observations done for this research and presented in the paper cannot be used to draw generalizations of how the rest of the world, or other parts of Asia or Philippines for example, works. The qualitative method is instead used to capture and discover how the respondent sees and experiences the world.⁷² Although it *might* be possible to generalize about Filipina entertainers in general, based on the study findings of this research, this paper will try to show what the *interviewed women* think about *their own work* as entertainers, not what other women working as entertainers, or with other types of work, think about it.⁷³ In the words of McCracken, “qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it”.⁷⁴ To increase the transferability of a qualitative research, a “thick description” with rich accounts of the details of a culture is preferred.⁷⁵ However, to be able to generalize about entertainer and/or sex workers in a larger perspective, a quantitative method would probably also be needed, and it is not the aim of this thesis.

5.2.1. Ecological Validity

The interviews was done at several different places, but the ecological validity can be said to be reasonable high since they were conducted in “natural settings” for the respondents, in their own homes or at their work in clubs and bars (but of course in private). If interviews are carried out in unnatural settings, such as laboratories or special rooms, it is more likely that the findings will be ecologically invalid. The semi-structured interview, with follow up questions rather than pre-made, where the women were able to talk freely in their “natural environment”, also helps to keep the ecological validity high. However, answering intimate questions from a stranger can in itself contains an inherent unnaturalness which can affect the ecological validity.⁷⁶

5.3 Reliability / Dependability

To make this empirical method possible the study initially took help from of a woman I know from my childhood in the Philippines. She helped to established and set-up contact with entertainers in Cebu, before I left Sweden for my fieldwork. She is someone who has worked as an entertainer

⁷¹ Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, p. 376

⁷² McCracken, Grant (1988). *The Long Interview*, p. 21, 65

⁷³ Ibid, p. 49

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 17

⁷⁵ Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, p. 378

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 33

herself, and she helped out with different contacts in the beginning. She is however no longer in the business, and was only contacted during the first days of the 30 days total spent in the Philippines, and was not around during the interviews or participant observations. Taking initial help from this woman will therefore, in this sense, not break Grant McCracken's thumb rule of using respondents that are "perfect strangers". However, McCracken explains that the term "perfect strangers" means that the respondents should be "unknown to the interviewer and other respondents". A few of the respondents did know each other, and can therefore not be said to be "perfect strangers".⁷⁷ In some cases, new respondents were found by "snowball sampling". With a snowball sampling approach, the researcher initially make contact with a group or a person, who the researcher can use to establish contacts with other people.⁷⁸ All of the respondents work at several different clubs and bars, and even though Cebu is a large town, some of them have been working at the same club. As an example, four of the respondents worked at the same nightclub, but at different time periods.

5.3.1. External Reliability / Replicability

Whereas another researcher would be able to use the same questionnaire when trying to replicate the empirical method used for this thesis, the semi-structured strategy, where the women were free to ask their own questions and was able to tell their stories in their own way, makes it hard, if not impossible, to do an exact replication of this research. This is a weakness, if one wants to see it as one, with the qualitative method rather than a quantitative method, or a fully structured interview method.⁷⁹ However, as mentioned earlier, replicability was not the aim of this thesis. Qualitative interviews has the possibility to examine subjective experiences and aspects that would be out of reach with a quantitative method.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

All of the respondents were adults, and everyone was presented to the "Appendix B Standard Ethics Protocol" from *The Long Interview*, and to my Gothenburg University student card.⁸⁰ The participant observation was done with both the *mamasang* (floor manager) and the entertainers consent. They were fully aware that I was conducting an overt observation, and what the aim of the thesis was. In this sense, the respondents were given information about the purpose of the thesis, to

⁷⁷ McCracken, Grant (1988). *The Long Interview*, p. 37

⁷⁸ Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, p. 184

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 376

⁸⁰ McCracken, Grant (1988). *The Long Interview*, p. 69

be able to do an informed decision whether or not to participate in the study.⁸¹ The participants were informed that they were able to refuse to answer any question, and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time.⁸² The identity of the interviewees is also kept confidential by using the term “respondent” instead of their alias or real name.⁸³

5.5 Demarcations

The different interviews that took place was focused on women only (with the addition of one transsexual worker), working as entertainers in nightclubs and karaoke bars in the City of Cebu, Philippines. Although there was several cases where sex work was present in the women’s stories, no interviews was done with women working at “out-and-out” brothels (a place where the only service sold is sexual services, which offers special rooms in the facility for sexual acts). For this study, only adult women, and women who entered the entertainer business without coercion was interviewed. Child prostitution and trafficking has also been excluded (and was never present, at least to my knowledge, during the observation or in the women’s stories). Some of these themes have been excluded due to lack of time, and the limited space this thesis have.

Since the aim of the study was to find out what the interviewed women think about their own work as entertainers, the focus was on interviews with the respondents, and not with the state or different NGO:s. Information about the Philippine society, laws and other entertainers and/or sex workers have therefore been assimilated through previous studies and through the respondents own words.

⁸¹ Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, p. 121

⁸² Ibid, p. 123

⁸³ Ibid, p. 118

6. Result and Analysis

The respondents comes from various backgrounds. Some come from warm tendering nuclear families, while other come from more dysfunctional families. Some lost their parents at an early age, while others grew up together with their relatives. Albeit, all of the women interviewed have their own story to tell, many of them share similar experiences and feelings connected to their work. It is important to highlight that none of the women, according to what they said during the interviews, were working as entertainers because of force or coercion from other people. All of the respondents are under-graduate, and none have finished college.

None of the respondents were minor age when the interviews was conducted. The oldest was 35 years old, and the youngest were 26. However, some have worked as entertainers since the age of 15. All of the respondents, except respondent 5 and 13, have also been involved in selling sex to customers. Respondent 2, 3 and 5 have no children of their own. All of the other respondents have between one to nine children.

Some thematic areas of importance to the women came up during the interviews. Within these thematic areas there were certain concepts that were more important than others to them. These concepts will be described and analyzed in the result and analysis chapter. The chapter will narrate each concepts, one by one. These concepts were:

Poverty, Pragmatism, Empowerment, Stigmatization and different relations that the respondents have with their family, colleagues or customers for example.

At the end of the chapter, we will also partially discuss the respondents' views and opinions on the sexual activities that the entertainers perform due to their work.

