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“YEAH, HE’S MY DADDY”:
LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF FICTIVE
KINSHIPS IN A STREET-LEVEL SEX WORK
COMMUNITY¹

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Abstract: This paper examines how language assists in the construction of fictive kinship networks amongst Southwestern U.S. street-level sex workers, thereby establishing affective ties and obligations as well as a definitive power structure between various members of their community and social hierarchy. Research findings suggest that these kin structures impact sex workers’ sense of agency in relation to others while simultaneously providing an additional means of insulation, alienation, and even exclusion from the dominant culture. This study indicates that language use within this community operates as a discursive framework that plays a critical role in relationship formation and maintenance.

Language and Kin

Currently, there is a lack of research regarding the unique discourses employed by sex work communities and the *effects* of this discourse on members of such communities, particularly in terms of how language constructs and maintains relationships. The language utilized by the illegal street-level sex work community in the Southwestern United States provides a means of legitimation, support, insulation, alienation, and even exclusion from the dominant culture. This language merits study and analysis because, as the linguist William Labov states, “the main achievements of linguistic science, which may formerly have appeared remote and irrelevant to many sociologists, may eventually be seen as consistent with the present direction of sociology, and valuable for the understanding of social function and social change” (Labov, 1972, p. 121). Better understanding of how relationships are formed and maintained within this community can lead to valuable

insight regarding the criminalization of sex work and coping mechanisms used by its participants because “kin terms have both linguistic and social significance” (Parkin, 2004, p. 124). In addition, focusing on language within this community connects to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, “generally understood as the principle that language conditions habits of speech which in turn organize and generate particular patterns of thought” (qtd. in Jourdan and Tuite, 2006, p. 5), which, in this community, include family hierarchy.

Kinship is the foundation of much anthropological study. Pre-structuralist anthropology focused on the importance of descent from a common ancestor, but Claude Lévi-Strauss shifted the way anthropologists conceived of kin structures. In his structuralist work, *The elementary structures of kinship* (1949), Lévi-Strauss suggests that the foundation of kinship is more about family alliances, highlighting the importance of the social exchange of females in kinship formation. Based on research among North and South Native American ethnic groups, Lévi-Strauss concluded that humans possess identical characteristics cross-culturally. In his book *American kinship: A cultural account* (1968), David Schneider argues that some anthropological notions of kinship are based upon Euro-American ideals and do not necessarily exist cross-culturally. By the 1980s, studies extended kinship analysis to “fictive kinships” or familial constructions among marginalized populations in non-consanguine relationships (see Weston, 1991).

Interestingly, each of these theories relies on linguistic constructions of culture and relationships. As Schneider (1968) suggests, “Insofar as a word is the name for something, and insofar as the word names—among many other things—a cultural unit or construct, one might conclude that culture consists of language; that is, the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, or the words and their definitions and their relationships to each other” (p. 3). Linda Stone (2006) states that kinship involves much more than relations through descent or marriage, social structure, and right and

obligations between kin; rather, “kinship is also an ideology of human relationships; it involves cultural ideas about how humans are created and the nature and meaning of their biological and moral connections with others” (p. 6). Thus, kinship is an ideological and social institution that functions differently depending upon the culture or community.

It is important to clarify distinctions between “kinship” and “fictive kinship” as used in this paper. Some anthropologists argue that “the concept of fictive kin lost credibility with the advent of symbolic anthropology and the realization that all kinship is in some sense fictional” (Weston, 1991, p. 105). However, this paper utilizes the term “fictive kinship” or “fictive kin” as a means of signifying non-consanguine, non-affinal kin structure found within the sex work community.

Research Methods

Participants were chosen with the help of Kim Smith³, Program Director of the Diversion Program, and Kathy Jones, a Diversion Program case worker. All participants were members of the Diversion Program in Phoenix, Arizona. According to Jones, Diversion is a Catholic Charities program that works in conjunction with the Phoenix Police Department as an option for first and second-time solicitation offenders. Upon a sex worker’s arrest, the sex worker has the option of serving 15 days in jail or enrolling in the Diversion Program. The average client, female, male, or transgender, enrolls in Diversion for ten weeks and attends various group meetings including Prostitutes Anonymous, Therapeutic Group Counseling, and Life Skills.

