It’s my Body, my Life

Prejudices around Sex Work in the Netherlands

Lisa Grooteman

Dr. Malena Gustavson: Gender Studies, Linköping University

Master’s Programme
Gender Studies – Intersectionality and Change

Master’s thesis 30 ECTS credits

ISNR: LIU-TEMA G/GSIC-A—14/003—SE
Acknowledgements

Here I would like to thank those that supported me during the process of my master thesis research. Firstly, I would like to thank the inspiring, passionate participants who were of great value to this study and I am very grateful that they were prepared to participate in my study. I enjoyed the hours listening to their stories, opinions and their driven motivations to improve the social position and well-being of sex workers. Also I would like to thank my supervisor Malena Gustavson for her valuable feedback and positivity. After every meeting with Malena I gained more knowledge and self-confidence that contributed well to my master thesis. Obviously I would like to thank my partner Robin for his love, acceptance and understanding during my research. The refreshing hours of walking, relaxing movie nights, dinners and taking over some household chores were really pleasant and helpful. Furthermore, I would like to thank my beloved family for their support and understanding throughout the process. The encouraging Skype sessions, encouraging mails and their love is of great importance to me. Also I would like to thank Marjorie Carleberg for checking my thesis on English spelling and grammar with a critical eye. Furthermore, I would like to thank my dear friend Vivien for proofreading my work. In addition I would like to thank the students and employees at the Unit of Gender Studies in Linköping for their critical, but supportive feedback.
Prologue

Twenty-three years ago I was born in a small village in the Northern part of the Netherlands. I was raised in a warm and supportive family together with my younger brother and sister. I look upon my childhood as a beautiful, warm, but also a disappointing period. Disappointing in the way that after a certain age life became less carefree and as a young child, you are exposed to prejudices, expectations and a lot of peer pressure. I was really disappointed in how some people treated each other, how spiteful people can be and eventually how it feels to not be part of the group. From my own personal experience I know how it feels to not be included, to try so hard to be recognized, to stand up for myself and eventually, to be ignored. There was and there still may be pressure to achieve, fulfil certain expectations and dress and act in a certain way, to be part of the group. A group that accepts who you are and supports you, but what if you cannot fulfil these requirements and what if these prejudices exclude you to be part of this group?

This is my own personal story of being excluded from a group and unfortunately this story does not stand-alone. There are many people in society who are not accepted or seen as equals due to their intersectional differences, such as gender, class, race, and sexuality or because of their choices in life. This master thesis is about the group of people who are not fully accepted in Dutch society, this group is that of sex workers. Sex workers receive a lack of support and acceptance in the Netherlands. With this master thesis I hope to create more awareness about the social position of sex workers in the Netherlands and I hope that due to their narratives in this study, that they will gain more respect and acceptance. Therefore, I would like to dedicate this master thesis to all the sex workers in the Netherlands.
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Introduction

“It is great to have an opinion and argue for it, but you cannot just judge someone because of their choices in life, even if it sounds so strange to you.”

This is a queer theoretical intersectional feminist study about the sex workers experiences and the prejudices they face in the Netherlands. Since October 2000 sex work is legalised in the Netherlands, which means that selling, and buying is permitted, and since that date sex work is a legitimate profession. However, sex workers do not get the same chances and opportunities as other workers in society, which makes it very difficult for sex workers to practice their profession. According to studies, from feminist researcher Ine Vanwesenbeeck, sex workers experience high rates of stigmatisation in their personal and professional lives and receive a lack of support and acceptance in society (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 638). In line with Vanwesenbeeck, former sex worker Melissa Petro states, recently sex work is related to other mainstream jobs, but however, the stigma on sex work distinguishes it from other mainstream jobs (Petro 2010: 155). Therefore, sex workers face difficulties in their professional and private lives, due to certain discourses around sex work. My overarching research problem of this study is the consequences of certain discourses that confine Dutch sex workers in their lives. To be able to discuss this I interviewed three (former) sex workers and a policy officer.

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1 Participant Melanie. “Het is goed om een mening te hebben en je mag ook oordelen, maar je mag niet zomaar oordelen over hoe iemand zijn leven leidt, al vind je het nog zo gek.”
Research questions and aims

In this study I will investigate how sex workers in the Netherlands experience the prejudices around their profession, the main question is:

“How do sex workers in the Netherlands experience the prejudices around their profession?”

What is the affect of certain discourses on sex workers? How does sex workers act upon the discourses? How and does it influences the lives of sex workers? Discourse in this context implies a group of statements that form an idea, or in other words, systems of thinking. It is some sort of cultural fantasy how people experience and imagine the world. Later in this study, in the theoretical framework I will elaborate more on this concept.

The most important research aim is that people will critically reflect upon this study and that they will take into account the different discourses and the non-uniformity of sex workers and sex work, in other words, to create awareness and a better understanding of the complex, diverse and various groups of sex workers and the sex industry. It is a business that is immense and often there is a great deal of judgement. With this study I hope to give an overview of a group of sex workers in a certain context from an equality perspective. My aim is not to argue if sex work is bad or good, but to give an overview, an explanation of a certain group of people to counter attack their rights.

The other two sub research aims are interconnected with the above mentioned research aim. The first sub research aim is to share the thoughts and experiences of sex workers towards the prejudices around their profession and to create awareness, in other words, a better understanding of the complex, diverse and various groups of sex workers and the sex industry. It has always been the aim of this study to give sex workers a voice. However I interviewed four people, so these people do not represent all the sex workers, but, nevertheless, the participants whom I interviewed are of great importance for this study and my research aim is to give these participants a voice and share their thoughts and experiences.

My second sub research aim is to suggest interventions that could change certain discourses around sex work and increase the social status and well-being of sex workers in the Netherlands. 

Aligned to my second sub research aim, I would like to add one more question:
“What interventions could improve the social status and well-being of sex workers in the Netherlands?”

To conclude, my greatest aim is that people will critically reflect upon this study and that they will take into account the different discourses and the non-uniformity of sex workers and sex work. Hopefully people will reconsider their own prejudices around sex work and sex workers.

In October 2000 the Dutch government decided to lift the ban on brothels (Outshoorn 2004: 185). This means that sex work is now officially legalised and acknowledged as a profession, therefore, sex workers should have the same rights as other workers in society. Another reason why it is important is, since I believe everyone is responsible for hir body. Your body is your property and nobody can decide what to do or what not do with it. Referring to the quote on page 6 of this thesis, you cannot judge someone because of hir choices in life.

There has been a lot written about sex work and prostitution and several scholars have studied this topic from a diversity of feminist as well as non-feminist perspectives. Within feminist research the field is mainly divided by the anti-prostitution standpoint and the pro-sex work standpoint. From the anti-prostitution standpoint, well-known authors are radical feminist Andrea Dworkin, clinical psychologist Melissa Farley and feminist sociologist Kathleen Barry. The anti-prostitution strand argues, that prostitution is inherently forced and is a violence against women (Barry 1995; Dworkin 1997; Farley & Barkan 1998). On the contrary, the pro-sex work strand argues, sex work is a form of labour and the illegal status of sex work violates the integrity and civil rights of sex workers (Chapkis 1997; Sanders 2005; Vanwesenbeeck 2005). Well-known pro-sex work scholars are feminist sociologist Wendy Chapkis, feminist philosopher Teela Sanders and feminist researcher Ine Vanwesenbeeck.

This study is written from a pro-sex work perspective and is in line with Vanwesenbeeck’s work. The reason why I write this study from a pro-sex work perspective is due to the Dutch situation where prostitution is legalised. Moreover, I believe not every sex worker is a victim of human trafficking or sexual exploitation, so these sex workers should have the same worker rights as others. Vanwesenbeeck is a Dutch researcher and published different materials about the social position of sex workers, such as *Prostitutes' Well-Being and Risk (1994).* Another Decade of
Scientific Work on Sex Work (2001), Burnout Among Female Indoor Sex Worker (2005). Her work clarifies that the well-being of sex workers relates more to their working circumstances than it does to sex work itself. Vanwesenbeeck’s work Prostitutes’ Well-Being and Risk was one first large scale research on the well-being of female sex workers in the Netherlands. Her work really benefits from the fact that she is aware of class, since she conducted research under 187 former and current sex workers from all forms of sex work, origins, educational backgrounds, etc. Her findings calls into question that prostitution is inherently violent, since the outcome of two studies expressed a diversity of results. Koken argues about Vanwesenbeeck, “Perhaps unsurprisingly, the women who were most likely to score in the lower 25 percent on the measures of well-being were also most likely to be working in the least paid, most dangerous venues for sex work” (Koken 2010: 44). So, the results of Vanwesenbeeck clarify the different experiences of sex workers, due to the fact that sex work consists of various forms of labour and the group sex workers is also very diverse, so you cannot argue for sex workers as one uniform group.

Sex workers are not a cohesive, uniform group, because of intersectional differences, such as class, background, ethnicity education, religion, gender, sexuality, race, etc. Also sex work is very diverse and sex work itself consists all forms of sexual services for money or other material benefits. Within sex work there are various forms such as brothels, clubs, erotic dancing, escort services, online sex services, phone sex and street work, etc. (Willman & Levy 2010: 1). The literature about sex work often reflects their working experiences or the deviance, illegal and negative consequences of sex work (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 243). In the research that has been done, there is missing a clear voice from sex workers about their experiences towards the discourses around their profession, a gap I wish to fill. Within this thesis I will focus on sex workers, who are working voluntary and independently in sex work.
Outline

In this thesis I will present how sex workers experience the prejudices around their profession. Firstly, I will introduce and elucidate important definitions in order to understand my thesis. Secondly, I will present the methods applied to collect data, and I will discuss the research ethics, the evaluation of sources and the methodology. Thirdly, I will present the previous research, which is an outline of the research results and conclusions that are relevant for this study. After previous research I will present the theoretical framework where I introduce concepts and theories to make the academic background of my research clearer. Furthermore, I will give some background information about sex work in the Netherlands and I will briefly outline some information about the Dutch parliamentary democracy. Eventually in the analysis I will analyse the transcriptions of the interviews and relate it to the previous research, theoretical framework and the research question. In the conclusion I will present a brief summary of the thesis and I will share the research results, answer the research question and give recommendations for further research. In the last and final part of the thesis I will present suggestions for political activist implementation.
Methods

This is a feminist interview study within an ethnographic framework about the prejudices around sex work in the Netherlands. This study consists of two research methods: literature review and interview study. In this chapter I will present the methods applied to collect data, I will discuss the research ethics, such as situating myself, and codes of ethics. In the last part, evaluation of sources and methodology, I will articulate how I analysed the material and evaluate the sources applied in this thesis.

Methods of data collection

In this study I combined two data collection methods, such as literature review and interviews. The literature review consists of the previous research and the theoretical framework, where I analyse and discuss literature. The interview study consists of interviews with four participants, conducted both online and face-to-face, to get a better understanding of certain discourses around sex work, by listening to the stories and experiences from the participants. The combination of these two methods can complement each other and increase the validity of the data, since I apply both academic and non-academic material.

As gender theorist Nina Lykke clarifies; the methods applied in feminist ethnography are seen as supportive tools to collect information and needs to be applied in a flexible and creative matter. The supportive tools should not be applied as mechanical devices (Lykke 2010: 144). I interpret this, that the methods applied in a study should be used in the most productive, comprehensive way and that the author should not be frightened to think outside the box and apply the methods in creative manner.

Literature review

The literature review consists of the previous research and the theoretical framework. In the previous research I compile and review studies and research that has been done in the field of sex work. It is some sort of summary of the most important research results and conclusions that are relevant for this study. In the theoretical framework I present relevant concepts, to inspire and to unravel the research problem and eventually to answer the research question. Both the previous
research and the theoretical framework are important for the analysis, since they are supportive tools to analyse the material.

**Interviews**

As mentioned before the main reason to use interviews is to collect the stories and experiences from sex workers in the field. This is the most important element in this study, since I base my analyses on the experiences of the sex workers’ I interviewed.

Gayle Letherby refers to an interview as, “A specialised pattern of verbal interaction – initiated for a specific purpose, and focussed on specific content areas” (Letherby 2003). In line with Letherby an interview in this context means a verbal exchange of knowledge within a specific framework. It is significant to be aware “That interviews are interactional encounters and that the nature of the social dynamic of the interview can shape the nature of the knowledge generated” (Fontana & Frey 2000: 647). So it is very important to be aware of receptive nature an interview and that participants constructing knowledge around the questions.

**Semi-structured interviews**

In this study I applied interviews as a method to collect data. In March 2014 I conducted four interviews with four participants both online and face-to-face. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter it is important to apply methods in a creative manner, therefore I decided to organise three interviews with the participants through an online medium, so-called Skype. The interviews were semi-structured, this means that I had a list with topics and eventually the participant could decide how to interpret the question. Eventually the answers of the participants guided the interview direction, so the informal and open scope of the interview engaged the participants in the research outline. As a result the participants could emphasise and point out the importance of certain topics. Therefore, all the interviews were ambiguous, depending on the persons, situation, etc. Another reason why I applied semi-structured interviews is to have some sort guidance, since I had a specific purpose in mind and I wanted to discuss a certain topic, however it was up to the participants to decide how to interpret the questions and they could decide to discuss or to switch to another topic. So, the reason why I applied semi-structured interviews is to have a greater extent of data and to discuss certain topics in a guided framework.
The average interview time was 1 hour and 15 minutes and took place both online and face-to-face. For the online interviews I performed a Skype conversation with the participant, if possible both me and the interviewee used the camera function on Skype. This was most preferable, but due to Internet connection problems, the sound improved after switching off the camera. Under those circumstances the participant and I had to adjust to the new form of interviewing and we had to listen carefully if the person had finished talking or just needed a thinking break. The face-to-face interview I conducted in at the Prostitution Information Center (PIC) in the Red Light District in Amsterdam. All the interviews went very well and both the different interview formats have pro and cons, for example the participants found it very comfortable talking about this topic in their own familiar and safe environment. A pro of having an interview face to face is that you can read the whole body language of someone, which is difficult to read from a webcam, which often only displays the upper body.