6.1 Poverty

Poverty is what seems to permeate all of the women's stories. Although none of the respondents started working as entertainers because of coercion, there is still a form of force that becomes obvious when attentively listening to what the women have to say, and that is the force that comes from poverty. The Philippines have a monthly average wage of \$279 (12 243 Philippine Peso), and there is a huge gap between the affluent and the impoverished. All of the respondents come from a more or less poor background. Based on the interviews, the respondents claim to be working as entertainers mainly because it is the easiest, or only way, to earn adequate money.

“Who doesn't want a job? Of course everyone wants to have a job. If we do not earn anything, we are the one to blame. That's why we push ourselves, because you need to eat. If you only have 200 pesos, how can you manage to live, pay your rent, or pay the bus fare?” - Respondent 4

“My family thinks that my job is dirty and bad. But we don't have a choice.” - Respondent 8

“I decided to work as an entertainer because life was difficult. My first husband had no proper job, and he was also abusing me. So I decided to work instead, to provide and support for our kids.” - Respondent 1

Several of the respondent's points out that people in the Philippines with a college education still have a hard time finding work. With this in mind, they argue that without an education, their chance to apply for, and to get a job, is limited.

“It's difficult to find a job, especially when you are getting older. How would you find a job when there are people who are college graduates and still can't find a decent and stable job for themselves? Where's the chance for us, we who didn't even graduate in high school?

Despite of trying hard to find other jobs, it would be very difficult to get one. The competition is just too high.” – Respondent 11

Four of the respondents used the Filipino expression “kakha tuka” during the interviews to describe their situation. “Kakha tuka” means, in a direct translation, “hand to mouth”. The expression is symbolic, and in the Philippines it is used to describe how chickens or roosters act when they find

and eat their food. People who are in poverty act in the same ways as roosters, according to this expression. They live with limited resources, and when they earn sufficient money to buy food for the day, they do not plan for tomorrow. They are like “one day millionaires”.

The radical feminist Kathleen Barry argues that women in industrializing and impoverished countries are marginalized from the developing economies. When there is no other job opportunities, emigration might be the only resort these women have.⁸⁴ As respondent 8 says, *“I’m willing to migrate, if there’s a chance. Especially to a place with greener pastures, with good opportunities.”* Nevertheless, most of the respondents found another solution to their situation than migrating, as they took work as entertainers.

6.2 Empowerment

The term empowerment is defined as to “give (someone) the authority or power to do something”, and to “make (someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights”. Empowerment is not something that can be done to people. Instead, empowerment is something that people “do by and for themselves”, and can give individuals the “capacity to make strategic life choices”.⁸⁵ In this sense, the respondents’ answers fits the definition of empowerment almost perfectly.

“This job is a big help for me. You see, this is my house, and it’s already finished. No one gave this house to me. I’m the one who saved the money. I paid for the whole renovation of my mother’s house too, and my child goes in private school.” - Respondent 4

What becomes clear in the quote from respondent 4, is that her work as an entertainer not only benefits herself economically, but the whole family too. She is not solely empowering herself, but also the people closest to her. This seem to be a crucial part of why most of the respondents chose to work as entertainers, and something that comes back in all interviews. During the interview with respondent 4, she also showed pictures of the houses she built, while at the same time as I interpreted, showing a lot of pride and contentment in her body language and through her eyes.

⁸⁴Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*, p. 50

⁸⁵Lister, Ruth (2004). *Poverty*, p. 174

Kamala Kempadoo indicates that the earnings from sex work could go to supporting children's education, or buying houses for the elderly or insurances for themselves.⁸⁶

As seen in the quote above from respondent 4, this is exactly what she does with the money she earns. During the interview, she also explains that she has signed two different insurances, one with Social Security System (SSS), and one with Philhealth. With SSS for example, one is able to get different benefits such as sickness, maternity, retirement, disability and death and funeral benefits. SSS also gives to possibility to take loans for housing, or for starting a business. The requirement to sign an insurance with SSS is, besides a birth certificate, that the person should be earning a minimum of 1000 pesos a month, and be under 60 years of age.⁸⁷ Without the high wage she earns as an entertainer, this would have been nearly impossible.

When Kamala Kempadoo visited the Caribbean to explore why women chose to take up sex work as an occupation, the reasons were varied. However, Kempadoo points out that the most frequent reason for sex workers was to obtain an extra income for the household, to accumulate capital to establish a small enterprise, and to meet the need for child-care and education costs.⁸⁸ All of the reasons show that the Caribbean sex workers mainly were after to empower themselves, and/or their relatives in comparison to other factors. The respondents in Cebu seem to have chosen their occupation for the same reasons, as the quotes below show:

“My dream is to become a millionaire. I want to start a small business, little by little, slowly building up until I succeed.” - Respondent 13

“The thing that's most important to me is my children's future, and that they can go to college. I don't think about my own future.” - Respondent 12

For numerous women in the Philippines, taking work as an entertainer might be one of the few ways to earn an income. However, as we have discussed earlier in the background chapter, women are far more likely to find work than men. In early 2014, the country's unemployment rate was at 7.5 percent, and 64 percent of the unemployed Filipinos were men.

⁸⁶Kempadoo, Kamala (2001). Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade: Transnational Feminist Perspective, p 33

⁸⁷ Journey to Millions (2013) SSS, PhilHealth and Pag-IBIG: What Every Filipino Shouldn't Miss

⁸⁸ Kempadoo, Kamala (2001). Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade: Transnational Feminist Perspective, p. 76

The group who had the hardest time to find work were young people between 15 to 24 years old, where almost 50 percent was unemployed.⁸⁹ These numbers correspond well with what the different women said during the interviews. Many see themselves as the families' breadwinner, while their husbands usually are portrayed as lazy, irresponsible and vicious, with vices such as gambling-, drug- and alcohol addiction. Women's economic dependence over the world depends largely on a gendered division of labour, where men do the greater share of paid work, while women do the greater share of unpaid, domestic work.⁹⁰ Paradoxically, many of the respondent's answers contradicts this statement. As seen in the quotes below, the respondents are supporting their husbands and boyfriends:

