

FOUR

PARENTING AND MONEY MAKING:
SEX WORK AND WOMEN'S CHOICES IN URBAN
UGANDA

Flavia Zalwango, Lina Eriksson, Janet Seeley, Sarah Nakamanya, Judith Vandepitte, Heiner Grosskurth¹

Abstract: Based upon detailed life histories of 96 Ugandan sex workers, this article documents the pathways women take into prostitution through marital separation and the subsequent need to support children via rural-urban migration to obtain wage work in Kampala. The money women receive from selling sex and other work helped them to independently pay for their housing children's school fees, and food for their family without receiving support from partners. In their narratives women portrayed themselves as mothers, wives, partners, friends and workers with self-esteem and the hope of improvement in their lives through their own efforts².

Introduction

A vast array of academic research demonstrates that stigma continues to play a key role in shaping sex workers' lives (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001, 279). In the past decade and a half, more attention has been paid to the ways in which sex work varies between and within countries and communities. This includes attention to the organization of different types of sex work and the ways in which it is distinguished from other social and sexual relationships (Harcourt & Donovan, 2004; Scambler, 1997; Gysels et al., 2002; UNAIDS, 2009). However, much of the literature on sex work continues to neglect these workers as women, with lives beyond the body that serves the market for sex. Our objective in this paper is to begin to address this gap by focusing on women engaged in sex work in urban Uganda. We explore the different ways in which these women describe themselves and their lives as

mothers, partners and daily wage laborers, juggling their family commitments and their identities.

The work of Castañeda et al. (1996) took an important step toward acknowledging sex workers as women in describing female commercial sex workers in Mexico City as living in a “constant double bind” as they balance their:

role in family life...marked by the reactions and prejudices which are the result of a symbolic masculine domination (women’s purity and passivity, women’s subjugation to masculine values, woman as mother and not a sexual individual)... [with] their professional experience, as symbolic masculine domination is broken after the client chooses one woman among various others (Castañeda et al. 1996, p. 233)

Yet such a duality appears too simple given that women who provide sexual services are, as O’Neill (1997, p. 11) states “ordinary women”. Van den Borne (2005, p. 271) cites Nencel (1997) who described prostitutes in Lima who would “take on fluid and multiple identities that would give them space to maneuver”, something that Van den Borne recognised among the bar girls and freelance women providing sex for cash in Malawi as they worked to portray their identities as women trying to establish relationships, rather than prostitutes seeking a customer; an identity which distanced them from the stigmatising terms used for sex workers. When van den Borne asked one woman if the term “commercial sex worker” would be better than *mahule*, the local, albeit pejorative, term for “prostitute”, her negative response was very clear:

that word [commercial sex worker] is even worse than *mahule* [prostitute]. It does not apply to us. Perhaps you have those women in your country, but not here in Malawi... You know that we are not “workers”. This is not

our work. This is not a job...I don't want to be called *mahule* because it is an insult, but at least it is better than [being called a "commercial sex worker"] (van den Borne, 2003, p. 16).

The concept of intersectionality provides a useful starting point for examining the multiple identities that women may sustain, thus helping to explain the somewhat contradictory subject position expressed by the woman in the passage above. Intersectionality emphasizes how different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into different and pure strands; as such, a woman may be a mother and a sex worker and the one role may impact upon the performance of the other. Ludvig (2006), however, notes that the discourse of intersectionality is usually silent about who has the power to define how, when and where a particular label is used. This is particularly important with respect to sex workers, who may variously define their clients as "husband", "regular client" or "casual partner" depending on a number of different factors, not least of which is the support and consideration the man shows to the woman. Similar factors may influence the way in which the man sees the woman and, of course, the way in which the woman sees herself.

Scholars working throughout Africa and elsewhere have analyzed how women engaged in sex work describe themselves. Van den Borne, for instance, notes the frequency with which sex workers in Malawi engage in "impression management" (2005, p. 271) through the careful self-representation and self-protective mechanisms they engaged in to avoid being described by others as a "prostitute", who sex workers noted were popularly perceived as "the worst people". In South Africa, social researcher Henry Trotter (2007, p. 110) observes that dockside sex workers describe themselves as masseuses or escorts to distance themselves socially and legally from the pejorative label of "prostitute".