**Interview set up**

After the small talk I started with the introduction, which consisted of the explaining the research proposals, mentioning the letter of consent, and emphasising on their anonymity. Furthermore, I informed if everything was clear and shared some practical information about the time and if I was allowed to record the interview with an audio recorder for the purpose of transcribing it. The participants in this study are made anonymous and the personal details will be handled with care in order to reduce any discomfort that the interviewee might experience. Furthermore, I mentioned that the participation in the study is completely voluntary and that they may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. Apart from this, I had a non-judgmental attitude, to give the participants a comfortable and confident feeling. Also I mentioned that if the interviewee had questions about my thoughts and opinions towards the topic I could share my thoughts after the interview, so I did not influence the participant with my ideology.

During the interviews I used an interview guide that I put together with some topics that I wanted to discuss with the participants. The interview guide is a document, which consists of example questions and certain topics. If the participant was done with speaking about a topic, I introduced a new topic. The interview guide is presented in appendix 1. The topics that I discussed during the interviews are: personal information, profession related questions, their experiences as a sex
worker, how sex workers are portrayed in media and in politics, and eventually what is their opinion about certain topics. Firstly, I was interested what personal information the participants would like to share, such as information about educational background, age, relationship status, but also if their friends and family are supportive towards their profession. Especially I was interested in the answers of the last question, to analyse which discourses were mobilised. The profession-related questions were about their motivation, what does their job mean and imply and what was their perception before they entered sex work. The part about their experiences was the most important part of the interview, since all the participants brought up different stories and experiences. In this part I posed questions about their personal experiences as a sex worker, for instance what they find challenging in their work. Also, I asked them to share their thoughts how they think how sex workers are portrayed in media or how they are represented in politics; this was for me also a very important research question. Eventually I had some questions related to their opinion, for example about the use of the term “prostitute” and the term “sex worker”, this question was relevant in relation to how I should represent the participants in this study.

In this chapter I often mention that the interviews were semi-structured, even though I apply the terms semi-structured to inform the reader about my interview proceedings, I have to underline that I think this concept has some shortcomings. In line with Letherby, I consider the terms structured, unstructured and semi-structured confusing and misleading, since the most unstructured interview is structured due to the natural interview roles and the particular rules (Letherby 2003: 84). Although I find these terms troublesome I think the benefits are still good and relevant enough to apply it, also I situate myself within an academic framework were certain rules must be applied and recognised. So, I think you could apply these terms, but with an elaborate explanation of your interview proceedings what semi structured, structured, unstructured implies.

**Participants**

Here I will introduce the participants by using fake names, due to the confidentiality code. As mentioned before, this study consists of four participants: one sex worker named Rachel, two former sex workers: Anna and Melanie, and a policy officer named Maria. The participants were recruited both individually and through the network of Soa Aids Nederland and Humanitas. Soa Aids Nederland and Humanitas both assist sex workers in the Netherlands by supporting sex
workers and giving advice. During the recruitment process I received several mails from sex workers who did not want to participate, however they were willing to help me find other participants. One sex worker wrote to me that she found it a very noble purpose and that she will contact other sex workers within her network. The same evening I received an email from a sex worker and she expressed her interest to participate in my research.

All the participants in this thesis have Dutch citizenship and are of Dutch origin, so therefore the interviews were conducted in Dutch. The participants in this thesis were on average 48 years of age and they all identify themselves as women. From a statistical categorical representation and intersectional perspective I tried to include people of other gender, origin and sexuality, however due to my limited access to the field and language issues I did not include people of other gender, origin and sexuality. I am aware that these four participants do not represent all the Dutch, female sex workers in the Netherlands, instead I would like to clarify how I think the stories of these participants can reflect the experiences of other sex workers. In this study I interviewed Maria, a policy officer who is very engaged and well informed about sex workers in the Netherlands. Melanie started an organisation about informing people about prostitution in Amsterdam and she has very close contact with sex workers. Anna started a sort of sex workers association and through this association she has a lot of contacts with other sex workers, both national and international. Furthermore, Rachel worked for more than 30 years in sex work in different settings and places. So, all of these women have different experiences and knowledge about the Dutch sex industry. Again with this study I am not trying to represent all sex workers, instead I will present and aim to create awareness about their stories and experiences.

As mentioned in the paragraph above all these women have different experiences in the Dutch sex industry. The sex worker and former sex workers have diverse experiences within sex work, for instance in window prostitution, escort services, brothels and sex clubs. They all worked for at least a minimum of five years in sex work, after that they became active as an activist for sex workers rights, for example as a board member of International Committee of Sex workers Rights in Europe, the Dutch sex work union Rode Draad and a national think tank. Two former sex workers are besides their activism employed with sex worker related issues, as a prostitution
officer and as a sex worker informant, who informs the society about sex work. So, the participants in this study are very well informed and updated about sex work in The Netherlands. They participated in this research for several reasons, for instance to raise more awareness about this topic and to inform and share their experiences about the difficulties they face in relation to the discourses around their profession.

**Research ethics**

In this part of this chapter I will discuss the research ethics. Firstly, I will situate myself in this study and in the section codes of ethics I will elaborate certain research ethics I applied in this study.

**Situating myself within this study**

In this study I situate myself as a young female critical, pro-sex work student that strives for equality and tries to be as inclusive as possible. In this research and especially during the interviews I think it was an advantage to be a woman, since the topic does mostly involve women and it can be a very sensitive topic. In addition women are preferred to conduct interviews, because women are perceived as less threatening and people will more easily open up and share their personal stories (Letherby 2003: 85). As Letherby argues, being a woman in this study is easier and more personal and I can confirm that in relation to the interviews I conducted. At the same time this can be a weak argument, since I have to acknowledge that I am not a female sex worker and therefore I do not have the experiences. However even if I had the experiences, interviewing is an interpretative, subjective process and is always implicated with my decisions. So in this study, I rather focus and emphasise more on my political perspective on sex, namely the pro-sex work perspective.

In the above paragraph I elaborate on my position as a woman, but apart from this I believe it is also significant to be aware of my position as a researcher. In line with Ruth Behar, being aware of the privileged position as a researcher, to study the marginalized, is significant to take into account the positioning from both the participant and researcher. The participant is asked to reveal, to share, while the researcher often reveals nothing or very little. This creates inequality between the participant and the researcher; the participant becomes vulnerable in contrast to the
researcher remaining invulnerable to maintain the power of neutrality (Fontana & Frey 2000: 659). From a feminist and intersectional perspective I find the hierarchy between the researcher and the participant very problematic, however in this study I acknowledge that I cannot argue for tools and methods that can decrease the hierarchical position of the researcher. Though it can be added that in my own study I can decrease the hierarchy by sharing my own thoughts or personal stories in relation to female sexuality with the participants despite the fact that I lack personal experience in sex work. According to Oakley, this form of interviewing creates intimacy and trust (Oakley 2003: 245). In my research I wanted to apply this form of interviewing, however I think this theory has some shortcomings, since I believe that the interview will be influenced by the knowledge of the interviewer and it will be most likely that it confirms the ideology of the interviewer. Therefore I believe the research is less objective, if you could even speak about objectivity, since objectivity is not about being not engaged. “Objectivity is not about disengagement but about mutual and usually unequal structuring, about taking risks in a world where “we” are permanently mortal, that is, not in ‘final’ control” (Haraway 2003:40). In other words objectivity is impossible to achieve, since it an illusion. Instead you can strive for a faithful account and position yourself in the world (Haraway 2003: 27). So, in this study I hope to situate myself in a clear way and strive for a faithful account as possible.

**Codes of ethics**

In social science the codes of ethics are the conventional format for moral principles. These principles are of great importance conducting research. The codes of ethics consist of four guidelines, for instance informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality and accuracy (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:139). In this paragraph you can read a brief overview of how I implemented the codes of ethics in my research. After the letter of invitation the participants received a letter of consent, this consists of the purposes and consequences of the research. It is significant to inform the participants about the nature of the research, since participants have the right to be informed. The participants must agree voluntarily and the agreement needs to be based on comprehensive information. Privacy and confidentiality is also part of the letter of consent and must be ensured against exposure. This master thesis is written on a sensitive, ethical topic and therefore I feel great responsibility about the privacy and confidentiality of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 139).
Evaluation of sources and methodology

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I conducted four interviews with four participants and the analytical tool that I will apply for the analysis is thematic content analysis. Also in this part I will elaborate and evaluate the sources applied in this study.

Methodology

During the process of interviewing I recorded the conversation, so I could transcribe every word that has been said. Field notes only are not enough, since you cannot note and or remember everything. In this chapter I mentioned that the most important element in this study are the experiences and thoughts from the participants, therefore I transcribed every word and expression from the participants. The speaking language is different compare to the written language, for this reason I adjusted the shared information to written language. The transcripts ranged in length from 13 to 18 pages per interview. Through reading and rereading transcripts, as well as making notes, I organized the information and created a global overview (Thorogood & Green 2006: 184).

To analyse the data I administered the method thematic content analysis, to apply this method you need to code all the interview transcripts and divide the content into themes and sub-themes. The research topic and lists of interviews were guiding in coding and organising the data. It is significant to mention that some codes emerged by itself, for example the discourses around sex work, sex work as a form of labour and the consequences of the Dutch policies around sex work. In the analysis I apply these thematic themes, to analyse the material and relate that to the research that has been done and the theoretical framework. However, firstly, I will present how I use terminology and present the previous research.
How I use the terminology

In this chapter I will clarify the definitions that are of great importance to my study. The interpretations of the definitions are build on previous work from other authors, in order to create my own understanding of, and perspective about the definitions.

Sex workers

In this study I often apply the term sex workers and therefore I find it significant to clarify this term before using it. The term sex workers comprehend in this context people who are employed voluntarily, often independently and in a legal framework in the sex industry. I am aware that the terms voluntarily and independently are problematic, nevertheless I still would like to adopt these terms, so therefore I give you an example of how I perceive the terms voluntarily and independently. In this context people who work voluntarily, decide to work in sex work, given the options they have. Some would argue that if money were the reason to work in the sex industry, that it is somehow forced, however I would argue that every form of economic labour is in some way forced. The term independently implies in this context that no pimp or third persons intervenes in their businesses, so this means that these sex workers are own bosses.

Sometimes the word prostitute is applied in relation to previous research or the language chosen by the participants. Personally I think the word prostitute evokes negative stereotyping and can be offensive. Furthermore, applying the word sex worker is also a political statement, since you refer to the pro-sex work perspective that looks upon sex work as a profession, so therefore I prefer to apply sex worker.

This group of sex workers consists of women, men, and transsexuals, above the Dutch legal age limit of 18 years. The members of the group sex workers are extremely diverse and consist for instance of highly educated students and housewives. It is significant to be aware of the intersectional differences among sex workers, since it is not a unified, homogeneous group, but it is extremely disparate and multifarious (Willman & Levy 2010: 1). Sex workers are employed in the sex industry; in the next paragraph I will clarify what sex work consists in this study. To be more specific, people who are forced into the sex industry are not sex workers, but are victims of sexual exploitation.
Sex work

Sex work consists all forms of sexual services for money or other material benefits. The sexual services involve all kinds of sexual exchanges, for example: sexual fantasies, sexual product and or sexual contact (Brents & Hausbeck 2010: 9). Within sex work there are various forms such as brothels, clubs, erotic dancing, escort services, online sex services, phone sex and street work, etc. (Willman & Levy 2010: 1). In this study I also apply sometimes the term prostitution to relate to the previous literature, since by using the term sex work I make a political statement and refer to the pro-sex work strand. So, in my own analyses my personal preference is to apply the term sex work.
Previous research

In this chapter I will present the research that has been conducted in the framework of sex work. This chapter is therefore divided in different, but related sections. As mentioned before, within the sex work debates there are two major standpoints: the anti-prostitution standpoint and the pro-sex work standpoint. Firstly, I will mention both strands in the sex work debate and elaborate the two perspectives. Secondly, I will illustrate the history and the discourses around sex work. In another section I will present the results and conclusions of an international comparative study of prostitution policy in Austria and the Netherlands. Under the heading Sex work as Work I will discuss a few authors who look upon sex work as labour. In the last heading I will present the results from two different studies about sex work and health related issues.

The anti-prostitution and pro-sex work debate

First I would like to start with a brief overview about the anti-prostitution and pro-sex work debate, since this debate divides feminists in two major standpoints towards sex work. The two major divides are the anti-prostitution standpoint and the pro-sex work standpoint. There are two well-known authors in these fields. Within the anti prostitution framework it is Melissa Farley, American clinical psychologist, researcher and anti-prostitution feminist. Farley’s work touches upon the topics of prostitution, trafficking and she investigated the forensic evaluations of survivors of prostitution (Farley 2004: 1125). From the pro-sex work perspective it is Dutch feminist researcher Ine Vanwesenbeeck, her former research work consists of the social position and well-being of sex workers in the Netherlands (University n.d: 1).