"The money I earned was spent on powder milk, food, rent to our boarding house and for our daily needs and expenses. My husband didn't have a job back then. That's why I was trying to earn money every day, as much as I could." - Respondent 13

"I really decided to work as an entertainer for the purpose of saving money, so I can take care of my two children. My first husband was a drug addict, and he also killed someone."
- Respondent 10

"I supported my boyfriend in high school. But I stopped, because as time went by, I just spent and spent. He didn't learn anything. Maybe he's a slow learner, or maybe he's just not willing." - Respondent 8

64 percent of the unemployed Filipinos were men according to the survey in 2012/2013. By taking up work as an entertainer, the women can therefore create both agency and economic independence. Because of their work, the entertainers can avoid the 'feminization of poverty', and become breadwinners in their family. Ruth Lister mentions that empowerment means different things to different people, and that it needs to be about citizen right and not consumer rights, and that the community as a whole need to benefit from the empowerment of women, and not only a few.⁹¹

When the respondents say what they spend their money on, it is mostly spent on basic needs for themselves and their family. In this way, they are empowering people around them. However, one could also argue that it only benefits the entertainers' families, which from a radical feminist viewpoint should not be mistaken as empowerment of women in large. Nevertheless, the

⁸⁹ Desiderio, Louella (2014). *Unemployment rises to P7.5% in January*

⁹⁰ Lister, Ruth (2004). *Poverty*, pp. 55-56

⁹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 173-174

entertainers are able to earn more money than they otherwise would be able to. During the interview with respondent 8, who also is a transgender, she explains that one regular customer gives her 3000-5000 pesos and a netbook computer every time they meet. She later sells the computer for 10 000 pesos, accumulating more than the monthly wage average in just one night.

Several of the respondents use the Filipino expression “kwarta sa hangin”, meaning *money in the wind*, or *easy money*, to describe why they chose their occupation. As with the case of the Dominican sex workers that Denise Brennan studied, the Filipina sex workers are also able to accumulate and earn more money in one or two nights, than what women in the domestic service earn in a whole month.

When respondent 3 talks about her work, she says that she has no regrets.

“I really enjoy it! Especially when I have a guest who has got plenty of money. I spent a day with one guy, and when I went home, he gave me 25 000 pesos!” – Respondent 3

In this case, respondent 3 was able to earn more money in one day than what an average wage-worker would earn in 60 days. But despite that sex work from a liberal viewpoint could be seen as empowering women and their relatives, it could, from a radical feminist viewpoint, be argued that the women are “invisibly enslaved” by love and loyalty.⁹² Loyalty to their family and relatives might force women into sexual labour. As with the case of hostesses in Dalian in Northwest China, the Filipina entertainers send remittance to their families. They are also supporting their families, by paying for education, hospital bills, houses and other miscellaneous expenditures for their relatives.

The majority of the participants in this study explains that they feel ashamed and embarrassed over their work, since they feel that they have overthrown their dignity and reputation. A few of the respondents even lie to their family about what they do for a living. As one of the respondent says:

You can't buy or pay your dignity! However, in most cases, the families are fully aware of what the respondents work with.

During my field work, I also got the opportunity to talk to the mother of respondent 5. Respondent 5 moved from the province just to send money to her mother, and to the rest of her family.

⁹² Truong, Thanh-Dam (1990). *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia*, p. 48 p. 13

“It was my own choice and decision to commit to such kind of work. In the province, there are no jobs. Here in the city, there are lots of different work that you can apply to if you want to. In the province, it’s common that girls go together with their husbands and kids up into the mountains for farming. You can’t eat if you do not come to the city. I can’t survive in the mountains. Who will give you food when you are doing nothing?” – Respondent 5

Tiantian Zheng explains in her study of sex workers in Dalian that “rural women face limited employment opportunities in the city... and as migrants, they often lack the social connections essential for finding jobs in the already oversaturated urban labour market”.⁹³ In the case of respondent 5 however, she claims that “*in the city, there are lots of different work that you can apply to if you want to*”. This can certainly be the case compared to the job opportunities in the rural areas. In the city, there is possibility to work in the domestic service business, the informal sector and other types of work that an unskilled worker could get. Nevertheless, respondent 5 still chose to work as entertainer.

The mother of respondent 5 explained that she trusts her daughter. “*She’s a very good and decent daughter, and I know she won’t do anything inappropriate*”, the mother said. Here, it is worth to point out that respondent 5 was one of only two respondents who claimed that they had never sold sex. The mother seemed pleased about the choice of work that her daughter have chosen. In the province, she would have been forced to do hard, physical labour earning only a small amount of money. Now, her daughter can send her money every second week which helps to improve the life of family members.

6.3 Pragmatism

“Even though your guests are poor, when tourist guiding them, the least amount of tip they give is 500 pesos. Then you can pay your electricity bill for your house.” - Respondent 3

Pragmatism means dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations. To make a pragmatic choice, there need to be a general sense of awareness of the choice an individual is making. In the study done by ILO, half of the sex

⁹³ Zheng, Tiantian (2009). *Red Lights: The lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China*, p. 178

workers interviewed said that it was “friends who showed the way to earn money easily”.⁹⁴ This corresponds well with what the respondents have to say about the matter. Most of the respondents explained that it was an acquaintances, a friend, or a family member who introduced and recommended them to start in the entertainer business. Working as an entertainer is, when you look at the women's stories, a pragmatic and rational choice in most cases. As mentioned before, the expression “kwarta sa hangin” (easy money) was often used by the respondents during the interviews, and several of the respondents explain that they started working in the business because they witnessed how friends involved in the entertainer business had “an abundance of money”.

With the money they earn, they are able to buy what they want instead of living on the margin.