Bott (2006) used Skeggs' theory (1997) of "becoming respectable" in her analysis of identity construction amongst migrant British women working as pole dancers on the resort island of Tenerife. These women, like those in Trotter's study, made critical status distinctions based upon the amount of physical contact women had with their clients, with those who provided commercial sex at the bottom of this social hierarchy. These self-identified working class women observed that their lives in Tenerife were vastly superior to those they might have led if they had stayed in the United Kingdom. Brennan (2004) similarly describes this constant awareness of the stigmatized nature of sex work in her description of how sex workers in the Dominican Republic tempered their displays of monetary gains from their work so as to not threaten their reputation as mothers sacrificing for their children. We build on this work by exploring the construction of narrative identities (Singer 2004) amongst women engaged in commercial sex work through examining their descriptions of their lives, their work and their parenting roles in urban Uganda.

The 96 women who participated in the study came from many different parts of Uganda as well as Rwanda and Tanzania, but at the time of the study in 2009 all lived and worked in a low-income area in Kampala. The women were between 19 and 55 years old, 63 per cent had attended primary school, 35 per cent had completed the first two years of secondary school. Twenty nine percent of the women considered some form of sex work to be their primary means of earning an income; others mentioned their main work as being serving in a bar, restaurant or hotel, selling food stuffs or second hand clothes or working as a domestic servant. Seventy four per cent of the women claimed to have what they called a regular partner at the time of the interview, although the definition used of regular and casual partner was fluid and not always clear, something we discuss further below.

Methods

A systematic sample of 100 women was selected from a cohort of 1,021 women participating in a longitudinal clinical study of women identified as being at high risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections in Kampala, Uganda. Most of the women who participated in the clinical study also provided commercial sexual services, making them an excellent sample for our purposes. Ninety six of the 100 women took part in a series of seven interviews conducted over a period of six months by three female interviewers. This extended period spent engaging with the women allowed ample time to build rapport and create trust-based working relationships. The in-depth interviews were conducted with the aid of an interview guide to explore women's life and work experiences. The life histories were only gathered in the later interviews, when rapport had already been well-established. The remaining four women who did not take part in the latter phases of the interviews, including the life history collection, had moved away or were sick when those interviews were carried out. Data analysis was based on an inductive qualitative model developing themes and theoretical categories as data collection progressed (Hood, 2007). Data were managed using Nvivo 8 software, and this study received ethical approval from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and the Science and Ethics Committee of the Uganda Virus Research Institute.

The Construction of Femininity

Fulfilment as a woman in Uganda, as in many other cultural contexts, is often equated with motherhood. Writing in 1911, Roscoe observed that among the Baganda, the main ethnic group in central Uganda, "every married woman was anxious to become a mother, and expected to show signs of maternity within a few weeks of her marriage" (Roscoe, 1965, 46). A woman without children, he goes on to say, was despised. Researchers often describe African societies as pronatalist, placing a high value upon

and encouraged high rates of fertility (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987, Lesthaege, 1989). This shows no sign of changing in Uganda. While total fertility in neighboring Kenya fell by forty percent between 1980 and 2000, fertility rates in Uganda declined by less than 10 percent, which is attributed to differences in desires for children and an unmet need for contraceptive services in Uganda (Blacker et al., 2005). While the reasons for these differential fertility rates may be attributed to these and a variety of other factors, including concerns in Uganda and other parts of Africa that the AIDS pandemic threatened population growth (Gregson, 1994), the fact remains that the vast majority of Ugandans expect to have children and are accorded particular respect and status as a result.

Involuntary childlessness in Uganda, as in other parts of Africa, is abhorred. In a series of articles on infertility in South Africa, Dyer and colleagues (2002, 2004, 2008) quote one man as saying that “you are not a man if you cannot bring children into the world” (2004, p. 964) while a woman said “men leave me because I cannot have children” (2002, p. 1663). Such statements succinctly convey the plight of childless women, who are destined to “become the slave and drudge of the household” (Roscoe, 1965, 49). While sex work is clearly the antithesis of reproductive sex resulting in pregnancy, our findings indicate that the two are intimately connected in the context of the women’s lives featured in this study.