In literature and especially in literature from anti-prostitution strand, such as Farley in her article *Bad for the Body, Bad for the Heart*: Prostitution Harms Women Even if Legalized or Decriminalized (2004) it is often about the negative consequences of sex work. In other readings from the pro-sex work perspective, such as Chapkis (1997) and Sanders (2005) the negative social effects do not relate to sex work itself, but to the discourses around sex work. These discourses around sex work are understood as one of main reasons that confine sex workers in their personal and private life (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 638).
The anti-prostitution standpoint looks upon prostitution as harmful for the body and mind and that prostitution itself is violence against women (Farley et al. 1998: 406), (Dworkin 1997:143). Farley states, “Prostitution is an institution that systematically discriminates against women, against the young, against the poor, and against ethnically subordinated groups” (Farley 2004:117). Juline Koken refers to a study of Isin Baral, Melissa Farley, Merab Kiremire and Ufuk Sezgin *Prostitution in Five Countries: Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* (1998) that they began to work on their study from the perspective that prostitution is always violence towards women. The study consisted of a comparative study of violent experiences of 475 street working prostitutes in five different countries. The study findings were that the majority of the people experienced high rates of violence against them, 67% suffered from PTSD and 92% of the street workers wanted to stop working as a street prostitute (Koken 2010: 46). In their study the authors made modest great claims, for example “Our data show that almost all those in prostitution are poor” (Farley et al. 1998: 421). The authors in this study portrayed a side in society in which women get exploited; at a level that they live a life deeply depended on people, who take advantage of them and their vulnerable position. I would like to note that I absolutely do not intend to dismiss or disagree with the research results, however I have to underline that this study only focussed on a certain group of sex workers and therefore I think that you cannot present claims that prostitution discriminates against all women and that it is always violence. In other words, I am very critical about the generalising claims the authors present.

As mentioned before, Farley claims that prostitution itself is violence against all women, but her studies are often focused on one specific group within sex work, namely street workers. In the example mentioned above the study consists of 475 street workers and street work is known as one of the most dangerous forms of sex work. In an interview with Farley about her study in 1998, the interviewer asked Farley “Do you encounter women who say they like this work?’ To this Farley replied, ‘Women don’t say that to me because of the questions I ask” (Koken 2010: 47). In line with Farley’s answer pro-sex work feminist Juline Koken stresses, “Women who have asserted that they have consciously chosen employment in sex work have been neglected or viewed by anti-prostitution feminists as non-existent” (Koken 2011: 210). The answer from Farley is a problematic statement and this proves that Farley’s data was limited due to her own ideology towards prostitution.
The pro-sex work perspective looks upon sex worker as a form of labour. Vanwesenbeeck stresses that “from a pro-sex work feminist frame of reference, meaning that sex work is, on principle, considered legitimate work, not violence. At the same time it is acknowledged that the illegal status of sex work and its consequences do violate the workers’ rights and integrity of sex workers” (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 243). So, the pro-sex work perspective sees sex work as any other profession and argues for the equal rights and chances for sex workers (Koken 2010: 35).

I will write my work in line with the studies from Vanwesenbeeck, because she investigates in a more extensive manner compared to other scholars, as Farley. Here I would like to underline that I am aware that the participants in this study are more privileged, compare to the ones in the study of Farley’s. The participants in this study are working voluntarily and experience more independence and the ones in the study of Farley did not. Vanwesenbeeck published different articles about the social position of sex workers, such as Prostitutes' Well-Being and Risk, 1994, Another Decade of Scientific Work on Sex Work, 2001 and Burnout Among Female Indoor Sex Workers, 2005. The work of Vanwesenbeeck stands out compared to other sex work research from different scholars, since Vanwesenbeeck conducts a research from various groups of people from all levels within sex work. Second, her research is not written from the perspective that sex work is bad or good and the questions she posed for her research allows a diversity of responses and results (Koken 2010: 44).

This research will be mainly written from the pro-sex work perspective. The reason why I am writing in line with the pro-sex work perspective is that I take the stand that one is responsible for your own body, your body is your property and nobody can decide what to do or what not do with one. Secondly, I look upon sex work as a form a labour and therefore I argue for equal civil worker rights. Thirdly, the group sex workers is so diverse and various that I believe that you cannot say that sex work is bad per se or good per se and I think others cannot decide or judge about someone’s life. The pro-sex work perspective sees sex work as work and tries to create a better social status and well-being, which is in line with my ideology towards sex work. I would like to underline that I do not want to dismiss the fact that there are people forced into prostitution and I look upon this as grave violence and exploitation. If I mention the definition sex workers I mean people who work voluntarily, independently, with no interference from
pimps or other third parties. So, people who are forced into prostitution are not sex workers, but victims of sexual exploitation.

**The history and discourse around sex work**

In the article *Another decade of social scientific work on sex work: a review of research 1990-2000*, Vanwesenbeeck consolidates different discourses around sex work from the beginning of the 1990’s till the millennium. Before 1990 scholars often investigated why and how prostitutes entered the industry (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 243). Pamela Lucas, master student in Master Medical Anthropology and Sociology clarifies in her master thesis *Bodily Experiences in Sex Work* that late in the 19th century, scientists were investigating the motivations behind why people end up working in the sex industry and scientists looked upon sex workers as diseased personalities with inborn criminal traits or psychopathological disorders. From the second half of the Twentieth Century scientists compiled and linked sexual abuse in childhood with an increased chance of becoming a sex worker. Scientists assumed that sexual abuse would cause an increased chance that people would sell sexual services (Lucas 2012: 2). Research was often conducted in the framework of AIDS and sexual transmitted diseases, sex workers were considered as a danger to public health. Most observations were generalised and no distinctions between different forms of sex work were made (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 243).

In her article Vanwesenbeeck *Another decade of social scientific work on sex work: a review of research 1990-2000*, she argues for an intersectional approach. Vanwesenbeeck compiles and criticises research literature on prostitution from 1990 till 2000. She presents different topics and perspectives from early writings under specific headings. Vanwesenbeeck is critical in her conclusion about earlier writings on prostitution, especially writings that are not inclusive enough and focus often on one specific vulnerable group of sex workers. These negative study results are often presented as the consequences for sex work in general. Often sex workers are victimised, criminalised and seen as deviant in scientific literature. Vanwesenbeeck criticises the stigmatisation and stereotyping that looks upon sex workers as one unified group in academic scientific literature (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 280).

In 2008 Marije van Stempvoort investigated the discourse around sex work in the Netherlands. Van Stempoort is the policy officer at Humanitas. During her studies Comparative Women’s
Studies in Culture and Politics at Utrecht University she wrote her master thesis about *Service providers and their attitude towards sex workers*. According to her study, sex workers in the Netherlands are afraid of being stigmatised if they ask for help, in particular that they will not be seen as humans and that others will not understand and respect their decision to be employed in sex work. Stempvoort concludes that most of the service providers do respect and recognize sex workers and look upon sex work as a form of labour. This ideology is a pro-sex work thought and Stempvoort argues that the majority of the service providers identify themselves in the discourse of pro-sex work. The service providers mentioned that they also applied this ideology and put it into practice. Furthermore, some service providers mentioned that they would put their ideological attitude aside to assist sex workers. Stempvoort was aware that during her fieldwork she might obtain socially desirable answers, but according to her, both outcomes are positive. Sex workers want to be seen as acting subjects and if service providers are aware of their position within this field and are aware of the discourse, that is already positive (Stempvoort van 2008: 44).

In the literature described above there is a lot of emphasis on the stigma around sex work and sex workers. In her book *The Prostitution Prism, 1996* from sociologist and psychologist Gail Pheterson she describes what she calls the whore stigma. The verb prostitute is defined in Pheterson’s work as “To prostitute oneself is to sell one’s honor for base gain or to put one’s abilities into infamous use” (Pheterson 1993:1). The definition is the popular opinion about the verb prostitute, they definition assumes that prostitution concerns a female sex worker, heterosexual intercourse and the exchange of money. According to Pheterson, there is a mechanism of social control on women’s sexuality. If a woman exceeds certain limits, she will be labeled as a whore. Sex workers exceed the limits of female frigidity and sell their honor for base gain by having sex with multiple partners. (Pheterson 1996: 12).

**Sex work and policy**

Here the previous research from Dutch policy researcher Sietske Altink, scientist at Leiden University will be presented. Since the early 1980’s Altink has been conducting research in the field of prostitution. Recently Altink was a policy officer at The Read Thread, an advocacy support group for prostitutes, but after financial problems The Read Thread was lifted (Opinie 2013:1). Moreover, Altink collaborated with Dutch professor Henk Wagenaar and Helga
Amesberger in an international comparative study of prostitution policy in Austria and the Netherlands. The results of this study consist of two major conclusions. The first conclusion is more on prostitution in general and the second conclusion is about prostitution as a subject of policy (Wagenaar et al. 2013: 87).

The general conclusion about prostitution consists of the notion that prostitution is an enormously policy resistant topic and it is in constant motion. It is influenced by international developments, such as technology, trends in Internet and labour migration. Previous sex work forms like window prostitution are disappearing and new forms, for instance online escorts services, hotel and home prostitution are being introduced to the field. Due to these rapid changes policy officers have a hard time adapting their policies to the current situation and it forces them to be in a highly reactive position. Furthermore, this report pointed out other consequences due to the current prostitution status, such as stigma, shame, criminality, language and cultural issues, since a great number of the sex workers are migrants. Apart from this it is extremely significant to emphasise that there is a great lack of accurate and reliable material, since the material presented in academic publications and serious media is often adapted to the authors ideology. Besides that it is very difficult to obtain the material, since prostitution often operates in the dark (Wagenaar et al. 2013: 87).

This paragraph presents the results and conclusions on prostitution as a subject of policy from an international comparative study of prostitution policy in Austria and the Netherlands. In the conclusion the authors particularly underline that prostitution is very diverse, various and exists in different forms. Since prostitution is looked upon as a not unified phenomena it causes differences in understanding and therefore it is difficult to design inclusive and engaged policies. Furthermore, the authors address the fact that prostitution is a sensitive topic and it often divides people within the same political parties, since it involves moral issues. In addition to developing and designing effective policies it is important to be aware of the diversity and non-uniformity of the topic, since an easy solution, regardless of the goals, does not exist (Wagenaar et al. 2013, p 87).
Sex work as work

As mentioned before sex work was often seen in the framework of the negative and deviant and seen as a social problem. During the last two decades there has been a new movement in scientific research that looks upon sex work as labour (Koken 2010: 28). This is the perspective from pro-sex work authors, like Chapkis, 1997, Sanders 2005, Petro 2010, Vanwesenbeeck 2001, 2005. “What distinguishes sex work from other forms of employment, however, is the way the industry has historically, contemporarily and cross cultural been criminalized by the state and stigmatised by popular society” (Petro 2010: 155). As Petro stresses, recently sex work is related to other mainstream jobs, but however the stigma on sex work distinguishes it from other mainstream jobs.

Sociologist Wendy Chapkis published in 1997 her books Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor, 1997. This book is a seven years ethnographic study in the Netherlands and the United States. Chapkis interviewed women from various levels in sex work and victims of sexual trafficking; her work includes both positive and negative aspects of the experiences of women within prostitution. She interviewed more than fifty women and to not let her ideology concerning sex work lead her work, she involved and used material that is not in line with her opinion towards sex work (Chapkis 1997: 6-7). The work from Chapkis is seen as ground breaking, since Chapkis acknowledges that sex work is emotional labour, and emotional labour could lead to health issues, like burnouts or feeling alienated from your own true feelings. Koken expresses that according to Chapkis sex work itself does not lead to health issues, but your control over your own working conditions, personal experiences as well as acceptance and support from your environment (Koken 2010: 50).

Sex work and health

Years after the publication of the book Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor, 1997 from Wendy Chapkis, other scholars became interested to write about sex work as emotional labor, such as Doctor in Philosophy and Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Leeds Teela Sanders. In her article ‘It’s Just Acting’: Sex Workers’ Strategies for Capitalizing on Sexuality, 2005 she describes how sex workers adopt a manufactured identity to protect their own mental well-being from the effects of sex work. Sanders relates emotional service jobs to sex work and she argues for normalization of sex work as a legal profession (Sanders 2005: 337).
In line with the work from Chapkis, Vanwesenbeeck published her work *Burnout Among Female Indoor Sex Workers, 2005*. Vanwesenbeeck examined burnouts among sex workers and another comparison group of female nurses. The outcome of this research is that sex workers health is not only influenced by their experiences at work, but also in their social environment. Social acceptance and recognition of their profession as well their choices in private life appeared equally as important (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 637). Vanwesenbeeck clarifies that “negative social consequences with violence, and lack of a worker-supportive organizational context were found to be important factors in burnout. To a certain extent, many of these factors are stigma related” (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 637). In other words the stigma and stigma-related experiences are seen as one of the most significant elements of burnout. In her report she stresses that legal rights for sex workers does not normalise and guarantee social acceptance. According Vanwesenbeeck the reduction of negative reactions should be an additional aim for policy makers to increase the social status and well-being of sex workers (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 637).
Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will make the academic background of my research clearer. First, I will indicate the theoretical framework I have used to approach my research question; this will be from a queer theoretical intersectional feminist perspective. The research question of this study is “How do sex workers in the Netherlands experience the discourses around their profession?” In order to understand and to carry out an analysis it is important to deconstruct and unravel the research question. This theoretical framework constructs different parts of the inquiry. Here I will present the key perspectives of this inquiry, in order to organise and structure the theoretical framework. I decided to present the perspectives under two main sections. Those main sections are firstly, discourse and secondly, representation and respectability. Within these two main sections I will present other theoretical reflections on key concepts, such as experiences, stigma and sex work as emotional labour.