The data discussed in this paper derives from 12 interviews and 16 interviewees, all female street-level sex workers between the ages of 18-45 years old who have or recently have had a pimp. Interviews were held in a private office at the Diversion Program site and were digitally recorded and later transcribed. Interviews

lasted approximately one hour, and some women were interviewed in pairs while others were interviewed individually. The interviewees were asked open ended questions, and all “street language” and kinship terminology used during the interviews was defined and clarified by the interviewees.

Family Terminology

While many marginalized communities adopt familial terminology as a means of creating structure⁴, at the street-level, familial terms are used as mechanisms to bring literal strangers together to create a group that functions as a family unit consisting of a father figure, a matriarch, often multiple female members, and sometimes children. In this paper, I provide an analysis of sex workers’ own worldviews, experiences, and linguistic strategies. The kin structure of the street-level sex workers interviewed could be categorized as a “patriarchal authoritarian” family, meaning there is a male “head” of the family (pimp) who holds the most power within that family and exercises that power in an authoritarian and sometimes physical manner. It is important to note that variation of these terms and linguistic strategies could occur in different circumstances, such as in a legal brothel setting where most workers act as independent contractors and do not work for pimps.

My folks: The family metaphor is prevalent within street-level sex workers’ language and begins with the foundational term “my folks,” commonly used within the community. “My folks” is interchangeable with “my team,” reinforcing feelings of identity beyond “sex worker” and connecting to feelings of belonging and even camaraderie. According to Diamond, a 20 year old African American sex worker, “my folks” is the basis of many conversations between street-level sex workers as often one of their opening lines to each other is, “Who you wit”? Who your folks?” as a means of identifying which “family” a street-level sex worker belongs and serving as an identity-making strategy.

This term serves as the cornerstone of the symbolic family. As Robin Lakoff (1990) suggests, “language is a symbol, not a reality...[b]ut symbols have tremendous potency, often more than the reality they stand for, because so much volatile emotion attaches to them” (p.15). This holds true for the symbolic family established by the pimp: “[The pimp] in return invites her into his underground social network with the sense of belonging” (Williamson and Cluse-Tolar, 2002, p. 1079). Additionally, “folks” serve as the only sanctioned homosocial relationships that many sex workers have. Taylor, a 19 year old bi-racial sex worker, explained that while working, she is allowed to “ho-cialize” only in attempt to recruit other sex workers to her family:

You can only talk to girls for a minute and thirty seconds, and in that minute and thirty seconds they have to say that they’re gonna go with you and your pimp. Then you gotta move on. If [your pimp] see you talking longer than that, then you get beat.

While each pimp’s rules about “ho-cializing” can vary, most interviewees confirmed that spending time socializing with other women was unacceptable and could result in violence, therefore most interviewees socialized only with their “folks.” Thus, the term “my folks” induces emotions connecting to allegiance, duty, and trust while the pimp establishes himself as the emblematic head of the family with the term “Daddy,” as is illustrated below.

Daddy: Many of the interviewees discussed the taboo of naming their pimps. Some interviewees stated they would never use the pimp’s given name while others stated they would use his name only in extreme situations. Taylor, for instance, noted that “I call him Poppa or Daddy, or sometimes I’ll just say his name when I’m angry with him or I don’t really want to talk to him.” While most of the sex workers start out in a romantic relationship with their pimps, using his name, there often comes a point in the relationship when she has to stop using his name and refer to him

as Daddy. Taylor explains that transition in her relationship, which ultimately signified that she was transitioning from his “girlfriend” to his sex worker:

I would always call him Reginald, ‘cuz that’s his name, or just Reggie, but then, like, when I got around the other girl, ‘cuz he didn’t let her call him that, she had to call him like, Daddy, so like, he told me that he wanted me to stop calling him [Reggie] ‘cuz then the other girls that he has will think it’s okay to say his name when I guess it’s not.

Most sex workers in this study commonly call their pimps “Daddy,” a referent that arguably infantilizes the woman and places the pimp in a position of power, authority, judgment, and discipline. The women interviewed seemed to clearly understand the power of this term. As Jade, a 19 year old Latina sex worker, stated, “You call him Daddy, you know, because it’s like he gave you this life. This new life.” Or, as Diamond said, “To his face? I will not call him Daddy just because it gave him some kinda extra power, but to my friends I’ll be like, ‘Yeah, he’s my Daddy.’” The women interviewed understood that this term empowered the pimp and Diamond recognized that it simultaneously subordinated her. And, much like in traditional patriarchal authoritarian families, “Daddy’s” power is reinforced by the control of his family’s finances.