The following analysis demonstrates that it is not uncommon for children to be conceived within relationships established by women for the purposes of obtaining material support. Significantly, women often describe the need to financially support children as a significant motivation for engaging in sex work. Analysis that follows begins with a discussion of women’s assessments of the role that their childhoods and early relationships with men played in shaping their perceptions of their roles and sense of adult self, then explores the women’s narratives of

initiation into sex work and their strategies for managing wage work, parenting and relationships.

Women's Backgrounds and Entry into Sex Work

While a few women recalled happy and contented years spent with their natal kin, the majority spoke of difficult family relationships. Most women described childhoods marred by conflict and parental marital instability as well as financial strictures which limited the amount of education they were able to receive. A number of women described being brought up by grandparents or stepmothers, the latter of whom were often portrayed as cruel and unfair, as in the following account from a twenty-three year old woman:

After my father completed university, he got a job with an Indian in Kampala. He liked having fun and he remembered to have children when it was late [in life]. His first wife never had children and she is the one living in my father's house... He had about three houses. After the death of my father, I continued living with my mother, together with my two siblings. My mother kept a shop and [raised] poultry. My mother died later when I was thirteen and we went to live with our stepmother... My stepmother mistreated me and I decided to leave home. She was mistreating me psychologically because she would say that she was the owner of the home; remember that she never had a child of her own. She even told my paternal uncle to stop paying my school fees and pay only for my young siblings. Even after making that decision, she stopped him from paying for them as well.

Such cruelty was often given as a reason for leaving home. Yet, such narratives also hint at the role the adolescent may have had in being a target for that cruelty. This woman reminded the researcher to "remember she never had a child of her own",

suggesting that, in the speaker's view, a childless woman was not entitled to own her own home.

It is not surprising that most of the women who encountered difficulties as a child saw marriage at an early age as means of escape. A forty-two year old woman, for example, recounted her impoverished parents entrusting a married elder brother with her care when she was nine years old. She was later forced by her family to get married before she was eighteen years old in order to reduce the economic burden on the household. "I had to accept marriage" she explained, "because I had nowhere to go". The man she married was also poor, and life continued to be a struggle. This woman was not alone in her description of a family's rather calculating use of daughters as economic leverage; one twenty-six year old woman recounted how her mother had forced her to marry a financially well-off man so that the family could access his resources.

Not all women had been born into poverty, as others became poor following the onset of marital instability or the death of a relative who had previously provided economic support, such as a father. Such sudden events prompted the withdrawal of children from school and reduced food consumption. One twenty-six year old woman concisely described the events that took place after the death of her father by noting, "there was no more money. I left school and got married." Some women looked to relationships as a route out of economic hardship and entered into marriage or common-law unions that they described as marriage. Sometimes this decision to marry was the result of an unplanned pregnancy, the majority of which resulted from consensual sex (although four women said they conceived during a rape). A number of women who had experienced unplanned pregnancies had difficulty obtained support from their children's biological fathers, some of whom were still teenagers. One nineteen-year-old woman described how she was abandoned by the teenager who impregnated her while she was living at an uncle's village home.

She attributed his flight to his inability to economically support the child, but still refused to forgive him even after he returned to the village following her delivery of a still-born child.

While the hasty establishment of a marital home may have resulted from unplanned pregnancy for some, with the relationship often faltering a few years later, other women's marriages ended when they failed to conceive. One twenty-nine year old woman recalled how her partner disappeared after she had a miscarriage by noting that his departure occurred because "he... got tired of a woman who just eats his food and is not producing [children]." Most of the women married and had children, and some recalled years of happiness with their husband prior to divorce or separation. This often occurred because their husband took another wife, or fell out of love with them. A thirty-four year old woman told the following story:

My husband was a womanizer. He was not very old but had about sixteen women and he could bring some of them at home in my presence and beat me up whenever I complained. He used to do this in front of my children. At first, he loved me so much but I cannot tell what changed him. I got fed up of his behavior and decided to leave. I left with my children and went back to my late mother's home.