Queer theoretical intersectional feminist standpoint

Firstly, I would like to frame my theoretical assumptions: my standpoint will be from a queer theoretical intersectional feminist perspective. It is important to take a stand, because by doing so, I mobilise certain theories from a specific feminist standpoint. In the next paragraphs I will discuss and outline what my stand is towards gender and sexuality, since the terms are related and irremediably slippery (Kofosky Sedgwick 2005: 83). But first I will briefly explain what I mean by queer theory.

Lykke explains in her book Feminist Studies, A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing that Queer Theory emphasises that gender, sex and sexuality need to be analysed all together and that gender and sexuality are seen as intra-acting performatives in a heteronormative discourse (Lykke 2010: 210). Queer theorist Nikki Sullivan argues that “Queer (Theory) is constructed as a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices and (political) positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities” (Sullivan 2003: 44). Sullivan stresses that queer is not an identity, but rather a position. Therefore everybody who feels marginalised due to his or her sexual practices can take up a queer position. Currently this is happening with the sex workers in the Netherlands, since they are marginalised due to their sexual activities and they are challenging the norm around sex.
Gender and sexuality

From a queer feminist intersectional perspective I perceive gender as something we do, instead of something we have or are (Lykke 2010: 205). Queer theorist Judith Butler argues in her text *Critically Queer* that “Gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraint. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization” (Butler 1998: 21). In other words this means that gender is a social construct. Sullivan elaborates that repeating the performative effects on reiterative acts causes the natural sort of being. This natural sort of being does not really exist, since it is not something natural, but a but a repeated act throughout time that causes the illusion that gender identity is a natural sort of being (Sullivan 2003: 82).

In *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* Sullivan adopts Foucault’s argument that, “Sexuality is a discursive construct that takes culturally and historically specific forms” (Sullivan 2003: 119). In line with Sullivan, Rubin argues in *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* that Foucault is arguing that new sexualities are continuously being produced. So, Foucault is emphasising that sexuality is constructed by society and history and not by nature. In line with Rubin I look upon sexuality as a human product, such as kinship systems and scientific taxonomies (Rubin 1975: 267-277). Furthermore, Rubin argues, “If sex is taken too seriously, sexual persecution is not taken seriously enough. There is systematic mistreatment of individuals and communities on the basis of erotic taste or behaviour. There are serious penalties for belonging to the various sexual occupational castes”(Rubin 1975: 310). This quote of Rubin is very much in line with my standpoint within this queer intersectional feminist study, since sex workers are marginalised because of their sexual behaviour.

Queer Theory tries to understand certain performances and practices, for instance heterosexuality. These performances and practices form gender identities, due to continuously producing these gender identities creates the normativity of gender and sexuality. This is reinforced by what Foucault call the regime of truths that seeks to naturalise heterosexuality.

Truth isn’t outside power… Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general
politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes functions as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned… the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault 1980: 131).

So, the reproduction of truth, regimes of truth, normalises certain practices and performances. I think sex work is a discursive part of this regime of truth, as the sex is outside marriage, non-productive, non-monogamous and other there are institutions that claim these truths.

**Discourse and representation**

To get a better understanding of the social attitude towards sex workers it is important to acknowledge discourses around sex work. According to Foucault, knowledge and power are closely linked together and controls how we look upon and experience the world around us and imagine society (Foucault 1990: 5). Foucault argues that discourse constructs the object, it organises the meaning around the object. Apart from influencing the practice, there are some kind of set of unwritten social rules that define how to talk, write, look upon and conduct oneself. According to Stuart Hall the creating of the discourse through the language we apply, leads to the control of people, but in the same way it “rules out” people (Hall 1997: 44).

The term “discourse” means in the context of this study

A group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of historical moment… Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct - all practices have a discursive aspect (Hall 1992: 201).

In relation to the work of Foucault and Hall I would like to share my own definition and interpretation of discourse from a Foucauldian perspective. Discourse is a group of statements that form an idea, or in other words, systems of thinking. It is some sort of cultural fantasy how people experience and imagine the world. A discourse effects and affects objects, certain discourses are very challenging to modify, since they are based on fairly fixed notions, but other discourses are more receptive to being altered.

To get a better understanding of what a discourse entails and implies I would like to share some points from Hall about the concept discourse from Foucault. First of all, a discourse consists of different statements and this can be produced by individuals within families, schools, prisons,
hospitals, that is to say within different institutional settings. Every discourse is developed from the position of the subject. As Hall argues “Anyone deploying a discourse must position themselves as if they were the subject of the discourse” (Hall 1992: 202). So, this means, in the context of this thesis, the position of the sex workers. It is significant to underline that it is not about analysing the relations between the author and the subject. It is about what position can be occupied by the individual or, in other words, the subject (Foucault 1972: 95-96).

Another point that I would like to clarify is that discourses are not closed, single systems, but open and reactive systems. With reactive systems I mean that often certain elements within a discourse relate to elements within another discourse. For example the discourses around sex work are constructed and compiled by discourses around sexuality, female sexuality and many other discourses (Hall 1992: 202). Lastly, to have a better understanding of what a discourse implies and entails, I would like to briefly explain the concept of discursive formation. In the book *Michel Foucault* by post-structuralists and Foucault admirers Cousins and Hussain, the concept “discursive formation” is very well explained. The statements “Refer to the same object, share the same style and support, a common institutional, or political drift or pattern” (Cousins & Hussain 1984: 84-85). This means that the statements are in line with each other, but do not have to be totally the same. As Hall expresses “But the relationships and differences between them must be regular and systematic, not random. Foucault calls this a ‘system of dispersion’” (Hall 1992: 202).

**The discursive nature of experience**

During my fieldwork I conducted four interviews and, while interviewing and listening to the participants, discourses were introduced. Discourses and experiences are related, since experiences are produced by practice and every experience is an interpretation. Gender historian Joan W. Scott argues, “Experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political” (Scott 1991: 797). In other words, experience is an interpretative process and the term “experience” is very ubiquitous. In order to understand my interpretation of experience, it is significant to be aware that I relate the concepts power and knowledge to experience, from a Foucauldian perspective. This means that I look upon power and knowledge as closely linked, since it has the authority of being and making itself true. At the
same time, once applied knowledge in society, it has real effects and therefore becomes true (Hall 1997: 49). In the following quote Foucault argues:

Truth isn’t outside power. … Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes functions as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned … the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980: 131)

In the quote Foucault refers to regime of truth, in other words, general politics of truth, the politics of construction. Regime of truth is related to experience, since experience it is always an interpretation, due to the discursive nature of experience; it is influenced and constructed by dominant discourses. The dominant discourses select what counts as true or false, to be more precisely regime of truth.

During the interviewing, the participants shared their experiences and certain discourses were mobilised, for instance: discourses around female sexuality, sex work as criminal and sex workers as deviant imaginaries. The participants experienced different, but related discourses, since they are integrated in the discourse and nobody is outside of discourse. So, the sex workers’ experiences mobilised certain discourses. The concepts discourse and representation are related to each other appears similar, so therefore I will clarify the differences between these two concepts in next section.

**Representation**

Another concept that I would like to analyse is the concept of “representation” from Stuart Hall. Stuart Hall is a cultural theorist and sociologist who lectured and wrote on the subjects of race, identity and social change (Jeffries 2014: 1). According to Hall, representation “Is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (Hall 1997: 17). The term “language” covers, in this context, a broader meaning. It is not only the written and spoken language, but it also includes music, visual images, the language of facial expressions, the language of fashion, etc. As Hall stresses, “Any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning is, from this point of view, ‘a language’” (Hall 1997: 19).
Discourse is mainly about the production of knowledge through discourse, while representation produces meaning through language (Hall 1997: 44). In other words discourse is about knowledge and is expressed through language, however social practices consist of meaning, which determine and influence how people act, which means that all practices have a discursive aspect (Hall 1992: 202). So, discourse is the system of representation. In relation to discourse and representation I would like to bring in the concept of respectability in the next section.

Respectability
In this section I will apply the concept of respectability as the discourse of normativity from Beverley Skeggs. Beverley Skeggs is Sociologist London. Respectability is an important signifier of class and in forms how we act, how we speak, who are and who we are not. Respectability notifies us how we classify others and it is usually of concern to people who seem not to have it. So, people who are normalised do not experience respectability as problematic, since they are part of the discourse whereas to people who are positioned by and against the discourse of normativity, it is troublesome (Skeggs 1997:1).

Besides respectability, exclusion is one of the most fundamental markers of class. Skeggs mentioned in her book (1997) that certain women were excluded due to non-respectability. Class was experienced as affective and emotional politics. The powerful and superior position of the other authorizes these women to be judged about every little, single aspect of their lives. As a consequence these women lived in fear and they never felt comfortable, since they were scared that others would find something undesirable. This manifestation induced shame due to their disposition and place in society, but some women tried to counter attack against the shame and negative valuing by others. They tried to claim respectability, but instead they were trapped in the perception that they were managed or controlled by others (Skeggs 1997: 162).

Another important signifier of class is the body (Skeggs 1997: 82). According Bourdieu the body is the most undeniable materialization of class. Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher; who developed the well known cultural deprivation theory (Bryant n.d: 1). The body is a physical site where different elements and relations come together, like gender, race, age and sexuality, and where these relations are embodied and practiced. The
respectable body is white, heterosexual and desexualized (Skeggs 1997:82). So, the bodies of prostitutes are not respectable. Professor of Political Science at York University in Toronto, Shannon Bell clarifies that the bodies of prostitutes produced a negative identity and were seen a deviant (O’Connell Davidson 1999: 111).

The concept of respectability is applicable to the discourse around sex work, especially in relation to the figure of sex hierarchy. In *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, feminist and pro-sex work activist Gayle Rubin introduces a visual figure about the discourse on sex hierarchy. This figure consists of a line between good and bad sex, for example good sex is portrayed as normal, natural, healthy, such as heterosexual, monogamous, married, reproductive and at home. Between the best and the worst sex are unmarried heterosexual couples, masturbation and even more on the bad side are long term, stable lesbian couples, and even worse, lesbians in bars. On the totally bad side of the sex hierarchy are transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists and prostitutes. It is described as abnormal, unnatural, sick and sinful. Rubin clarifies that some sexual behaviour has become more respectable and accepted, but the current discourse on sexuality is very much influenced by religion, politics, etc. (Rubin 1975: 282). In other words, sex workers are not respectable, because of the discourse around sex work that it sees as bad, abnormal or sinful. However I have to underline that this article was written in 1975, almost 30 years ago, and, as Rubin states in her essay, during the written process society has started to recognize and accept different forms of human interaction. Rubin refers to coupled, monogamous homosexual interaction which has become more respectable (Rubin 1975: 283). However sex work is looked upon as less respectable than for instance monogamous, married, reproductive sex.

**Stigma**

In this section I will present and outline the concept of “stigma” in relation to “respectability”. I look upon stigma as part of respectability, and by doing so stigma is perceived, as the experience deviant from the normative discourse. By arguing that stigma should be introduced as a theoretical tool, as something that needs to be applied, then as a consequence, it stigmatises sex workers again. Therefore I argue for stigma as a discourse, a part of respectability, a missing respect.
Sociologist Erving Goffman clarifies “A stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity” (Goffman 1963:12). According to Goffman, stigma is some kind of attribute and others perceive that attribute as not according to the norms and is therefore unacceptable. Compared to other so-called normal people the stigmatised is an impaired person. The context and situation decides if something is stigmatised or not. So this means that an attributer can normalise, but for others it might stigmatise them. A stigma is therefore not, per se, unfavourable or not favourable. Goffman describes three types of stigma: body, character or tribal. The bodily stigma is physical and often visible, for example people with a disability. The character stigma is less visible and consists of undesirable characteristics in society, such as unnatural desires or honesty. The tribal stigma is socially related and consists of the social norms and discourses in society. Sex workers are part of the tribal stigma. However, if they are working, they can be stigmatised through their bodies, in other words body stigmatisation (Goffman 1963:15-18).

Goffman argues in his text that stigmatised people are not quite human. “By definition, of course, we believe that the person with the stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances” (Goffman 1963: 5). In other words, sex workers are not looked upon as human beings, nor as mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters or children. According to Rubin, this has to do with the discourse around sex. “Sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent. Virtually all-erotic behaviour is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. The most acceptable excuses are marriage, reproduction and love” (Rubin 1975: 278). So this means that the normative discourse around sex only consists of heterosexual, monogamous, married couples in a reproductive setting. This discourse excludes and dismisses sex workers and therefore sex workers can experience the consequences of a stigma due to the normative discourse around their profession.

**Sex work as emotional labour**

In relation to respectability I will present here sex work as a respectable profession, a form of labour. Recently sex work has been seen more as a service job and more likened to other mainstream traditionally female occupations, such as nurses, waitresses, etc. Often many people
are concerned about sex work and especially about selling a part of your body, earning a living with something so personal and intimate (Brents & Hausbeck 2010:16). However, if you take a better look at the society around us many people earn a living by offering services like human relations, emotions, and experiences. Nowadays human relations are bought and sold. “Research is showing that sales people and service workers are becoming increasingly adept at managing multiple, and flexible presentations of self to meet customer expectations. Recent research has been examined similarities in the experience of commodifying emotions between these workers and sex workers including exotic dancers and prostitutes” (Brents & Hausbeck 2010: 16). So, Brents and Hausbeck relate sex workers to other emotional and service related professions.