“My salary is enough. I can eat whatever I want. I can go to which restaurants I like. I am happy, because I have big ‘kwarta’ to spend” – Respondent 1

Pragmatism even affects the respondent’s preferable choice of partners. As seen in the discussion of empowerment, many of the respondents describe their boyfriends, cohabitants and husbands as lazy and sometimes even the reason why they started working as entertainers. During the interviews, it becomes clear that a foreign husband is preferable over a Filipino husband. One of the respondents, who has nine children in total, explains that the father to her American child still supports her and sends her 5000 pesos (\$113) every month, even though they now are separated. However, she still want to meet a foreigner to get married. *“If I don't get married? Then maybe none of my kids will finish school”*, she says. The reason to this is that she also helps to support her mother, who is a widow, her four siblings, and her aunt and uncle with money every month. This corresponds to the research done by Denise Brennan in the Dominican Republic, where sex workers see their occupation as an advancement strategy, and a way to get out of poverty. They are, in a way, also trying to capitalize on the global linkages that exploit them.⁹⁵

You have a bright future if you get lucky and find someone who’s willing to take you away from your job as entertainer. The sooner the better. But luck do not come easy, it comes merely at the right moment. - Respondent 13

If there’s just a man who tells me to stop working with this job. That he’s willing to support me and provide for the sake of my children. I was always praying. No matter who he is. - Respondent 12

⁹⁴International Labour Organization (1998). *Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia*

⁹⁵Brennan, Denise (2002). *Selling Sex for Visas*, p. 155

As illustrated in the quotes above, the respondents are, as in the case of sex workers in the Dominican, looking for someone who can support and provide for their living. “*No matter who he is*”. There is a common Filipino phrase that is reoccurring in many of the interviews, “bahala na”, literally meaning *come whatever may*, and that someone surrenders to their fate. It is an attitude where individuals resigns to whatever may happen to them.

From a radical feminist viewpoint, the advancement strategy that Denise Brennan is talking about is only another form of prostitution. Kathleen Barry argues that most women do not want to remain in prostitution. She agrees that marriage with a wealthy foreigner might be the only way to escape, since it gives better opportunities than what a marriage with a rural man could offer.⁹⁶ However, Barry argues that from the foreigners’ perspective, the marriage with an Asian bride is a racist, sexist dream. By marrying an Asian woman, they believe that they will have an alternative to “liberated” Western women.⁹⁷ According to radical feminists, even women who meet men thru “mail-order-bride” agencies can be claimed to be victims of trafficking and prostitution. Wives’ are, in this perspective, bought for sexual as well as domestic services.⁹⁸ Even if some marriages do work out and are built on respect and love, it is “seriously offset by the numbers who are trafficked into sexually and physically abusing situations, and into prostitution”. As radical feminists see it, these marriages are built on “the reduction of women to saleable property”.⁹⁹

6.4 Relations

During the interviews, it became clear that different relationship was of big importance to the respondents. These were relationships to their family, like parents, children and partners, and to their colleagues and customers. Here, we will examine how these relationships are affected by the respondents’ choice of work.

6.4.1. Partners

As we mentioned earlier, most of the respondents portray their husband and boyfriends as lazy and irresponsible, mostly with vices such as, alcohol-, drug- and gambling addictions. Still, their partners seem to be well aware, and accepting, of the respondents choice of work. During the interviews, it also becomes clear that there is a negative sense of having a Filipino partner. The

⁹⁶ Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, pp. 151-152

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 154

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 155

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 157-158

Filipino expression *Basta Pinoy!* repeatedly reappears in several comments. There is no direct English translation of this expression, and it can have different meanings depending on the context. Here, the meaning is that a Filipino partner is no good, and that he will bring you bad luck. When reading this between the lines, one could argue that the expression is degrading Filipinos, while foreigners are put on a pedestal.

The respondents' partners are in many cases aware that their women have been selling sex to other men, but as we can see in the quotes below, they seem to be accepting the respondents work anyway.

“Bahala na, no matter who you are, I still want you. The only thing that matters to me is that you and the kids will not be so far away from me, my husband says. He knows that I have already tasted other men.” – Respondent 12

“My husband knows. Because he is a very lazy type, he understands me even though I’m working with this kind of job.” – Respondent 1

From a liberal perspective, we can see that the women seem to be, at least partly, in control of their relationships. They are the providers and breadwinners, and because of that, their partners' acceptance of their choice of work was necessary. In her article, *Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade*, Kamala Kempadoo points out that in Southeast Asia, prostitution has strong social bases. In many countries, women are obliged to act as the family breadwinners, and to “earn money to repay the care and protection given them by their parents in raising them”. This obligation can be seen as one of the reasons that young women enter into sex work.¹⁰⁰

6.4.2. Family

“I send most of my income to Manila. I send it to my family so they can pay their bills, their daily expenses and tuition fees.” - Respondent 7

The obligation to act as breadwinners becomes most crystalized when it comes to the issue of remittance. None of the respondents' partner acted as a pimp. Instead, their obligation was to their family and relatives. Many of the women come from the province, and have their family left in rural parts of the country. When they find work in the city, they are expected to send money home. As we

¹⁰⁰ Kempadoo, Kamala (2001). *Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade: Transnational Feminist Perspective*, p 38

have seen in the discussion of empowerment, remittance has the ability to enrich whole families. By sending remittance to their family, or when providing for them in other ways, the respondents also earn respect from people around them.

“Before, when I didn’t work as an entertainer, they didn’t notice me. Not even the neighbours. But now after I began to work, I am noticeable. People approach me and notice me. When I brought some Kulapu [booze drinks] to my home village, they were telling me that I’m kind because I brought something to drink. And then the neighbours said to my mother: What a nice job you’re daughter has in Cebu!” - Respondent 1

*“Because of my work, I’m able to influence my status in society. When I go back to visit my province nowadays, I’m suddenly ”humot” [Filipino for ”smells good”] because I have money. Before we didn’t have a line for water, electricity, and almost no food to eat! Now, I would never regret that I work as an entertainer, although I burn my body in hell! I’m financially satisfied. Before, when I was a student, they didn’t notice me at all.”
- Respondent 3*

By the quotes from respondent 1 and 3, we can see that with the money they earn, they are also able to get respect (even if one could argue that respect they earn is not genuine), from people who treated them bad, or did not notice them before. However, there also seem to be two sides of the same coin. They are able to earn respect because of the money they earn, but on the other hand they are also in risk of being stigmatized, as we shall discuss later on in the paper.

Sending back remittance to the family is many times something that the respondents are obligated to do. Reciprocity is rooted in the Philippine culture, and the one who earn the most in a family is automatically supposed to help the rest of the family. Another reason might be that they are the eldest child in the family, who in the Philippine cultures is expected and relied on to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. Even when there is no demand from the family to send remittance, many of the respondents explain that they do it out of free will.