During our interview, Renee, a 21 year old Latina, stated, almost as a mantra, “The pimp is at the top of the food chain,” supporting Williamson’s argument that “Pimps...are those at the top of the pimping game. To these men in power, it is a game in which they control and manipulate the actions of others subordinate to them” (Williamson and Cluse-Tolar, 2002, p. 1078). One of the things pimps control is money. “Pimps just want they money,” Diamond said. For all of the sex workers interviewed, one-hundred percent of the sex worker’s earnings, every night, went directly to their Daddy, as Diamond said, “‘cuz I was givin’ him not a percentage

or a portion but all my money, all my money goes to him.” Diamond and Renee both stated they had to hand over every dollar, literally every cent, to their pimps or they would “get in trouble” (Renee). Diamond said, “If I had a dollar he didn’t know about,” and Renee interrupts, “If I had fifty-cents!” and Diamond continues, “he be like, ‘wachu doin’ with change [laughs]?” The pimp seems to understand that control of the finances translates into a particular kind of power and control of the family.

In this same vein, the pimp, or the “father figure” of this family, is situated as the “head” of the proverbial family and there is consistent linguistic assertion and maintenance of his position of authority with the use of the term “Daddy.” The pimp understands this dominant position, as Mickey Royal, a pimp, writes in his book *The pimp game*, “You must stay on top and above. On top of your game and above your product and any situation you encounter. The easiest way to stay above your ho’s is to keep your ho’s beneath you. They are not your friends. You are the father, not the brother” (Royal, 1998, p. 76)⁵. The pimp, therefore, exists in an established position of dominance and control often (though not always) reinforced by physical abuse. The interviewees stated that their Daddy would “dole” out money for necessities or give them spending money or would reward them if they were new to the family or earned a large sum of money.

Beyond controlling the finances of the family, interviewees explained that many pimps often control their affection, rewarding only the top earners. For example, Taylor stated that if she made good money, her pimp would give her a kiss:

They want you to be strictly about business, about getting them money...unless you make them really happy, and then they’ll do something like give you a kiss. If you make them really like, make good money. Unless you make them good money, then maybe they’ll like give you a kiss...they’ll give you hugs, tell you how proud they are of

you, they even might kiss you on the mouth to show you that they're like really happy. They'll lay with you, they'll buy you stuff like clothes, shoes, they'll get your nails done, stuff like that.

Other interviews confirmed this, for example, Janey, a 19 year old Caucasian sex worker, stated, "Most of them, they don't, they don't sleep with you unless you have [made] a certain amount of money or you've reached his quota for the month." Many of the interviewees discussed the earning quota that each worker had. The quota varied by pimp and could depend on the skin color of the worker, her experience, her "hustle," and her position within the family. Some interviewees suggested that the "bottom bitch" did not have to earn as much money as the other workers.

Bottom Bitch: According to my interviews, most pimps have a "bottom bitch" or "bottom," which is his number one worker: "Like a girl who he has regardless, like working, no matter what happens she'll be there. He may have other, other girls, but those girls he can't count on like the bottom bitch" (Diamond). When I asked Diamond if every pimp has a bottom bitch she replied, "Yeah, or he's not a pimp, I would say." Often the bottom is the sex worker who has been with the pimp the longest and was the first sex worker he initiated into the profession, usually she is his best earner. As the pimp adds more women to his family, either by recruiting them himself or having his bottom recruit them, it is often his bottom's responsibility to inculcate the new sex workers into the ways of the family and the expectations of the pimp. Valerie, a 36 year old African American sex worker said: "I was a bottom. I'd tell the girls, 'this is what you do, this is how you do it, this is what he expects, don't fuck up.'" Other interviews suggested a more maternal role. Frankie, a self-identified "bottom" stated:

I made sure the girls got up; I made sure they ate, made sure all their clothes were washed, and they were out at the

time they were supposed to be at. And if something was to happen while they were out there, you know, I was the person to go and drive, you know what I'm sayin', to see what the problem was, or I would drive him to go see what the problem was. Or, they had too much money on 'em and was scared somebody was gonna take it from 'em, he would send me out somewhere to meet 'em, pick up the money, and send 'em back out.