The term “emotional labour” was for the first time introduced by Hochschild in 1979. In her work she argues that people working in service jobs express socially desired emotions as part of their profession (Brewis & Linstead 2000: 226). In the articles of Hochschild, 1988 and Vanwesenbeeck, 2005 sex work is related to emotional labour. Emotional labour means work that involves someone having to act a certain way to establish a relationship with the customer. There are different forms of acting, for instance surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting is known to be false or fake, whereas the main purpose of deep acting is to transform someone’s feelings (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 628). Examples of emotional labour are service jobs, for example: hostesses, social workers, and waitresses, etc.

In the essay Social workers and sex workers Webb and Elms argue that the job description of sex workers and social workers are related, since for both types of workers education and counselling are very important. Sex workers offer not only their bodies, but they offer an experience. Webb and Elms claim that both types of workers need to apply the same skills in their work and they both need to work intensively with the customer(Webb & Elms 1994: 175). Nevertheless, in the book Sex, Work and Sex Work some authors, like Pateman and O’Connell Davidson argue that the emotional labour of sex workers is more intense compared to non- sexual service jobs. This has also to do with the fact that often sex workers work long hours and that that sex work involves sex, which is stigmatised (Brewis & Linstead 2000: 228).
Gherardi suggests that most mainstream service jobs are sexualised and that service jobs have much more in common with sex work, than assumed.

Sexual skills… are acquired incorporated into the organizational role. The organization acquires command over the sexuality of its employees, within certain limits. Women with jobs that require, implicitly or explicitly, an attractive appearance – hostesses, secretaries – are duty bound to be agreeable or seductive, and must be or pretend to be ‘sexy’ in their dealings with the public (Gherardi 1995: 43).

She argues in the book *Sex, Work and Sex Work* that women in service jobs have to prostitute themselves to live up to the expectations and to satisfy the employer and the customer (Brewis & Linstead 2000: 228). Gherardi argues that women in service jobs are sexualised, however I would like to underline that this is not only applicable for women, but for men as well, though to a different extent.

To conclude, this chapter presents the theoretical framework from a queer theoretical intersectional feminist perspective. The chapter consists of two main sections: discourse and representation and respectability. Discourse is a very important concept of this study, since the research question is all about the discourses around sex workers in the Netherlands and sex work is a discursive part of the regime of truth. Another important concept is respectability as a discourse of normativity: sex workers are excluded due to non-respectability and often they experience class as affective and emotional politics (Skeggs 1997: 163). In relation to respectability, stigma was introduced as a discourse, a part of respectability. Finally, sex work as emotional labour was presented as a respectable profession, like other mainstream service jobs.
A short context of the Dutch legalisation

In this chapter I will give background information in order to get a better understanding of the Dutch sex work framework. First, I will briefly outline about some information about the Dutch parliamentary democracy. Second, I will clarify how the Dutch ban on brothels was established and what the current regulation means.

About the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a parliamentary democracy with 11 political parties. The Dutch political system is based on a minority’s principle; this means that a political party never can form a majority on its own. Therefore the political parties need to establish and form a coalition of two or more parties. The Netherlands is a unitary state, which means that the laws are established by the national government. However local municipalities have independent authority over duties or implementation decided by the state. The Prostitution Bill is an example of the diverse implementations by local municipalities. To organise the municipalities about the prostitution policy there is a so-called APV, the General Local Ordinance, which is the umbrella organisation to create uniformity. However every municipality can establish their own prostitution policies. Nevertheless, the prostitution policies from big cities as Amsterdam and Utrecht are seen as examples for smaller municipalities (Wagenaar et al. 2013: 22).

Dutch policy on prostitution

Before the year 2000 sex work was tolerated in the Netherlands in other words it was accepted that it existed, although it was neither illegal, nor legal. From the late 1970’s there was a great growth of the sex industry and this caused a situation where that sexual services spread all over neighbourhoods and citizens started to protest. The Dutch municipalities combined their forces to lobby and to repeal the ban of brothels in order to regulate the sex industry. This is seen as the starting point of the lobby for lifting the ban of brothels in the Netherlands (Outshoorn 2004: 185).

In the debate about the ban of brothels the Dutch government organised a poll to investigate the opinion of the Dutch citizens towards legalisation. The poll monitored the opinion of the Dutch citizens and it formulated that 73% of the Dutch population was in favour of legalising sex work. So the majority of the Dutch citizens approved the legalisation and they thought that sex work
should be socially acceptable (Stok 2010: 3). This pro-sex work philosophy might be caused due to the debate on the repeal on brothels in 1983. The liberal Minister of Justice Korthals proposed a bill (18202) to modernise the Penal Code and to remove the former Bill of Work Camps for pimps. The bill was supported by a majority of the Dutch parliament. The bill consists of the pro-sex work philosophy that looks upon voluntary sex work as work and forced prostitution as illegal. The bill proposed to stop moralising about sex work, remove the stigma and introduce a form of labour: sex work (Outshoorn 2004: 188).

“Prostitution has existed for a long time and will continue to do so. This requires a realistic approach on the part of government. Prohibition is not the way to proceed, but one should allow for voluntary prostitution. The authorities can then regulate prostitution and the prostitution sector. It can then become healthy, safe, transparent and cleansed from criminal side-effects” (Korthals 1999 in Outshoorn 2004: 185).

This is a quote from October 1999 in the parliament when Minister of Justice Korthals held a speech about the legalisation of brothels in the Netherlands. This quote clarifies concisely the Dutch pro-sex work philosophy. As mentioned before, the Dutch pro-sex work philosophy consists of two strands; voluntary sex work, which is legal and, forced prostitution which is illegal. Voluntary sex work is seen as work and municipalities regulate the sex industry by giving out licences to brothels and arranging a health and safety net. Forced prostitution is a criminal offence and now carries heavier penalties towards criminal offenders (Outshoorn 2004: 185).

The citation mentioned below is a quote from the press release that the Minister of Justice sent out in October 2000 to explain why the nation voted in favour of the ban of brothels. The main aims for lifting the ban of brothels were:

1. “Better control and regulation of the sex industry
2. Better combatting of involuntary prostitution, underage prostitution, and human trafficking of illegal aliens for the sex industry
3. Improve the position of prostitutes, specifically in regards to health, well-being, financial independence, and public opinion” (Stok 2010: 4).
The regulation consists of various forms of control, for instance to control and ban certain criminal aspects of prostitution, the restriction of the number of sex businesses and the number of sex workers, organising a network to help and prevent sexually transmitted diseases and organise, restrict sex businesses to specific neighbourhoods and fight human trafficking. So, the regulation should decrease crime and provide support and service to sex workers. (Wagenaar et al. 2013: 15).

**Regulation**

In October 2000 lifted the Dutch government the ban on brothels, which means that sex clubs and escort services can now operate as legal businesses. Under certain conditions brothels are now allowed in the Netherlands, that is to say that only people who work there are voluntary workers and no minors are involved. The owners of sex businesses must obtain a licence and satisfy certain conditions. As a result of this bill, licences are obligatory and the municipalities can regulate the sex industry. Sex work is now a legal profession, so this means that sex workers need to have a valid Dutch residence permit, need to be at least 18 years old, need to pay taxes and need to be voluntarily engaged in sex work (Affairs 2012: 3).
Analysing the interviews

In this analysis I will analyse the transcriptions of the interviews and relate it to the previous research, theoretical framework and the research question. I will analyse the material in order to answer my research question. I therefore decided to present my analysis under three main themes: the discourses around sex work, the consequences of the discourses around sex work and sex work as a form of labour. Under these main sections I will present related sub-themes.

**Experiencing the discourses on sex work**

In this section I will analyse some of the discourses around sex work in the Netherlands, which are sex work portrayed as criminal and the victimisation of sex work. In relation to sex work I understand discourse as group of statements that form an idea, a perception in society. These discourses, in other words systems of thinking form different meanings around sex work.

**Sex work portrayed as criminal**

Here I will portray sex work seen as a criminal activity. As mentioned in the previous research according to Vanwesenbeeck (2001), the discourses around sex work are problematic, since it stigmatises and stereotypes sex workers as one uniform group (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 280). Participant Rachel confirms Vanwesenbeeck results and says the following about stereotyping and stigmatizing prostitution:

> Prostitution is often linked to human trafficking and I believe that through that way of thinking it will limit the effective combat. Besides that, to relate prostitution to all forms of violence against women is offensive to the women who deliberately chose to work in prostitution.\(^2\)

In the quote Rachel refers to the fact that prostitution is often linked to human trafficking and that it is problematic for people who chose to become a sex worker. Participant Melanie argues, “Prostitution is providing sexual services as a profession, but of course voluntarily. It is totally not related to human trafficking or sexual coercion. So to understand my vision, you have to see the difference between human trafficking and professional sex work, because to me these are two

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\(^2\) Participant Rachel.Prostitutie wordt vaak gezien als mensenhandel en ik denk dat door die gedachtegang het effectief bestrijden van mensenhandel juist buiten bereik raakt. Het gelijks tellen van prostitutie aan al het geweld tegen vrouwen, dat vind ik niet goed genoeg rekening houden met de vrouwen die daar weloverwogen voor hebben gekozen.
completely different issues.”³ Melanie looks upon human trafficking and sex work as two
different and not related issues. In line with Melanie, Rachel argues, “I do not perceive my work
as something criminal, because it is not criminal. The terrible side effects these are criminal.”⁴

Similar to Melanie’s quote, Rachel does not relate her work to other criminal activities in the
business, since both women see human trafficking and sex work as two different issues. This
thought is in line with the pro-sex work perspective as mentioned in previous research, where sex
work is perceived as a form of labour, a legal profession (Sanders 2005: 335). In line with the
participants and the pro-sex work perspective I argue, that human trafficking and other forms of
criminality have nothing to do with sex work itself. The thought that sex work is criminal is part
of a fairly fixed and dominant discourse, produced long time ago. As Vanwesenbeeck stresses, in
the late 19th century, scientist looked upon sex workers as diseased personalities with inborn
criminal traits (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 243). This discourse is nowadays still very dominant and it
looks like that this discourse is very challenging to modify. This has also to do with the fact that
criminal activities are happening within the industry, so therefore you cannot dismiss and ignore
it. Under those circumstances I argue for the acknowledgement of abuses within the industry, but
for effective regulation and control and to challenge the dominant discourse.

Rachel’s quote about the criminalisation of sex work is an example of the ideology of this
discourse around sex work. This has to do with the fact, as mentioned in the above paragraph,
that this discourse is very dominant and it is characterised by the ideology that all forms of sex
work are related to criminality. To me it is a shortcoming, that this discourse is very generalising
and I think that is a weak argument, nevertheless, the discourse is really dominant. Therefore, I
challenge this discourse, on the basis that it generalises sex work and sex workers. This discourse
argues that all forms of sex work are related to human trafficking. As an example I could argue
that all forms of agricultural work are related to human trafficking, since there are a lot of
migrants who are exploited in the agricultural sector. However not every business in agriculture
is criminal, so therefore sex work could neither be generalised.

³ Participant Melanie. “Prostitutie is het verlenen van seksuele diensten als beroep, maar natuurlijk wel uit vrije wil. Het staat voor mij volledig los van mensenhandel of dwang. Dus om mijn visie te begrijpen moet je wel het verschil zien tussen mensenhandel en professioneel seks werk, want dat zijn voor mij twee totaal verschillende onderwerpen.”
⁴ Participant Rachel.“Ik zie mijn werk niet als iets crimineels, want het is niet crimineel op zichzelf. De vreselijke neveneffecten die zijn crimineel.”
The following quote from Melanie about her friend’s experience is similar to that of Rachel’s:

People are shocked and people find it a scary subject, since they link it to criminality and they look upon sex work as something bad. I can give you an example of my colleague; she wanted to work as a home nurse for elderly people, but she did not get the job, because she worked in the past as a prostitute. They said to her that she might offer her services to other elderly men and they are too vulnerable, so they did not want to take that risk.⁵

This is an example of the consequences of this discourse around sex work. Sex workers are regarded as persons who are non-respectable, this is a very common thought and deeply troubling. Sex workers are systematically excluded from the economic labour market. Melanie’s friend was discriminated because of her former profession, which is often related to criminality. The bodies of sex workers, the taboo around sexuality and other discourses are related to this event, since the bodies of sex workers are not perceived as respectable, they produce a negative identity (O’Connell Davidson 1999: 111). People who are positioned against the discourse of normativity are delegitimized through associations of non-respectability (Skeggs 1997: 162). I think Melanie’s quote is a good example of the importance of class in society, since due to non-respectability Melanie’s friend was excluded from a position in the labour market. This is in line about what Rubin argues, “Individuals whose behaviour stands high in this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legality social and physical mobility, institutional support and material benefits” (Rubin 1975: 279). This means that people, in this study, sex workers, fall on the lower scale are not rewarded and are related to mental diseases, non-respectability, criminality, constrained physical and social flexibility, economic punishments and loss of institutional support (ibid: 279).

Melanie presents another example of the criminalisation of sex work: “When you go to the Chamber of Commerce to register yourself, they look at you very suspiciously. Prostitution is

⁵ Participant Melanie. “Mensen schrikken dan en mensen vinden het een eng onderwerp. Mensen linken het aan iets crimineels en ze vinden het toch iets slechts. Ik kan je een voorbeeld geven van een collega die bijvoorbeeld wilde werken in de thuiszorg, maar niet werd aangenomen vanwege haar verleden als prostituee. Ze zeiden dat ze zich nog wel eens zou kunnen aanbieden aan hun oude, mannelijke klanten en die zijn veel te kwetsbaar en dat risico wilden ze niet nemen.”
often perceived as the criminal and dangerous world. "6 Again this an example of the negative labelling of sex work and the consequences of this discourse that sex work is being seen as criminal and dangerous. As a result, sex work and sex workers are not treated with dignity and respect, as Melanie mentions they look at you very suspiciously. Not only are sex workers perceived as criminals, but also sex workers are perceived as victims of human trafficking of coercion.