“They didn’t ask me to help them. But I want to help them, and it brings me happiness. I don’t want them to end up working in a bar like I do. I will never allow them to do it. That’s the reason why I send them money.” – Respondent 2

As we can see in the quote from respondent 2, she sends money to her rural family out of free will. The remittance is used for food purposes in the village, but also to help her siblings pay for their education so that they do not end up like her. Respondent 2 also explains that some of the remittance is used to hire someone that can work with the family, so that her family, who are farmers, can avoid to do the hardest work that farming requires.

6.4.3. Colleagues

When talking about relations, most of the respondents explains that the relationship with their female colleagues is of great importance. *“We are like a big family”*, as one respondent says. The women spend plenty of time together at work and also go out together in the night when the work is finished. They go out eating, shopping, drinking, and dancing together, and a strong bonding relationship with their colleagues is important. Despite of this bonding network, jealousy is a frequently reoccurring topic during the interviews, and the turncoat behaviour seem to be prevalent. While conducting my participant observation, I noticed that the women gathers in different groups. Women who spoke *Binisaya* hang out in one part of the club, while women who spoke *Tagalog* were in the other part of the club. When there were no customers, the women attended themselves by chatting, eating, playing cards, doing make-up and Facebooking while waiting for customers to show up. All of the time, the Tagalog-speaking women from the Luzon regions kept to themselves in one side of the club. There was no obvious fighting between the groups on the four night that the participant observation was conducted, but I discerned a distinct jealousy between some of the entertainers.

When one entertainer came back to the club after meeting a customer outside of the club, the other entertainers more or less interrogated her about how much money she had earned, where they went and what they had been doing. The tune of their voice revealed an underlying jealousy because the customer had picked her, and not them. One entertainer, who was not a respondent, started cursing with a loud voice and said: *“Why did they just pick one? Why did they not pick me? It’s so embarrassing!”*. When I was speaking and listening to the entertainers at the club, it was evident that a lot of the jealousy was a consequence of poverty. Their anger came from frustration over not being chosen by the customer, which in the end meant less money for the women that were not chosen.

Tiantian Zheng noticed similar behaviour in her study of hostesses in Dalian. The hostesses gathered in groups, one with rural women and one with urban women. In one instance, an urban hostess took a client from a rural hostess by showing up her ID in front of the customer in an attempt to besmirch the rural hostess's background.¹⁰¹ One of the respondents tell a similar story:

“There was one colleague who was very jealous of me, because her customer chose me instead of her to table him. Of course, we are trying to earn money, and I didn't know that it was her old customer. She confronted me, saying ‘do you know that it was my customer and that you took him from me?!’ I was new back then, and I didn't want to do that again. The next night the customer came back. I refused to go with him, but the customer complained to the mamasang. The customer is always right, you know! The other girl tried to get drunk at the back yard, and then later, she pulled me and hit me with a chair.”
– Respondent 10

The respondents' jealousy to each other could, from a radical feminist viewpoint, have its origin in the way women are “saddled with a bonding to male sexual demands that turns women against other women”, as Kathleen Barry puts it.¹⁰² Instead of taking out their anger on their male clients, who could be seen as their oppressors, they take it out on each other. The entertainers spend much time together, and need to find friends at work. During my observation, I noticed that for the most parts, entertainers spend their time together. When there are no customers, they associate with each other as a way to pass time. Without any friends in the establishment, this would be hard to do.

However, they are at the same time in competition with each other over the customers' attention. If they do not attract the attention of the customers, they will not earn any money.

6.4.4. Employers

Kathleen Barry argues that the 'oldest profession' is not prostitution, but pimping.¹⁰³ She talks about how pimps target young girls, who are likely to be naive, and bitter at the family they have just run away from, or the marriage they have just left. At that time, a pimp shows up, who “know all the cards and how to play them”, trying to win the girls over.¹⁰⁴ As argued by Kathleen Barry, 80 to 95 percent of women involved in prostitution are controlled by a pimp. However, in the case of

¹⁰¹Zheng, Tiantian (2009). *Red Lights: The lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China*, pp. 93-94

¹⁰²Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*, p. 279

¹⁰³Barry, Kathleen (1979). *Female sexual slavery*, p. 85

¹⁰⁴Ibid, p. 89

Filipina entertainers, there are no pimps. Instead, each club or bar have at least one *mamasang*. A *mamasang* usually have experience of working as an entertainer themselves, and are the one who manage and brief the women before they start their daily duty. Two of the women interviewed, respondent 6 and 7, were working as *mamasangs* when the interviews was conducted.

Respondent 6 started working as an entertainer and when she was 23 years old. Today she is 35 and have 30 girls (as she calls them) as employees in total, and about 20 to 25 girls on duty every night.

She claims that none of the girls are brought into the business by force or coercion, as illustrated in the quote below:

“You can’t say that the girls were forced to do something because they are the one who choose to work with this in the first place. They will question you. Why do you work like this and then you don’t go out with the customers?” - Respondent 6

However, the relationship with the *mamasang* is significant for the entertainers. The *mamasang* is the one who deals with problems that emerge at the club. Respondent 6 explains that she communicates with the owner of the club, and then pass on the information to the girls. Sometimes she protects them, for example when there is a lack of customers. Other times, she is the one who give the girls a fine, if they do not show up at work, sleep on duty, or misbehaves in some ways. She protects them, when for instance the entertainers are harassed. Still, the entertainers are employees, and they need to fulfil their duty at work.

“We are more like an artist, but we don’t have a camera. Even though the clients are very annoying, you must work and handle it because it’s our job to do it so.” – Respondent 7

“My employer treated me well, because I had plenty of customers. It’s their business, and their business depends on the girls, so they treat you good, as for sure. I respect my boss, and my boss respects me. I never felt that my boss treated me like I was just a piece of meat. I can see it, and feel it.” – Respondent 2

But even though most of the women seem to have a good relationship with the *mamasang*, a few respondents tell another side of the story. Respondent 10 describes how the husband of the establishment owner where she works forced himself unto her.

“All the girls were afraid of him. Until now, I keep it a secret. The other girls don’t know about it”, she says. He ended up paying her, but she never had the choice to say no.