Only one woman, age thirty-eight, blamed herself for the dissolution of her marriage, although she said that her behavior was caused by her co-wife's witchcraft:

The man loved me so much but I was always fighting with him... After three years, my husband married another woman. I had two children by then... Even after he had married, he still treated me like I was the bride. People advised him to show more love to his new wife but he could not. My co-wife decided to leave the marriage but then she returned. I think she did some witchcraft, because

from that time, I detested the man. I provoked him into breaking up with me... I would neither cook him food nor have sex with him. It is my co-wife who was doing it all. The witchcraft that my co-wife did brought divisions into the family.

After leaving her husband, this woman had a series of other relationships prior to her making a decision to live independently. She opened a small shop and provided sex to a few men in order to make some extra money. In our study, economic need was usually given by the women as the main reason for turning to sex work for support, often because they needed to take care of children. "Life was hard" said one thirty-four year old, "I had no support for my children." Given that buying and selling sex are illegal in Uganda, this should not be taken to be an easy option. This is not unique to Uganda, as other researchers have documented women's entry into sex work due to the financial problems caused by "chronic poverty; death of parents; family rejection; divorce or widowhood; spouse unable to work; or a drug using partner" (Devine et al., 2010, 230).

Few alternatives were available to women with children to care for and little in the way of marketable skills. It is therefore not particularly surprising that many women explained their decision to start providing commercial sex as being driven by the need to support their children. One thirty year old woman explained her entry into sex work as a consequence of the high cost of childcare for young children. Sex work, she noted, was the only job that provided sufficiently flexible hours that could allow me time to take care of child" A thirty-four year old woman described herself as having "looked for money from all corners" before deciding to enter sex work in order to "eat and rent the house...[and pay] my children's school fees."

In the absence of familial support or a male economic provider, women left with the care of children had a limited range of

options. Many women told us that they had actively chosen not to follow through with a pregnancy if it was the result of an unplanned pregnancy with a casual partner, who would be unlikely to provide support for them. A twenty-three year old woman presented the rationale behind an abortion by explaining, "I did not want to go on spreading children to different men. I got the first one accidentally, then the second one I thought I will be with that man permanently but he... left me for good... why should I put myself in danger all the time, having children by different fathers?"

Caring for Children

These women did not experience their parental role as sole-provider in an uncontested manner. In the patrilineal societies from which almost all the women in the study were drawn, children belonged to the father's lineage, which was expected to provide support to them (Roscoe, 1965). However, many women functioned as sole economic providers for their children because paternity was denied or because the biological father of the children had married another woman and did not wish to support his children from a previous relationship. Yet some women freely chose to abandon their marital home with their children when conditions became intolerable. One thirty-eight year old woman recalled leaving her husband's home ten years ago with her children following her husband's acquisition of a second wife. Having been raised by a stepmother who mistreated her, the woman believed that she could not allow her children to endure a similar fate and observed, "I could not leave my children with that co-wife to treat them the way my stepmother did to me... [with] the witchcraft these days, the woman would use charms [harm-inducing magic spells] on my children."

Approximately half (forty-two) of the eighty-three women in this study who had children lived with at least one of them at the time of the interviews. Half of these women lived with all their children,

while the other half had placed their (usually) older children with relatives. As noted previously, many women described the main motivation for engaging in sex work as “the children have to eat”. Women’s earnings frequently supported both children living with them in the city and were also sent to rural relatives caring for older children in order to pay for school fees, clothing and food. A number of women had sent their children to stay with their rural relatives, particularly when they were due to start school, to provide stability but also to access village schools with lower fees and, in the mother’s view, a safer environment.