**The victimisation of sex work**

Sex workers are often perceived as victims of human trafficking and coercion. Queer feminist Judith Butler confirms that the discourse on victimisation have become a popular perspective. Butler argues, “The discourse on victimization, have succeeded in rendering popular a view of feminism in which positions of gender are strictly correlated with positions of domination or subordination within sexuality” (Butler 1994: 7). According to Anna, the Dutch media and the Dutch government often victimise all sex workers, she argues “There is a lot of lobbying about the victimisation, but the government needs to understand that not everyone is a victim, also not of the oppression of men, and that not every customer is a potential rape.”7 Anna is very clear in her quote that the group sex workers are perceived as one uniform group, as Vanwesenbeeck (2001) argues, that is very problematic. However, in relation to the system of sexual oppression, sex workers, who are not Dutch and people of colour, have an increased chance to be perceived as victims of human trafficking. This has to do that they are less privileged and therefore less immune to sexual oppression (Rubin 1975: 293). So, Dutch sex workers are more privileged, although there are not immune to sexual oppression.

The victimisation of sex work discourse is in line with the ideology of the anti-prostitution strand as expressed by Baral, Farley, Kiremire and Sezgin, that all forms of prostitution are violence against women (Farley et al. 1998: 406). This is problematic, since therefore all the sex workers are generalised. Like Melanie discusses:

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6 Participant Melanie. “Ga je naar de Kamer van Koophandel om je in te schrijven, kijken ze je daar toch zo wantrouwend aan.Prostitutie wordt toch vaak gezien als de criminele en gevaarlijke wereld.”

7 Participant Anna. “Er wordt heel veel gelobbyd over het slachtofferschap, maar de overheid moet gewoon een keer goed uitgelegd krijgen dat niet iedereen slachtoffer is, ook niet van onderdrukking door mannen en dat niet iedere klant een potentiële verkrachting is.”
If there is too much focus on human trafficking and coercion, and they see the prostitute as a victim of coercion and abuse, then they do not ask her what do you really think, what do you want and in what circumstances would you like to work? Because they are too concerned with saving girls and they do not see her as an entrepreneur or employee or someone who needs clean sheets, good price and a good negotiating position.  

Melanie argues that not every sex worker is a victim of sexual exploitation and that it is important if people want to support a sex worker or help a victim of sexual exploitation, since they both have different needs. Melanie emphasises the importance of the consequences of the discourse, which portrays sex workers as victims of sexual exploitation. Contrary to this reasoning I argue that the women in this study are very privileged and therefore argue from a privileged position, since they speak the Dutch language, know how the Dutch system works and therefore they have in general good experiences within sex work and do not relate to the abuses in the sex industry. This is in line with the research results from Vanwesenbeeck Prostitutes’ Well-Being and Risk (1994) that native Dutch women, who work independently, attained higher education, had a better standard of living and scored in the top of measures of well-being. So, they are therefore more privileged than other sex workers.

As Rachel expresses before, relating sex work to all forms of violence, reveals ignorance about a group of people who choose to work in prostitution. This dominant and strong discourse has a historical reason, since during the 19th century it was told to youth that sex is always harmful, eventually it was chiselled into social and legal structures (Rubin 1975: 268). Nowadays this discourse is still visible within society.

In this section Rachel shares her experience of being ignored and being portrayed as not existent at the European Parliament in Brussels.

I went to the conference in the European Parliament in Brussels, prior to the adoption of the anti prostitution resolution. I was there as a sex worker, but they pretended I did not existed. According to them, I am woman who is not capable and does not have enough knowledge to make my own choices to participate in prostitution, which actually was a very deliberate decision in my adult life. In the parliament

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8 Participant Melanie. “Als er teveel gefocust wordt op mensenhandel, dwang en ze de prostituee zien als slachtoffer van dwang en misbruik, dan ga ze haar niet vragen van wat vind je eigenlijk, wat wil je eigenlijk en in wat voor omstandigheden zou je willen werken? Want ze zijn alleen bezig met het redden van de meiden en ze zien haar niet als een ondernemer, werknemer of iemand die behoefte heeft aan schone lakens, een goede prijs en een goede onderhandelingspositie.”
there are a lot of women who are much younger than me and they are less educated. I have a bachelor degree and I was raised in an extremely good family. So, the attitude from people in the parliament you could experience as great violence. As well, the consequences of exclusion in society are great violence towards the women who deliberately chose to work in prostitution.  

In the quote Rachel is referring to her agency and her independency that is questioned, or actually are ignored by the members of the parliament. Instead of empowering people, the members of the parliament disable and express the non-existence of voluntary sex workers. As Rachel stresses, the consequence of exclusion in society is great violence for sex workers. This causes sex workers to be not comfortable with themselves. Skeggs emphasises, “Their pathologization through contemporary representations serves to continually confirms this discomfort” (Skeggs 1997: 162). In other words, as a consequence of certain discourses that portray sex work as psychologically abnormal, it reproduces discomfort. “Their attempts to claim respectability locked them into systems of self-regulation and monitoring, producing themselves as governable subjects” (Ibid: 162). So, they are trapped in the perception that they are managed or controlled by others.

**The consequences of discourses around sex work**

In this section I will analyse the consequences of certain discourses on three different levels: professional and political, the social consequences within social life and the bodily effects on the health of sex workers.

**The professional and political sex work struggles**

In this section I will argue for the struggles sex workers face within a professional working context. As mentioned before in the background, since 2000 sex work in the Netherlands is legalised, after that date sex workers have to register themselves. Melanie explains “You must now register at the Chamber of Commerce, you have to pay taxes and continuously inspectors, social workers and other people come to you who make things more difficult or try to rescue  

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9 Participant Rachel. “Ik ben bijvoorbeeld bij de conferentie geweest in het Euro parlement in Brussel, voorafgaand van het aannemen van de anti prostitutie resolutie. Wanneer ik daar als sekswerker ben en ik hoor beweerd te worden dat ik eigenlijk niet besta en dat ik een vrouw ben die niet voldoende bagage heeft om zelf een keuze te maken voor prostitutie, wat een zeer weloverwogen beslissing in mijn leven in mijn zeer volwassen leven is. In het parlement zijn er heel veel vrouwen die veel jonger zijn dan ik en die ook niet beter opgeleid zijn. Ik heb een HBO opleiding en ik kom uit een buitengewoon goed gezin. Dus hun houding kun je ervaren als groot geweld. En dan ook nog de consequenties van uitsluiting in de samenleving, want dat is een groot geweld naar de vrouwen die weloverwogen hebben gekozen voor prostitutie.”
you.” Melanie argues that since the legalisation a lot of people try to help and intervene, but all this attention keeps you from doing your job. Due to the fact that sex work is legalised, it is understandable that there are more controls and that the government regulates the industry. At the same time, due to the fact that sex work became more visible, more organisations and people intervene, as Melanie argues that keeps your attention away from doing your job. This might has to do with the fact that there are certain organisations that want to rescue sex workers. Rubin argues, “Prostitutes who had been part of general working-class population, became increasingly isolated as members of an outcast group” (Rubin 1975: 286). As Rubin argues, sex workers are treated as isolated members, in relation to the previous sections sex workers are portrayed as victims and criminals. Therefore, organisations might feel the need to help and since not all sex workers are as privileged as the participants in this study, I think this is very good. However for the privileged sex workers in this study, it can be distractive during their work.

Another struggle for sex workers is the great focus on the combat of human trafficking; as a consequence one of the main aims of legalising prostitution, improving the position of sex workers receives no attention. “I think there is more focus on human trafficking, than the employment status and the immediate working conditions of the prostitute.” The problem here is that that is not enough emphasise on the diversity and non-uniformity of sex work. At the same time I would like to underline again that this quote from Melanie is a very privileged thing to say. However I agree that it is important to develop and design effective policies it is important to be aware of the diversity and non-uniformity of the topic, since an easy solution, regardless of the goals, does not exist (Wagenaar et al. 2013, p 87).

Maria articulates that for sex workers it is very difficult to get a mortgage, an insurance and business account. Rachel explains:

Prostitution was not perceived as a normal profession. It was almost impossible to get a bank account and you had to come up with all sorts of weird euphemism to explain what your profession is. Nevertheless,

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10 Participant Melanie. “Je moet je nu registreren bij de Kamer van Koophandel, je moet belasting betalen, je krijgt continu controleurs, hulpverleners en andere mensen die je het moeilijk maken of ze komen je redden.”

11 Participant Melanie. “Ik vind dat er meer gefocust wordt op mensenhandel, dan de arbeidspositie en de directe werkomstandigheden van de prostituee.”
this was the situation for all normal facilities, such as insurance, mortgage, buying a house, etc. You need the help of other businesses to facilitate you.

Nowadays Rachel has a house, a bank account; she only does not have occupational disability insurance. For all these facilities Rachel had to discuss and argue a lot to convince others to receive these facilities. This is a good example that the participants in this study have agency, since they argue and they stand up for their rights.

As Rachel argues in the quote you need the help of other businesses to support and help you to receive facilities. For sex workers it is very difficult, because they are seen as less or not respectable. Respectability is an important signifier of class and uniforms how we act, how we speak, who are and who we are not and notifies us how we classify others (Skeggs 1997: 1). Sex workers and sex work itself are perceived as less or not respectable and therefore businesses are not so helpful and willing, since sex workers are positioned by and against the discourse of normativity. In line with respectability Rubin criticises sexual regulation and she refers to it as sexual discrimination. “The law buttress structures of power, codes of behaviour, and forms of prejudice. At their worst sex law, and sex regulation are simply sexual apartheid” (Rubin 1975: 291). So, Rubin argues that a sex law is just reinforcing apartheid, but now with a focus on sexual non-normative behaviour. Personally I problematize the term apartheid, since it is specifically originated in a violent South African context and therefore I think Rubin’s use of apartheid is not very suitable. Furthermore, the quote of Rachel is very troublesome and therefore I would argue, since sex work is legalised in the Netherlands, that businesses are obligated to help and find a solution in consultation with the customer.

**The stigma on sex work in social life**

“I experienced that is was very difficult to discuss with my family, since there is a certain embarrassment. And I thought if I experience this as troublesome, than many others in this

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12 Participant Rachel. “Prostitutie werd niet gezien als een normale bedrijfsactiviteit. Het was vrijwel onmogelijk om een bankrekening te krijgen en je moest allerlei rare eufemismen bedenken voor wat je deed, maar dat gold voor alle normale faciliteiten die je nodig hebt om deel te nemen aan de samenleving, zoals het afsluiten van verzekeringen, het afsluiten van een hypotheek, het kopen van een huis, etc. Daarbij heb je de hulp nodig van het bedrijfsleven om jou te faciliteren.”
profession are also suffering from this, it is just a great concern.” 13 This quote is from Melanie about the stigma around sex work. Melanie is not the only person who faces difficulties with the stigma around sex work. During the interviewing the most popular and applied word was the word stigma. Every participant expressed different stories and examples of experiences with the stigma around sex work and all the participants in this study expressed in different ways that they were dealing with a certain stigma. Similar to Melanie, Rachel expresses:

I eventually told my two older sisters and brother. My older sisters had to struggle with the idea that I worked as a sex worker, but from a position of affection. They were wondering how I could ever do such a thing to myself, because they could not imagine that I had sex with random men. My brother also found it difficult, but he was also very curious about my motivation. However I am sure I could explain it to my family, although I have lost friends, since they could not cope with it, but at the same time other friendships became much more substantive. 14

Both women experienced difficulties with telling their families that they were working as a sex worker. The discourse around sex work causes a stigma on the profession itself and the people working within sex work. As mentioned above by the participants they are stigmatised, because of the fixed discourse around sex work. In the theoretical framework Goffman expresses a stigma as failing, a shortcoming, a handicap (Goffman 1963:12). The participants in this study very well express this shortcoming and handicap, not only in private life, but also in society. For instance Melanie, “You work voluntarily or you worked voluntarily for a few months or years and you do not have any problems with that, but your position in the society is very difficult. You cannot express yourself or be open about it, even if you do not have any problems with that, because other people will condemn you.” 15 Since this is the situation in the Netherlands Anna expresses that her partner is very careful to who he tells that Anna worked as a sex worker. She explains “He is very careful to who he tells it, especially towards the construction workers and painters he

13 Participant Melanie. “Ik vond het heel lastig om met mijn familie te bespreken, want er is toch een bepaalde schaamte. En ik dacht ik heb daar last van, maar heel veel anderen in het vak hebben daar ook last van, het is gewoon een groot ding.”
14 Participant Rachel. “Ik het uiteindelijk ook verteld aan mijn twee oudere zussen en broer. Mijn oudere zussen hebben moeten worstelen met het idee dat ik werkte als sekswerker, maar wel vanuit genegenheid. Zo van god wat doe jij jezelf aan, omdat ze het niet konden voorstellen dat ik seks met willekeurige mannen had. Mijn broer heeft ook moeten slikken en die was erg benieuwd naar mijn motivatie. Ik weet wel zeker dat ik het kon overbrengen aan mijn familie, maar vrienden ben ik kwijt geraakt, omdat ze het niet aankonden en andere vriendschappen zijn juist veel inhoudelijker erdoor geworden.”
15 Participant Melanie. “Je zit vrijwillig in het vak of je hebt vrijwillig in het vak gezeten voor een aantal maanden of jaren en je hebt daar geen problemen mee, maar je positie in de maatschappij is toch heel ingewikkeld. Je kan daar niet echt voor uit komen, terwijl je er zelf geen problemen mee hebt, maar andere mensen veroordelen jou.”
works with. He is very cautious, also for his own position”.\textsuperscript{16} Anna explains that it is very
difficult to work or have worked as a sex worker, because it often implies something negative.
Also when you have children it is really tough, because it will be used against you. Melanie also
confirmed this, since she experienced similar experiences:

It is very difficult to get a job if you inform the employer. Also you cannot really talk about it, because
you know people will judge and condemn you. Likewise in your private life, such as family members and
people, you thought they were your friends, are calling you a whore behind your back or think you are
doing something really bad. Because of this you start to doubt about yourself and the people around you.
It is just very complicated.\textsuperscript{17}

These stories confirms what Rubin describes in her essay, that most sex workers experienced sad
stories of mistreatment and rejection by disturbed families and friends (Rubin 1975: 293). In line
with Rubin I think, despite of the fact that sex work is legalised in the Netherlands, that sex
workers are easier mistreated and rejected by their family, due to all the discourses and prejudices
around sex work. Personally, I find it heart breaking that people reject other people due to their
choices in life.