Relationships between the entertainers and their customers will be discussed separately at the end of the chapter (6.6).

6.5 Stigmatization

“It is better to be called a prostitute rather than a thief” - Respondent 6

Stigma is the feeling of disapproval that people have about their personality, ways of behaving, particular illnesses or other trademarks that make them stand out from the crowd. In this sense, entertainers are stigmatized by people who classifies them as living without moral values. The “normative rules” do not apply for entertainers, and in the eyes of many, they differ from their societal cultural norms when selling sex or offer services for money.

From a liberal feminist view, decriminalization of prostitution and the promotion of it as a condition of women’s freedom or self-determination, could hopefully lead to a neutralization of its social stigma. Radical feminist oppose this, and establishes that it is not the way that prostitution will be neutralized and destigmatized. To promote prostitution sex as “one’s self-chosen identity is to be actively engaged in promoting women’s oppression in behalf of oneself.”¹⁰⁵

In ILO:s report *Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia*, more than half of the Filipina women working in massage parlours said that they carried out their work “with a heavy heart”, and 20 percent still considered sex with a customers as a sin.¹⁰⁶ According to the authors of *Sex Tourism: Marginal people and liminalities*, female sex workers are characterized as deviant, abnormal or as victims of men or drugs. But in many cases, as the authors point out, the “attributions are projections upon the sex worker who becomes a fantasised object”, and a “fantasy born not solely of the erotic desires of actual and potential customers, but also of the different agendas of researchers and social guardians”.¹⁰⁷ Despite of the economic empowerment the women get by working as entertainers, in society, many of them are indeed marginalized and stigmatized. Some people argue that by criminalizing prostitution, society allows the abuse of prostitutes as

¹⁰⁵Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, pp. 70-71

¹⁰⁶International Labour Organization (1998). *Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia*

¹⁰⁷Hall, C. Michael & Chris Ryan (2001). *Sex Tourism: Marginal people and liminalities*, Routledge: London, p. 93

women. Being labelled as a prostitute makes it hard for example to file a charge for theft, rape or even attempted murder.¹⁰⁸ All of the respondents use fictive names when they are working as entertainers. Partly as a protection from stigmatization, and partly “*in case of emergency, when the police raids our establishment*” as respondent 1 says. Nevertheless, in the respondent’s stories, the stigmatization in focus is that of shame. Many (but not all) of the respondents describes how they lie about their work for friends, and even their families, as shown in the quote below:

“In the beginning, I didn’t tell my parents the truth about my job. I tried to hide it. I told them that I’m working at a restaurant. They wondered why I don’t bring any left-over food. I don’t even tell my sisters and brothers because I feel ashamed.” - Respondent 1

One of the respondents describes how she disguises what she works with by not dressing so seductive, and very seldom outside her apartment or work. When people ask her what she does for a living, she tells them that she is a waitress. To reinforce the lie, she also dresses up in a waitress uniform, and takes pictures of herself at the clubs office, pretending to work there instead. Another respondent highlights that other types of work usually need some kind of experience, but she do not put her experience of years of work as an entertainer into her biodata (résumé). In doing so, the biodata would look “bati”, a Cebuano word for ugly, and would not have the positive effect work experience usually has in a résumé.

“When people look at you as an entertainer, you always look dirty to them. It doesn’t matter how branded your clothes are. They’ll gossip about you. It’s indeed better to have a decent job and earn money than selling your dignity.” - Respondent 13

As explained above in the quote from respondent 13, expensive clothes might be a way to try and disguise their occupation. As Tiantian Zheng indicates, clothes and other forms of body decorations has in many cultural settings become a way to “encode information about the wearer’s social position and ranking.”¹⁰⁹

6.6 Entertainers, their Customers and Sex Work

Working as an entertainer and in the sex trade can certainly be dangerous. There is risk for sexually transmitted diseases, violence, stigmatization and the possibility of being arrested. According to

¹⁰⁸Truong, Thanh-Dam (1990). *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia*, pp. 53-54

¹⁰⁹Zheng, Tiantian (2009). *Red Lights: The lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China*, p. 195

Kathleen Barry, any forced sexual intercourse is to be considered as rape and sexual slavery. “If one is not free to consent or reject, one is forced”.¹¹⁰

As we have mentioned before, none of the respondents claim that they started working as entertainers because of force or coercion. Still, some of the respondents talk about experiences that from a radical feminist viewpoint should be considered as sexual slavery, and rape.

“Of course, if you’re used by different men, it’s no good. You must have forbearance, even if they touch your vagina, and even though it hurts. Because otherwise they will not give you your money, and they will go back to the bar and complain. No matter how many times they used you, if they complain, you don’t get anything.” - Respondent 9

“Yes, I have been forced to do something I don’t want to do. One customer asked me to take his sperm in my mouth, and in my face. Another time we were two transgender. The customer, an American, wanted to watch while we had sex with each other. Which is unnecessary I think. It isn’t impossible to do, but the feeling is strange, because you have the same gender.” - Respondent 8

In the relationship between the entertainers and their clients, the entertainers always play an subordinate role. As disclosed in the quotes above, entertainers who complain or reject to do what the customer wants, might end up without getting paid. There is always a risk that the customer will go back to the club or bar and complain if they are not satisfied. There is also a risk that the entertainers will not get paid at all, and that some of the customers seem to have something else in mind than buying the respondents service, as seen in the quote from respondent 4 below:

“I had lunch with a Japanese. I was expecting that he would pay me, but there was no payment, only lunch! He was courting me! This is my job, and it would be unfair to other customers if he does not pay. But he said that he could not afford it. What should I do!” – Respondent 4

From a radical feminist viewpoint, it can be argued that respondent 4 was at the mercy of her male customer, and in a subordinate role. He pays if he wish to, and the entertainer can only feel resignation when she is left without payment. However, some respondent explains that when a

¹¹⁰ Barry, Kathleen (1979). *Female sexual slavery*, p. 40

customer has treated one of the entertainers bad, or refused to pay, the rest of the entertainers at the establishment gang up against the customer, to “bully him”. This could be seen as a way of protecting each other, but also as a way to protect their own future income. If a customer treats one of the entertainers bad, it is possible that he will do it again to another entertainer.