Fostering was and remains a widespread practice throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, including Uganda (Goody, 1982; Page, 1989; Madhavan, 2004). Fostering functions as a safety net by providing economic and political benefits for families through reciprocity for children’s services, as well as the education, care, and socialization of children. Women involved in sex work use this culturally accepted practice as a means by which to distance their children from the realities of their mothers’ lives. For those with small children living with them in Kampala, combining child care and work was a challenge. One twenty-two year old woman described herself as “in pain” while bringing her crying infant son to solicit potential clients in a restaurant. She did so as a last resort when her sole childcare provider could no longer manage the infant’s constant crying. The woman expressed hope that she could find alternative childcare soon that would allow her to practice sex work more freely.

Women’s childcare arrangements varied, but all were fraught with the difficulties of balancing earnings with the cost of paying a caregiver. Some women paid a friend or neighbor to look after their children on a daily basis. One thirty-two year old woman described becoming what she called “fully involved into sex work” only after she found a caretaker who she could pay 1,000 Ugandan shillings (44 U.S. cents) on a daily basis. A twenty-six year old bar worker paid the same amount to her children’s caregiver, which

represented one-third of her daily income. This woman became a sex worker in order to supplement her income, and found that three clients per night could earn her an extra 10,000 shillings (\$4.42) to supplement an otherwise inadequate income.

A forty-two year old ex-sex worker provided nightly childcare services to younger sex workers, earning 1,000 shillings (44 U.S. cents) for each child she cared for. Children's mothers were also required to provide her with milk, sugar, an additional set of clean clothes, a bucket of water for dirty clothes and powdered soap, for each child. This childcare provider often had four or five small children in her home each night, which she found difficult because they often cried all the time and kept her awake. "There is nothing else to do" she said, because since ceasing sex work that was how she earned her living.

Work and Sex Work

The majority (66%) of women said that they had another job in addition to sex work. Eighteen percent worked in bars where they arranged appointments with customers for later in the evening after their shift finished. Nine percent of women described themselves as self-employed, and managed small food or produce stalls from near their home. Others sold second-hand clothes, provided laundry services, performed domestic labor, or worked in a factory. In the course of these interviews, most women did not define themselves as sex workers even though they were involved in such work. Instead, the women preferred to identify themselves through their other, less stigmatized form of work, at least in part because sex work did not provide their regular income. A thirty-three year old woman who sold second-hand clothes observed that sex work was "not my main work. I cannot fail to sell at least a piece of cloth each day but I may fail to get a sexual partner on a particular day."

Some women noted their dislike of the labels “sex worker” or “prostitute” because of the stigmatized nature of these terms, which they sometimes described as “shameful”. One twenty-seven year old female bar owner explained that although she was not a sex worker, she engaged in “playing men one after another” until she earned enough money to support her business. Another, aged twenty-nine, worked in a hotel and earned additional income from six regular sexual partners, who she distinguished from clients by noting, “We have been together for a long time, [and] they give me money when we meet for sex. I can’t say I’m a sex worker. I don’t go to the streets.”

The desire to distance oneself from the label “sex worker” due to a sense of shame or stigma was particularly pronounced among older women who were worried about their reputation and what their children might think of them. One forty-three year old woman noted, “I am aged and I don’t want my children to know that I am into sex work and whenever I think about it I feel like giving up, but the needs!” “The needs” this woman describes kept many women who claimed they would prefer not to be involved in sex work in the trade. When women spoke of future possibilities for income generation that did not involve sex work, these were often bound up in the quest for a new relationship with a man, even for those who had experienced violence and mistreatment at the hands of their previous partners.

Relationships and Partners

The quest for a partner, someone to help and take care of financial needs and to provide emotional support, was a very real preoccupation for a number of women. One twenty-three year old described her current partner, to whom she was not legally married, as her husband, because “He is renting the house, buying the food and caring for my needs.” However, given many of the women’s histories of broken relationships, most were keenly aware that such a situation might not last. A twenty-six year old woman

who had found a steady partner who provided for her was rather pragmatic in her assessment of her situation, noting that “if he turns against me I may choose to go back into sex work.”