Melanie’s quote about the difficulty of informing your employer raises a troublesome issue. This
is living in deception. Goffman refers to this as “modes of double living” (Goffman 1963: 76).
Here I would like to add, that as a result it becomes an obstacle, for example to start a new career,
due to the stigma around sex work. For this reason it is likely that former sex workers are in a
disadvantaged position and therefore they have to hide and lie about their career history.

Maria expresses that this year during international women’s day a group of sex workers where
planning to organise a flashmob with red umbrellas, the sign of sex workers organisations. Weeks
before the event sex workers started to discuss about it, Maria expresses “For example, what you

\textsuperscript{16} Participant Anna. “Maar hij is heel voorzichtig aan wie hij het vertelt, helemaal tegen de stoere bouwvakkers en
schilders met wie hij samen werkt, daar is hij heel terughoudend in, ook voor zijn eigen positie.”

\textsuperscript{17} Participant Melanie. “Het is heel moeilijk om een baan te krijgen, als je het eerlijk vertelt. En je kunt er ook niet
goed over praten, omdat je weet hoe mensen erover denken en je wordt er toch op afgerekend. Ook in je privéleven,
zoals familieleden of mensen waarvan je dacht dat het vrienden zijn, die achter je rug om, je voor hoer uitmaken of
vinden dat je iets heel slechts doet. Daarom ga je ook twijfelen aan jezelf en aan de mensen om je heen. Het is
gewoon erg ingewikkeld.”
see is that the sex workers who want to join, already start discussing if they should wear a wig, where can I buy a wig? Because it is difficult for coming out that you are a sex worker.”

All the experiences shared by the participants have to concern with certain negativity. The sex workers in these examples were afraid for the negative social consequences, by informing others about their profession. Based on their experiences it is evident that most people relate to sex work as something negative, an immediate negative labelling. This labelling causes an I-it, subject-object relationship, as a result the labelled, the sex worker is seen as an object instead of an intrinsically valuable human. Goffman would argue that the stigmatised is compared to so-called normal people and is considered to be an impaired person (Goffman 1963: 15). This is very problematic, since this disconnection confines sex workers’ opportunities to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with others. In order to minimalize the possible loss of friends, family or opportunities in society, sex workers need to minimize disclosure of their sex worker identity, which is troublesome.

**The stigma on sex work and health**

The support from friends and family are very important. Koken expresses that sex work itself does not lead to health issues, but the acceptance and support from your environment is very significant (Koken 2010: 50). Not only family and friends are important, but also social acceptance. Rachel argues that she often gets confronted with politicians who would like to adopt a new anti-prostitution policy. So, together with other sex workers they have to express their resistance and every time they have the face and deal with the stigma around sex work. “This ensures that I would be confronted again with stress and tension, since my social position relates to stress and tension”. So, as Rachel explains not the work itself, but the stigma, around sex work causes stress and tension. This confirms the study *Burnout Among Female Indoor Sex Workers* Vanwesenbeeck (2005) that social acceptance and recognition of their profession are equally important as the work experiences (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 637).

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18 Participant Maria. “Wat je bijvoorbeeld ziet is dat de sekswerkers die mee willen doen, hebben het er nu al over, zo van, moet ik een pruik op doen? Waar kan ik die halen? Gewoon omdat het lastig is om ervoor uit te komen dat je een sekswerker bent.”

19 Participant Rachel. “Dit zorgt er weer voor dat ik weer geconfronteerd word met stress en spanning, mijn maatschappelijk positie die ik nu heb, hangt gewoon samen met stress en weerstand.”
Sex work as a form of labour

In this section I will analyse sex work as a form of labour or as Rachel stresses “Prostitution is an economic activity, it is a job.” 20 In this section I divide two subsections: professionalisation and normalisation of sex work, and suggestions to deconstruct the discourses around sex work.

Professionalisation and normalisation of sex work

“Often people have the idea that it is only sexual contact, but that is not correct, since it is much more comprehensive. It is often suggested that it only consists of sexual acts, without any form of communication. This is a misperception, since it consists a wide range of services.” 21 In this quote Rachel is arguing for a better understanding about what sex work implies and that it is way more comprehensive. As Petro stresses in the previous research sex work is related to other mainstream jobs, but, however, the stigma distinguishes it from other mainstream jobs (Petro 2010: 155). So, this means the quit fixed discourses around sex work distinguishes compare to other jobs.

The participants in this study look upon sex work as a profession, which becomes very clear when we analyse how the participants express themselves. In the following quote Anna argues for the importance of sex work for the Dutch economy. Anna explains:

I always said to the police, go to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and calculate how important prostitution is for the economy, because it is a big business. We do not quite know how many people are working in prostitution in the Netherlands, but if you would argue for approximately twenty thousand people, then you have hairdressers, taxi drivers, tanning salons, lingerie companies, etc. So, there are a lot of people around who earn a lot of money with this business. 22

With this quote Anna is arguing for the normalisation of sex work by relating it’s importance to other concerned jobs and the economy. The other participants and Anna express themselves in line with the pro-sex work perspective that sex work is a form of labour, which confirms the

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20 Participant Rachel. “Prostitutie is een economisch ding, het is werk.”
21 Participant Rachel. “Vaak hebben mensen het idee dat het alleen een seksuele handeling is, maar dat is niet zo, want het is veel meer omvattend. Het wordt vaak voorgesteld dat het bestaat uit alleen maar kale handelingen, zonder dat er wordt gecommuniceerd en dat is natuurlijk niet zo. Het is namelijk een ruime dienstverlening.”
22 Participant Anna. “Ik zei altijd tegen de politie, ga naar het ministerie van economische zaken en ga uitekennen hoe belangrijk prostitutie is voor de economie. We weten niet zo goed hoeveel mensen er in Nederland in de prostitutie werken, maar stel dat er zo’n twintigduizend mensen werken, dan heb je er kappers, taxi chauffeurs, zonnestudio’s, lingerie bedrijven, etc. erom heen. Dus er zit een enorme entourage van mensen om heen, die geld verdienen aan die business.”
thought from Petro. “Once women have entered into sex work, the industry operates in a way that manufactures consent for continued participation, as the sex worker comes to understand sex work as ‘work’ and as she reconciles her identity with the identity imposed upon her by her profession” (Petro 2010: 156). So, Petro stresses that once sex workers entered the industry sex work become normative, however not for the people outside sex work.

**Why professionalisation, why is that important for normalisation?**

In this study the participants often mention the professionalisation of sex workers. Rachel argues “In our situation we express it as professional practice and that it is something else, than just only having sex with men. Communication is the key in our work and it is all about providing a service, personal service that includes more than just sexual contact.”  

23 This in line with the work from Webb and Elms, they argue that sex workers offer not only their bodies, but they offer an experience (Webb & Elms 1994: 175).

The professionalisation of sex work is very important to normalise the industry and provide professional services. As a result of the normalisation, the social status and well-being of sex workers will improve. According to Rachel, “Professionalisation is important to be resilient and to do your job well. I think the resilience of sex workers can be an important instrument to normalise sex work, also to prevent sex workers against the negativity of certain people.”  

24 Rachel argues that professional communication is very important within sex work, since they work very intensively with people; she says the key for professionalisation is good communication. So, in this quote Rachel underlines the importance of the professionalisation of sex work and she emphasises that she relates her work to social workers and other service providers. As Webb and Elms argues in the theoretical framework the job description of sex workers and social workers are related, since for both workers education and counselling are very important and both workers needs apply to the same skills in their work and they both need to work intensively with the customer (Webb & Elms 1994: 175).

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23 Participant Rachel. “Bij ons is er sprake van professionele beroepsuitoefening en dat is iets anders dan zomaar met mannen het bed in duiken. Communicatie speelt een hele belangrijke rol in ons werk en er is sprake van dienstverlening, persoonlijke dienstverlening dat meer omvat dan alleen het seksuele contact.”

24 Participant Rachel. “Professionalisering van seks werk is belangrijk om weerbaar te zijn en om je werk goed te doen. Ik denk dat de weerbaarheid van sekswerkers een belangrijk instrument kan zijn in de normalisering van de sector en ook het weerbaar maken tegen de negativiteit van sommige mensen.”
To become a well-prepared and professionalised sex worker the following skills are very important according to Anna:

You should be able to stand up for yourself, you should be able to negotiate and you need to be resilient. Furthermore, you need to realise that there are nice customers who just want to have fun with you and would like to enjoy an orgasm. But there are also customers who want to exploit you and want to pay as little as possible for as many services. You need to self-confident and tell them that you are the boss and they have to listen to you. If they want more you can say that you will think about it and that they need to pay for it.²⁵

In this context the word exploit implies to utilize, to make as most use of the sex workers, so the customer pays as little as possible. According to Anna, sex workers need to be confident and need to stand up more for their selves, since sex work can be very challenging.

In this section the participants relate sex work to other service providing professions and argue for the professionalisation of sex work, to professionalise sex workers, so they create a stronger position and are better prepared. Also they argue for the professionalisation of sex work so it becomes more normalised and seen an official profession. In line with the pro-sex work strand I think the professionalisation of sex work is very important to normalise the industry and to improve the social status and well-being of sex workers, especially since it is legalised in the Netherlands. For example by offering a course how to present oneself, how to communicate with customers, learning how to start an own business. Besides the fact it can normalise the industry, it also empowers and supports sex workers.

**Suggestions to change the discourses around sex work**

All the participants had suggestions to change the discourses around sex work and to improve the position of sex workers. Rachel thinks it is important that first the sex workers start to respect themselves as sex workers, but also the society and the Dutch government need to more receptive to alter their ideas around sex work. Rachel argues, “But the initiative should also come from the sex workers.”²⁶ In line with Rachel, Melanie believes that sharing positive stories about other sex workers and herself helps to carry out positive stories about sex work.

²⁵ Participant Anna. “Je moet goed voor jezelf kunnen opkomen, je moet kunnen onderhandelen en je moet weerbaar zijn. Verder moet je, je ook realiseren dat er ontzettende leuke klanten zijn die het gewoon gezellig met je willen hebben en lekker willen klaarkomen, maar er zijn ook klanten die jou willen uitpezen en je zo min mogelijk willen betalen voor zoveel mogelijk diensten. Je moet stevig in je schoenen om te zeggen, luister ik ben de baas hier en jullie luisteren naar wat ik wil. En alles wat jullie meer willen daar denk ik over na en daar betalen jullie voor.”

²⁶ Participant Rachel. “Maar het initiatief moet ook echt vanuit de sekswerkers komen.”
I always talk with students and I always spent a lot of time talking. Sometimes I get paid by a group of students or a school. And sometimes I do not get paid, for example now with you, but you are listening to me and you write down what I say and eventually other people will read it and hopefully they will start thinking of it. I find this very important and if more people would do this, more positive stories will be shared. It works very slowly; it is every time a drop in the ocean. So, it is actually a very difficult struggle with a relatively small group of people against a gigantic lobby against prostitution.  

**Suggestions to the Dutch government**

On the other hand Anna and Maria argue for more independence for sex workers, by starting a collective. Maria stresses, “To stimulate them to establish their own organisations and try to engage them more in the policy making process. Also, to really do something with the problems they indicate, such as the problems of entrepreneurs.” Similar to Maria, Anna clarifies, “What I would like to see is that prostitutes could obtain a license to start their own collective. That they could start their own businesses and can create their own rules, educate other entrepreneurs to become professionals, without the inference of pimps and landlords.” Another suggestion towards the Dutch government from Anna is, “If they would argue that prostitution is part of the society, then people might become more open about it, but I am not sure about this, since I am saying this already for more than twenty-five years.”

I think more recognition from the Dutch government is very important so it becomes easier for sex workers to start their own businesses. Especially, since sex work is legalised in the Netherlands and the sex workers have to pay taxes, but at the same time starting an own business, getting a mortgage, insurance and business account is very challenging. To me this policy is very

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27 Participant Melanie. “Ik praat altijd met studenten en besteed daar altijd tijd aan. Soms levert dat wat op zoals bij een groep studenten, want dan wordt ik betaald vanuit de school. En soms levert het niets op, zoals met jou, niet in geld, maar wel in de zin dat jij naar mij luistert en dat opschrijft en dat ook weer laat lezen aan andere mensen, in de hoop dat je mensen bereikt die er dan toch over na gaan denken. Dat vind ik harstikke belangrijk en als er meer mensen zijn die dit doen, dan komen er meer positieve verhalen naar buiten. Het werkt heel langzaam, het is elke keer een druppeltje op een gloeiende plaat. Het is eigenlijk een hele moeilijke strijd die wij met een relatief kleine groep leveren tegen een gigantische lobby die strijd tegen prostitutie.”