“I’m financially satisfied but emotionally not. Because you are working at the bar and after work it affects you emotionally. You do things that you do not actually want to do, even if nobody forced you to. And when I’m alone, I’m asking myself while looking at the mirror: Why am I doing this?” – Respondent 2

Numerous of the respondents have ambivalent feelings about their work, which is illustrated in the quote from respondent 2 above. She is financially satisfied, but from an emotional viewpoint, she is not. This is a feeling that most of the respondents share. Working as an entertainer is emotionally and spiritually tiresome. Nevertheless, as in the case with hostesses in Dalian, China, the Filipina respondents prefer working as entertainers rather than other type of jobs that an unskilled worker in the Philippines can acquire.

From a liberal viewpoint, the respondents should not be seen as sexual slaves, as Kathleen Barry and radical feminists argue. Instead, individuals who are involved in sex work have the possibility to act out of free choice, and could be seen as entrepreneurs. As an example, when one of the respondent says that “*I can see myself as an expert, and a professional. Why? Because they wouldn't pay me like that if they didn't like what I did.*”, she indicates that when she is selling sex, she looks upon it as a profession, and something that you can be good at, or not.

While at least half of the respondents have had more or less bad experiences from sex work, a few respondents also talk about a more curious side of it. During the interview with respondent 3, she explains that before she started working as an entertainer, she heard from other women in the business that sex was “lami”, a Filipino word for delicious.

“I was curious about sex back then. Because I was a virgin when I started working in the karaoke bar. And I also had a crush on a customer” - Respondent 3

Other respondents talk about their customers as “handsome”, or “macho”. In a way, they seem to be attracted to some of the customers. “*I have tasted men from all over the world*”, as one respondent says. It could be argued, from a radical feminist viewpoint, that the curiosity a few of the

respondents feel about sex work is a way to neutralize the negative status it has, and that it is a way to nullify their feelings about participating in it. It is easier to construct a positive attitude towards sex work, since despising oneself “is just too painful”. Pro-sex workers are, according to Barry, treating that harm they are exposed to as prostitutes as something sexy and fun. To be able to bare the negative effects of their work, they need to embrace and promote an optimistic approach to their work.¹¹¹ This was also something I noticed while conducting the interviews. There were times when my questions was answered with laughter. A few times I felt that their laughter was not authentic, and that they might have laughed as a way to oppress, or disguise, their negative feelings.

¹¹¹ Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, p. 70

7. Conclusion

When I travelled to the Philippines to do my fieldwork, I was not expecting that so many of the entertainers was selling sex as a part of their work. Although I knew that poverty is prevailing in the Philippines, and that sex work in the entertainer business is common, I did not expect that eleven out of thirteen respondents had sold their bodies in their struggle to survive.

When entering the entertainer business, the women have learnt to adapt and adjust to new circumstances in their new situation. A common phrase from the respondents where that: *you need to learn how to swim in a big pond full of fishes*. They need to be adaptable, to be practical and wise, and should also be flexible, which seems to be an essential characteristic in order to succeed. In other words, they need to learn how to be survivors in the business.

The work these women practice and the choices they make must be seen in contrast to the complex socio-cultural context that they are in. Selling sex might be the best, or in some cases the only choice these women have when it comes to survival. Anti-prostitution advocates argue that prostitution is dehumanizing women, and that prostitution is violence against women. However, the assumption that these women are victims, mechanical beings with no control over their own lives, is when it comes to case of the interviewed entertainers, neither suitable nor correct. None of the women were working as entertainers against their will. Instead, it was in all cases a deliberate strategy to survive in a society where poverty is overwhelming and everywhere to be seen.

As mentioned earlier, the average monthly wage in the Philippines was \$279 (12 240 Peso) in ILO:s global wage report 2012/2013. Several of the interviewees tell about experiences where they would be able to earn that amount in just one evening, as for example when respondent 8 meets her regular customer who always gives her a laptop, that she later on sells for 10 000 pesos. Seen in this light, the women should not be denied the argument that they can voluntarily chose to have sex with their customers, and that it at least in this specific issue can be seen as pragmatism. The pragmatism is also well illustrated when respondent 3 points out that the lowest tip that the customer gives, 500 pesos, could at least pay the electricity bill.

The singular and universalized description that radical feminists give to the meaning of sex work therefore overlooks the differences between women involved in sex work. To be active as a sex worker should not be encouraged, but where it does exist, it is dangerous to be narrow-minded and to avoid looking at what the occupation actually does for the individuals involved. When the

respondents speak about what they are able to do with the money they earn by selling sex, it is clear that they are thinking rationally. When they talk about their choices, they seem well thought over. By simply portraying these women as victims, one omits the fact that they are not only doing it for the benefit of themselves, but also for their family and relatives. Some, who with the help of the money earned by a relative who is involved in sex work, might be able to go to study and in the end may also avoid ending up in poverty or sex work themselves. Several of the respondents explain how they help not only their own children and parents with the money they earn, but also to nieces and nephews and other relatives. By working as an entertainer, the respondents many times empower several people around them, who might have a chance to a brighter future.

With that said, there is of course reason for concern when it comes to the situation these women are in. According to radical feminists, forced intercourse should be considered as rape and nothing else. Several of the respondents talk about situations where they have been forced to do sexual activities that they did not want to do. They could have walked away of course, since they are not working under slave-like conditions and are free to quit work any time they want. But in the end, it all comes down to poverty, and putting food on the table. Even though no physical force was involved, it is easy to believe that the respondents would have chosen another type of job if they had the chance, and if the wage was just as good.

To say that all of the women have made a deliberate “choice” is partly true. In all cases, according to the respondents themselves, the women’s mind-set focus on a rational and pragmatic choice where the most important thing is to survive, and to provide for the needs of loved ones. Nevertheless, as Truong Thanh-Dam points, the women could be said to be ‘invisibly enslaved’. Both because of loyalty to their family and loved ones, and because of poverty *per se*. When poverty, and families’ expectations of remittance is high, is there really any choice at all? Some of the respondents also mention that the competition for customers has risen. Increasingly, women are coming into the entertainer and sex industry, and it becomes harder for the entertainers to accumulate sufficient money to fulfill their role as breadwinners. The claim that competition is getting higher is reinforced by the jealousy and quarrel that some of the entertainers experience. When faced with adversity and poverty, the women need someone to blame, and from a radical feminist standpoint, they turn on each other instead of attacking the patriarchal system and power.