For seven of the women, death, either because of HIV or conflict, had robbed them of their male source of support. A thirty-four year old woman described how she had started a relationship with a regular partner who supported her with some money for rent and bought her other things. After two months in the relationship she conceived and later gave birth to a baby girl, and the man continued to support her and the baby. Her partner’s family stayed near Kampala so she got to know some of them when they took the baby to show them. She said “after giving my child a name he was so happy, and he even told me to stay home for some months while I breastfed. He managed to support me with everything for the three months I was at home.” Her life went smoothly, and she was contented but the man died when the child was two years old and she was left once more without support, and had to return to sex work.

The history of unstable relationships that many women had experienced led to the expectation that a partner who had gone away may not return, leading the woman to constantly search for ways to support themselves (including sex work) in case the man had left for good. Often, even if the man had left and then returned without providing an explanation for his absence, the woman was happy to resume the relationship because of the temporary security it afforded. One thirty-six year old woman who had been abandoned by and reunited with the same man several times, explained that she accepted his behavior because he paid her rent, the children’s school fees, and provided her with 5,000 shillings (U.S. \$2.30) per day during his visits in addition to buying everything that was needed at home. In his absence, she met her own and her children’s needs through engaging in sex work with three or four partners per week. These men, who usually contacted

her by phone, paid 10,000 shillings (U.S. \$4.40) per encounter. However, she added:

...I do not spend the night with them because I have to make sure that my children do not understand lest they tell their father and when I leave home I tell them that I have gone for some reasons other than sex...I love him [her children's father] though at times he mistreats me and we separate for some time, but he is my husband who showed me Kampala and if it was not for him I think I would have been in the village all my life.

In order to protect such longer-term relationships with men, other women either decided to forego sex work entirely while the man was present, or engaged in careful strategizing to hide their activities. A small minority of five women in this study had disclosed their involvement in sex work to their partners. One twenty year old woman, who had formed a long-term relationship with a former client, described her partner's acceptance of her work, noting "He is not bothered. What matters [to him] is: have you returned, are you alright?" Yet most other women with regular partners worked hard to conceal how they earned money, such as a twenty-three year old woman who explained: "I make sure I hide it from him and that is why I am always home on Sunday. He is not aware that I am a sex worker and I cannot tell him because when we are together, he is always talking about how disgusting prostitutes are."

The fear that regular partners would find out about their sex worker status and end the relationship was not only fuelled by stigma, but also by the fear of losing support. A thirty-three year old woman said that while she originally traded sex for money after taking a job at a bar, she ceased this activity after her husband started coming to her workplace every night under the guise of escorting her home. She described this cessation as a necessary sacrifice in order to preserve their marriage:

I used to get men without his knowledge and end up with five thousand [U.S. \$2.20] a day plus the three thousand [U.S. \$1.32] I would get from my boss, but when he started coming to the bar to pick me after work...I stopped that because I don't want to destroy my marriage because of money. The man...leaves me with two thousand shillings for food everyday and he allowed me to work. Why should I cheat on him and cause unwanted divorce?

However, women also found that it was not easy to sustain long-term relationships and a life without the additional income sex work previously provided. One twenty-six year old woman was abandoned by a man, who had been supporting her and paying her children's school fees, after her ex-husband threatened to kill him. The woman's ex-husband did this because he sought custody of his biological children after he married a new wife. After her children were taken from her, this woman entered sex work on a full time basis. Not surprisingly, women's definitions of a regular or casual partner varied depending on the level of support provided by the man and time they had spent with the man. One twenty-seven year old woman explained the difference between her regular and casual partners as follows, starting with her description of the regular partner:

He is the one who picks me from my work place and we go together to his house or to the place where he wishes, but I cannot allow him to my house because he can take it for granted that I am his wife, the thing I hated long ago. Even the casuals I get, they meet me after work and we go to the lodge, not to my house. I can get men for sex in a week plus [in addition to] my regular. If each one gives me ten thousand shillings [U.S. \$4.40] when I have had sex with him for fifteen minutes, I add that on what I have got from selling my potato chips...but I don't depend on

men...because I have my kiosk where I can get a daily income.