28 Participant Maria. “Het oprichten van eigen organisaties meer stimuleren en ze meer te betrekken bij het beleid. En daadwerkelijk ook iets doen met de problemen die ze aangeven, zoals de problemen van zelfstandigen.”

29 Participant Anna. “Wat ik graag zou willen is dat prostituees zelf als collectief een vergunning kunnen krijgen. Dat ze hun eigen bedrijf kunnen opstarten en hun eigen regels kunnen maken, hun eigen starters kunnen opleiden tot professionals, zonder dat daar poioers en exploitanten tussen zitten.”

30 Participant Anna. “Als er nou eens open en bloot wordt gezegd van dit is onderdeel van de maatschappij, prostitutie hoort in een grote stad. Dan heb je de kans dat mensen dan eindelijk eens een keer er meer opener voor zijn, maar ik weet het ook niet hoor, want dit loop ik ook al meer dan 25 jaar te verkondigen.”
contradictory and from an equality perspective I argue for a more consistent policy. I believe the Dutch authorities could support sex workers to help removing the stigma attached to sex work. As Pheterson argues, “Legal, social, and psychological authorities could nurture rather than sabotage such consistency by removing the stigma attached to prostitution. And political radicals could facilitate that process by integrating whore consciousness and whore activism into their liberation struggles” (Pheterson 1993: 60) So, Pheterson argues for an active attitude from legal, social, and psychological authorities to support sex workers by removing the stigma attached to sex work.

**Suggestions for Dutch education**

Melanie suggests that Dutch education can also become an instrument to change the discourses around sex work. She argues for discussions in high schools about respect for others choices in life, to discuss sexuality, and more focus on critical reflection. The perfect student or person according to Melanie is, “Someone who projects themself in the lives of others, and accepts their choices. Someone who is very aware of sex and who also understands that for someone working in prostitution, that sex is a technical activity.”

Similar to Melanie, Maria argues also would like to engage Dutch education more in the discussion, for example to mention it, while discussing discrimination in the classroom.

All the participants in this study also suggest that the Dutch media should carry out more nuanced and diversified news about sex work. Anna stresses, “They need to stop arguing that it is all about pitiful victims and that everyone is working against their will! They must once again give voice to other people, to others who do this because it is just an easy way to earn quick money.”

So, journalists should be more informed about the sex industry and be more careful how they portray a group of people.

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31 Participant Melanie. “Iemand die in staat is zich te kunnen verplaatsen in levens of andere keuzes die mensen maken. Iemand die heel bewust is van seks, die ook begrijpt dat voor iemand die werkt in prostitutie, dat seks een technische handeling is.”

32 Participant Anna. “Ze moeten nou eens een keer stoppen dat het alleen maar gaat om zielige slachtoffers en dat iedereen tegen hun zin werkt! Ze moeten eens een keer de stem geven aan mensen, die dit doen omdat het gewoon lekker snel geld verdienen is.”
**Conclusion analysis**

To conclude, in this chapter I analysed the transcriptions of the interviews and related it to the previous research, theoretical framework and the research question. In the first part analysis about the discourses around sex work, sex workers are often related to as criminals or victims of human trafficking. The participants argued that it is very problematic, since this is not the situation for everybody. Certain discourses causes a stigma attached to sex work, in part two of the analysis I presented the consequences of these discourses. The consequences were presented under three sections: the professional and political sex work struggles, the stigma on sex work in social life and the stigma on sex work and health. The participants argued that in different ways they have to face a stigma that confine their way of living and can be very troublesome. In the third part of the analysis sex work as a form of labour, I presented two subsections: professionalisation and normalisation of sex work, and suggestions to deconstruct the discourses around sex work. In these sections the participants argued for the importance of the professionalisation of sex work and how this can lead to normalise sex work, they also stressed suggestions to change the discourses attached to sex work.
Conclusion

In this conclusion I will present a brief summary of my thesis and answer the main research question. Furthermore, I present how I hope that this thesis will effect and affect people and give some recommendations for further research.

In this thesis, I inquired how a group of Dutch sex workers experience the prejudices around sex work. Therefore, I conducted four interviews in March 2014 and compiled all the stories and experiences from them. In addition, I presented the previous research were I gave a briefly outline of the research that has been done in the field. The previous research consists of work from different authors, but I wrote my work in line with the studies from Vanwesenbeeck. Vanwesenbeeck stresses, sex workers experience high rates of stigma in their personal and professional lives and receive a lack of support and acceptance in society (Vanwesenbeeck 2005: 638). Also, that burn out under sex workers is related to the negative attitude, in other words the stigma that limits sex workers in their lives. In the theoretical framework the main concepts I discussed were discourse and stigma as part of respectability. Discourse as systems of thinking, which effects and affects objects. Also I presented respectability, in relation to the so-called non-respectable bodies of sex workers and the missing respect and dignity towards sex workers, as well as stigma as part of respectability, as the experience deviant from the normative discourse. In the analysis the participants shared their stories about the negative attitude from people towards their profession, this negative attitude manifested itself in different ways. According to the participants, this negative attitude, or so-called stigma, confines sex workers in their personal and professional lives; this confirms the results as presented in the previous research.

Dutch sex workers experience the prejudices around their profession in a variety of ways. There are certain discourses around sex work, for example discourses, which portray sex workers as criminals or victims of human trafficking. According to the participants, these discourses are very problematic for them, since people look upon sex work as one uniform group and therefore certain discourses are manifested and confine sex workers in their personal and professional lives. The consequences of these discourses are expressed as professional and political struggles, consequences in social life and consequences for sex workers’ health. The consequences in professional life are: not taken seriously and it is very difficult to receive a mortgage, bank
account and insurance. Apart from this, the social consequences in life have also a great affect on
the sex workers, for example the almost daily experience of dealing with a stigma this manifests
in feelings of being misunderstood, unappreciated, unrecognized, condemned, and dishonored,
sometimes the fear of exposure of the prostitute identity and the possible loss of friends and
family. These social consequences have also affects on sex workers’ health, for example the
confrontation with stress and tension. However I have to underline that reactions to stigma vary
greatly from one individual to another. So, therefore more research is recommended in order to
enriching and create a deeper understanding of sex workers’ experiences towards prejudices.

With this research I hope that the readers get a better understanding of the diversity of sex
workers, a more inclusive and diverse comprehension. By sharing the stories and experiences of
the participants I hope that this negative perception around sex work will change. Furthermore, I
hope to make clear that due to prejudices sex workers’ face difficulties in their lives, since it
confines them. Rachel expresses this very clear in her quote, “There is always a down side, and
that is related to the negative consequences of the stigma, because there is always resistance and
therefore it is mentally very demanding.” In other words, “The isolated and stigmatised nature
of sex work may be the greatest contributing factor to sex work being a dangerous profession”
(Petro 2010: 169). This is a very strong quote and I agree with Petro that the negative attitude
around sex work causes more troubles, than the work itself.

As mentioned earlier in this study there is a great lack of accurate and reliable material, so
therefore more research is required. Especially I recommend to enriching the material of how
other sex workers experience the prejudices, but also what is the affect of policies in relation to
the prejudices and subsequently what interventions could improve the position of sex workers in
the society, to increase their social status and well-being. I think it is very significant to present
practical solutions of how these prejudices can be changed. In the final chapter after this
conclusion I share some suggestions, but I highly recommend further research.

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33 Participant Rachel. “Er is altijd een ‘maar’ met dit werk en dat zijn de negatieve gevolgen van het stigma, omdat er
altijd weerstand is en waardoor het mentaal ook heel zwaar wordt.”
The most important element in this study are the narratives of the participants and therefore I would like to end the conclusion of this study with a quote from Rachel, “I think self-determination over my own body, sexuality, sexual intercourse is very important and I think that I can decide that by myself.”

Since, it’s my body, my life!

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34 Participant Rachel. “Ik vind zelfbeschikking over mijn eigen lijf, seksualiteit, seksueel verkeer heel belangrijk en ik vind dat ik daar zelf over mag beslissen.”
Suggestions for political activist implementation

On the basis of this study I have the suggestions that could improve social status and well-being of sex workers. Here I will briefly express my suggestions.

1. Recognition of the Dutch government, that sex work is a legal profession is very important to normalise the industry. In order to normalise sex work, it is very important that sex workers will receive easier access to governmental services and that they also can receive a mortgage, loan, bank account, insurance, entrepreneur ship license etc.

2. In addition I think it would be good for the position of sex workers, if the government would rent rooms to sex workers, so that there are no third persons and the sex worker can work independently.

3. Also I would recommend that the government and the private sector establish a course to educate and prepare sex workers, for example by entrepreneur ship trainings, communication strategies, how to deal with a difficult customer, learn to listen to your body and maybe a physical training.

4. Furthermore, I think it would be very important if more journalists would write and inform the Dutch society in a more inclusive manner. To not generalize all the sex workers and be more critical about the diversity within the sex industry.

5. Besides that I think more discussion about this topic would be useful. I think Dutch schools could contribute by for example bringing in this topic, while discussing discrimination or other related topics.

These are some practical suggestions that I think that could contribute to improve the social status and well-being of sex worker, however more research is required. Nevertheless, now it's time to acknowledge sexual diversity, as Rubin expresses “It is time to recognize the political dimensions of erotic life” (Rubin 1975: 310).
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Appendix 1. Interview guide

**Introduction**

Introduce myself to the interviewee and small talk.
Purpose of the interview, appreciate participation, importance of the information and what happens with the information gained in the interview and mention the letter of consent.
Practical information: time, ask permission recorder.
Summarise the conversation.

**Start interview**

**Background/ Private life**

What is your age?
Where are you born?
What is your education background?
What is your relationship status?
Do you have children?
Which gender do you identify yourself with?
What is your sexual orientation?
Do you have siblings?
How would you define your relationship with your parents?
Do you think your family is supportive towards your profession?
Do you think your friends are supportive towards your profession?

**Profession**

What was your motivation to become a sex worker?
Could you tell me what your profession means and what does it imply?
Before you entered the sex industry what was your perception of sex work?
Did your perception changed after you entered sex work and how do you perceive your profession now?
Experiences
What do you find most challenging about being a sex worker?
What do you think is problematic about being a sex worker?
Have you ever been harassed? If yes do you want to share?

Media
How do you think media portrays sex workers?
How do you think politics/policies portrays sex workers?
What do you think of the policies regarding sex work? What can the government do more to improve your situation?

Opinion
What are you thoughts on the use of ‘sex worker’ and ‘prostitute’?
How would you like to be perceived by others?
How do you think the educational system can contribute to the rights of sex workers?
How do you think the media can contribute to the rights of sex workers?

Is there something you would like to add more or share?

Closing
Thank the interviewee for their time and information
Ask to the interviewee how she experienced the interview

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35 I would like to underline that these questions were guiding, a sort of thread throughout in the interview process.
Appendix 2. Letter of consent

Date: 27-01-2014

Study Title or Topic: A research about the prejudices around sex work in the Netherlands

Researcher: Lisa Grooteman, MA candidate, Graduate Program in Linköping, Linköping University

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of the research is that people will critically reflect upon this study and that they will take into account the different discourses and the non-uniformity of sex workers and sex work. Hopefully people will reconsider their own prejudices around sex work and sex workers.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: Participate in the interview.

Risks and Discomforts: The interviewee will be made anonymous and the personal details will be handled with care in order to reduce any discomfort that the interviewee might experience.


Anonymity: Your anonymity will be guaranteed.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and, unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher will have access to this information. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Information: You will be informed of the purposes and aims of the project.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time.

Questions about the Research: If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Lisa Grooteman, MA candidate in Linköping, at the Unit of Gender Studies, Linköpings Universitet, Gender Studies 581 83 Linköping.
Abstract

This is an queer theoretical intersectional feminist study about sex workers experiences and the prejudices they face in the Netherlands. Dutch sex workers do no get the same chances and opportunities as other workers in society. So, the overarching research problem of this study is the consequences of certain discourses that confine Dutch sex workers in their lives. The thesis aims that people will critically reflect upon this study and that they will take into account the different discourses and the non-uniformity of sex workers and sex work, in other words, to create awareness and a better understanding of the complex, diverse and various groups of sex workers and the sex industry. This study consists of two research methods: literature review and interview study. The literature review consists of the previous research and the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework presents discourse and stigma as part of respectability. Discourse as systems of thinking, which effects and affects. Also this study presents respectability, in relation to the so-called non-respectable bodies of sex workers and the missing respect and dignity towards sex workers, as well as stigma as part of respectability, as the experience deviant from the normative discourse. The interview study consists of four semi-structured interviews, conducted both online and face-to-face with four Dutch participants. The method thematic content analysis was applied to code the interview transcripts and divide the content into themes and sub-themes. The three main themes are: the discourses around sex work, the consequences of the discourses around sex work and sex work as a form of labour. Under these main themes I present related sub-themes. In the analysis the participants share their stories about the negative attitude from people towards their profession, this negative attitude manifested itself in different ways. According to the participants, this negative attitude, or so-called stigma, confines sex workers in their personal and professional lives.

Keywords
Agency, discourse, feminism, interviews, respectability, sex work, pro-sex work, prejudices, queer.