However, what I have learned from the women I met, is that we cannot judge them on the basis of western feminism. It is highly possible that the analysis of this study would have looked very

different with another theoretical approach. And, sex work should not be encouraged, as mentioned before. But for the respondents, it is certainly one of the few ways that they have to survive, and to provide for the needs of others. One must judge their occupation based on the context they are in. In a country with extreme poverty and almost no social safety nets, surviving for the day is the main battle these women fight. As the end conclusion, I want to emphasize what respondent 2 said, that she is “*financially satisfied but emotionally not.*” The occupation the respondents have chosen can from a feminist, and humanist viewpoint be seen as something inappropriate and evil. However, if we take away their livelihood, we need to replace it with something else. Something real and sustainable, and not just the dream of women's liberation that we, as westerners, are so lucky to at least partly have achieved.

References:

Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*, (3rd Ed.), Oxford University Press Inc. : New York

Almonte, Sherlyne A. (2001). The Plight of Filipino Women in Japan: Limitations and Challenges for the Philippine Education. *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Education, Hiroshima University. Part. III, Education and Human Science Vol.50*, 159-165

Agustin, Laura Maria (2007). *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*, Zed Books Ltd : London

Beasley, Chris (1999). *What is Feminism? An introduction to feminist theory*, SAGE Publications Ltd : London

Barry, Kathleen (1979) *Female sexual slavery*, New York University Press : New York and London

Barry, Kathleen (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*, New York University Press : New York and London

Brennan, Denise (2002). Selling Sex for Visas: Sex Tourism as Stepping Stone to International Migration for Dominican Women. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Ed. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild. Metropolitan Books : New York

Cavaliere, Shelley (2011). Between Victim and Agent: A Third-Way Feminist Account of Trafficking for Sex Work, *Indiana Law Journal: Vol. 86: Iss. 4, Article 5. Between Victim & Agent*, 1410-1458

Dery, Luis C. (1991). Prostitution in Colonial Manila. *Philippine Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4, 475–489

Esaiasson, Peter, M.Gilljam, H.Oscarsson & L.Wängnerud (2012). *Metodpraktikan*, (4:e Ed.) Norstedts Juridik AB : Stockholm

Franklin, Adrian (2003). *Tourism: An introduction*, SAGE Publications Ltd : London

Gilje, Nils & Harald Grimen (2007). *Samhällsvetenskapernas förutsättningar*, Daidalos AB: Göteborg

Hall, C. Michael & Chris Ryan (2001). *Sex Tourism: Marginal people and liminalities*, Routledge: London

Hayes, Sharon, Belinda Carpenter & Angela Dwyer (2012). *Sex, crime and morality*, Routledge: London, p. 116

Hilsdon, Anne-Marie (1995). *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and violence in the Philippines*, St Leonards : Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd

Kempadoo, Kamala (2001). Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade: Transnational Feminist Perspective, *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 1 (2), 28-51

Kirk, G & Francis, C. B. (2013). Redefining Security: Women Challenge U.S. Military Policy and Practice in East Asia. *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice*, vol. 15, Issue 1, 229-271

Lister, Ruth (2004). *Poverty*, Cambridge : Polity Press

Sprague, Joey (2005). *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, AltaMira Press : CA

McCracken, Grant (1988). *The Long Interview*, SAGE Publications Inc. : London

Truong, Thanh-Dam (1990). *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia*, Zed Books Ltd : London

Tyner, James A (1996). Constructions of Filipina Migrant Entertainers. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, vol. 3, Issue 1, 77-94

Zheng, Tiantian (2009). *Red Lights: The lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis

WEBB:

Agbayani, Apa M. (2012). *PH at bottom 3 of 'world's wages'*, [Downloaded 10 June, 2014 from <http://www.rappler.com/nation/4612-philippines-at-bottom-3-of-world-s-wages>]

Bindel, Julie (2006). *Eradicate the oldest oppression* [Downloaded 11 July, 2014 from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/jan/18/ukcrime.prisonsandprobation>]

Bindman, Jo (1997) Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda, *Anti-Slavery International* [Downloaded 11 July, 2014 from http://www.iiav.nl/epublications/1997/Redefining_Prostitution.pdf/]

Conditions of work and Employment Branch (TRAVAIL). (2012). *Global Wage Report 2012/2013: Wages and Equitable Growth*, [Downloaded 25 May, 2014 from http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-wage-report/2012/WCMS_194843/lang--de/index.htm]

Department of Health, Manila, Philippines (1976). *The Code on Sanitation of the Philippines* [Downloaded 15 June, 2014 from http://www.doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/code_on_sanitation_phils.pdf]

Desiderio, Louella (2014). *Unemployment rises to P7.5% in January*, [Downloaded 28 July from <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2014/03/12/1299885/unemployment-rises-p7.5-january>]

International Labour Organization (1998). Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia, [Downloaded 12 July, 2014 from http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_007994/lang--en/index.htm]

Journey to Millions (2013). *SSS, PhilHealth and Pag-IBIG: What Every Filipino Shouldn't Miss* [Downloaded 28 July from <http://www.journeytomillions.com/sss-philhealth-pag-ibig/>]

Godwin, John (2012). *Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific: Laws, HIV and human rights in the context of sex work* [Downloaded 30 July from <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/hiv/aids/English/HIV-2012-SexWorkAndLaw.pdf>]

South China Morning post (2013). *Manila's dark face of grinding poverty* [Downloaded 10 June, 2014 from <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1262337/manilas-dark-face-grinding-poverty>]

The LAWPHiL Project (2003). Republic Act No. 9208 [Downloaded 30 July from http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2003/ra_9208_2003.html]

United Nations for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Economic Empowerment*
[Downloaded 30 May, 2014 <http://www.unwomen.org/un-women/strategic-goal-4/>]

Yrasuegui, Magnolia & Esselborn, Priya (2009). *Philippines: Women struggling to achieve sexual equality* [Downloaded 30 May, 2014 from <http://www.dw.de/philippines-women-struggling-to-achieve-sexual-equality/a-4465029-1>]