Despite this woman's good fortune in having multiple income generation strategies, only one woman complained that she earned so little from sex work that she wanted to stop. Others put great store by the independence the job gave them, particularly if they had been in abusive relationships, such as the twenty-three year old woman who explained "I used to have regular partners but they were so possessive yet not supportive." Herein lay the ambiguity in many women's lives and identity: while it was easy to despise the work they did providing sex, that work also gave them independence and income that few alternatives could provide.

Conclusion

While each life story of the women in this study was unique, the most common theme was the fact that many women had separated from their husbands after episodes of domestic violence or infidelity. Such women moved to Kampala from their rural homes in search of employment opportunities and a fresh start in life. The provision of sexual services in return for money and material support provided the majority of women with a degree of autonomy over their own lives. Van den Borne (2003, p. 13) observes that "for them [women], sexual networking has become a strategy to escape poverty, get access to a modern lifestyle or some of its gadgets, and maximize their autonomy." The same is true for the majority of women in our study, as with the income they gained from selling sex they were able to independently pay for their rent, children's school fees, and to feed their family without receiving any support from male partners.

The narratives of identity that the women told provided a way for them "to make meaning of their lives, explain both how they understand themselves as unique individuals and as social beings who are multiply defined by life-stage, gender, ethnicity, class and

culture” (Singer, 2004, p. 438). Women made conscious efforts to portray themselves as mothers, wives, partners, friends, and workers with self-esteem and prospects for improving their lives, which could involve establishing a relationship with a caring man. This effort was not what Sanders (2005) has referred to as creating a manufactured identity, because the identity the women constructed was real; their identity was made up of all their roles, in addition to their role providing sex. The concept was more in keeping with Van den Borne’s (2005) use of impression management “that separates out work life from private life” (Sanders, 2005, 330). Women told their stories in ways that emphasized the multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations in their past and present lives (McCall, 2005). In doing so, they distanced themselves from the public discourse of sex work as dishonourable and shameful, the antithesis of being a good wife and mother.

REFERENCES

- Blacker, J., C. Opiyo, M. Jasseh, A. Sloggett & J. Ssekamatte-Ssebuliba. (2005). Fertility in Kenya and Uganda: A comparative study of trends and determinants. *Population Studies*, 59(3): 355-373.
- Bott, E. (2006). Pole position: migrant British women producing “selves” through lap dancing work. *Feminist Review*: 23-41.
- Brennan, D. (2004). Women work, men sponge, and everyone gossips: Macho men and stigmatized/ing women in a sex tourist town. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 77(4): 705-733.
- Caldwell, J. & P. Caldwell (1987). The cultural context of high fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Population and Development Review* 13(3): 409-437.
- Castañeda, X., V. Ortiz, B. Allen, C. García & M. Hernández-Avila. (1996). Sex masks: The double life of female commercial sex workers in Mexico City. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 20(2): 229-247.
- Devine, A., K. Bowen, B. Dzvichu, R. Rungsum & M. Kermode (2010). Pathways to sex work in Nagaland, India: Implications for HIV prevention and community mobilization. *AIDS Care*, 22(2): 228-237.
- Dyer, S. (2008). Infertility in African countries: Challenges created by the HIV epidemic. *ESHRE Monographs*, 2008(1): 48.
- Dyer, S., N. Abrahams, M. Hoffman & Z.M. van der Spuy. (2002). “Men leave me as I cannot have children”: Women's experiences with involuntary childlessness. *Human Reproduction*, 17(6): 1663.
- Dyer, S., N. Abrahams, N.E. Mokoena & Z.M. van der Spuy. (2004). “You are a man because you have children”: Experiences, reproductive health knowledge and treatment-seeking behavior among men suffering from couple infertility in South Africa. *Human Reproduction*, 19(4) 960.
- Goody E. (1982). *Parenthood and Social Reproduction: Fostering and occupational roles in West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gregson, S. (1994). Will HIV become a major determinant of fertility in sub-Saharan Africa? *Journal of Development Studies*, 30(3): 650-679.
- Gysels, M., R. Pool & B. Nnalusiba. (2002). Women who sell sex in a Ugandan trading town: Life histories, survival strategies and risk. *Social Science and Medicine*, 54(2): 179-192.
- Harcourt, C. & B. Donovan. (2005). The many faces of sex work. *British Medical Journal*, 81 (3): 201.
- Hood, J.C. (2007). Orthodoxy vs. power: The defining traits of grounded theory. In Bryant, A. & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 151-164). Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.
- Lesthaeghe, R. (1989). Social organization, economic crises and the future of

- fertility control in Africa. In R Lesthaeghe (Ed.), *Reproduction and social organization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 475-505). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ludvig, A. (2006). Differences between women? Intersecting voices in a female narrative. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3): 245-258.
- Madhavan S. (2004). Fosterage patterns in the age of AIDS: Continuity and change. *Social Science and Medicine*, 58: 1443-1454.
- McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3): 1771-1800.
- Page H.J. (1989). Childrearing versus childbearing: Co-residence of mother and child in Sub-Saharan Africa. In R.J. Lesthaeghe (Ed.) *Reproduction and Social Organization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 401-440). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Roscoe, J. (1965). *The Baganda: their customs and beliefs*. London: Frank Cass.
- Sanders, T. (2005). "It's just acting": Sex workers' strategies for capitalizing on sexuality. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12(4): 319.
- Scambler, G. & A. Scambler. (1997). *Rethinking prostitution: purchasing sex in the 1990s*. London: Routledge.
- Singer, J. (2004). Narrative identity and meaning making across the adult lifespan: An introduction. *Journal of Personality*, 72(3): 437-460.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender: becoming respectable*, London: Sage Publications.
- Trotter, H. (2007). Navigating risk: Lessons from the dockside sex trade for reducing violence in South Africa's prostitution industry. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 4(4): 106-119.
- UNAIDS. (2009). *UNAIDS guidance note on HIV and sex work*. Geneva: UNAIDS.
- Van den Borne, F. (2003). "I am not a prostitute": Discords in targeted HIV/AIDS prevention interventions in urban and trading centers in Malawi. Series on HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa: Sex, Gender and Policy. *Working Paper Series*, 13(8).
- Van den Borne, F. (2005). *Trying to survive in times of poverty and AIDS: women and multiple partner sex in Malawi*. Her Spinhuis Publishers, Amsterdam.
- Vanwesenbeeck, I. (2001). Another decade of social scientific work on sex work: a review of research 1990-2000. *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 12: 242-289.

¹ Janet Seeley is Professor of International Development at the University of East Anglia (UK) and Head of the Social Science Programme at the MRC/UVRI Uganda Research Unit on AIDS, Entebbe, Uganda and can be reached on j.seeley@uea.ac.uk

Lina Eriksson from the School of International Development, University of East Anglia, Norwich UK, worked with the Social Science Programme, MRC/UVRI Uganda Research Unit on AIDS, Entebbe, Uganda as an intern.

Sarah Nakamanya is an interviewer in the Social Science Programme, MRC/UVRI Uganda Research Unit on AIDS, Entebbe, Uganda and can be reached on sarah.nakamanya@mrcuganda.org

Judith Vandepitte is the project leader of the STI Programme, MRC/UVRI Uganda Research Unit on AIDS, Entebbe, Uganda and can be reached on judith.vandepitte@mrcuganda.org

Heiner Grosskurth is Professor of Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London UK and former director of the MRC/UVRI Uganda Research Unit on AIDS, Entebbe, Uganda and can be reached on heiner.grosskurth@lshtm.ac.uk

Flavia Zalwango is a senior social scientist in the Social Science Programme, MRC/UVRI Uganda Research Unit on AIDS, Entebbe, Uganda and can be reached at flavia.zalwango@mrcuganda.org

² Acknowledgments: This study was funded by the UK Medical Research Council. We are grateful to our colleagues Betty Nalusiba and Ruth Nalugya for their contributions to data collection and to Stan Musgrave for helpful comments on a draft of this paper, and two reviewers for their very useful input. We are grateful to all the women who spent time with us and told us the stories of their lives.