It appears beneficial for a bottom to have more women in the family because sometimes her earning quota is reduced. Renee (the "bottom" for her pimp) said, "From my experience, I won't have to make as much money as the other girls make [when new girls are brought into the family]." Many of the interviewees affirmed that the bottom rarely leaves her pimp because it is difficult to regain that status in a new family. "You can always work your way up to being a bottom bitch, but you gotta fight your way up to that place and work harder, so that's why most girls who are bottom stay there because it's easier than trying to work your way up [with a new pimp]" (Diamond).

Linguistically the term "bottom bitch" is relevant because it is used in this community as a term of respect; it is the Daddy's way of acknowledging that this female is a particularly loyal and strong worker and for the "bottom" to gain respect from other workers within the family and on the street. Renee suggests the "bottom" refers to the "foundation" of the family. Perhaps "bottom" can be read anatomically as in "the buttocks," though the women interviewed did not sense the term to be sexual. The term elevates the "bottom's" status within the family, yet it is tempting to read the term negatively as there is both an explicit and implicit subordination present: bottom (implicit) bitch (explicit). "Bottom" traditionally means the lowest possible point. "Bitch" is a much more explicit term used to dehumanize and subjugate. Framing this term as positive could give the Daddy the power to assert praise while keeping his "best worker" in a subordinated subject position.

However, “bitch” is also constructed as a term of endearment or respect among this street-level sex work community, which complicates this understanding.

Bitch: According to my interviewees, “bitch” is by far the most common referent from a pimp to his sex worker(s). Bitch is so pervasive that street-level sex workers use it as a referent to other street-level workers with whom they are very close. Renee says, “For me, it’s more like a term of endearment,” to which Diamond agrees: “Yeah, that’s my homegirl, that’s my best friend...that’s my bitch.” Diamond went on to say, about her pimp, “At first, in the beginning of the relationship we was cool, like ‘babe’, but when I start hittin’ the streets for him, oh, I din’ even, I barely even heard my name. It was just bitch, bitch.” Taylor’s interview also affirmed, “He likes to use the word bitch. He uses that word most of the time.”

Much scholarship has been done about the term “bitch” (see Sutton, 1995; Collins, 2004) discussing “bitch” as it functions as an invective in the dominant culture or attempts by women to reclaim the term. In terms of the pimp/sex worker relationship, the term “bitch” may reflect that sex workers are loyal to each other or their families, willing to offer protection. Perhaps the term reflects the sex worker’s relationship to her pimp, who in some sense “owns” her, thus the term bitch functions as a naturalizing framework for social relations. Bitch, as it is used in this community, establishes in-group status and sharing this and other terminology reinforces community identities. The development and maintenance of insider status through the use of this and other terms may be particularly important to this population because members of this community rely on each other, to some extent, for protection from police, from dangerous clients, and sometimes from domestic abuse. Similarly, given their circumstances, they may need to exclude outsiders as a way of ensuring protection from arrest, judgment or proselytizing.

Wifey: The family metaphor is further linguistically constructed by referents like “wifey” or “wifes-in-law.” A pimp will often call his workers “wifey” or, as Renee states, “He can’t call other girls wifey, just me, ‘cuz it makes me mad.” Here, it seems, Renee exercises some form of control over her “Daddy’s” use of the term, though it is difficult to know if her pimp refers to his other workers as “wifey” when she is not present. Renee considers “wifey” a term of respect, and, as her pimp’s “bottom,” she believes only she is entitled to that referent. “Categories like ‘husbands,’ ‘wives,’ ‘mothers’...are created as groups with certain characteristics and relationships” (Connell, 2005, p. 130), thus by utilizing this term, the pimp and sex workers establish a metaphorical married relationship with at least some of the same commitments, respect, and loyalty.

Similar ideas are reinforced by women of the same family referring to each other as “wifes-in-law,” establishing not only a familial connection amongst them but invoking an almost “legal” status to their relationships, a social contract. While Dalla (2006) notes that there is surprisingly little information “documenting the nature of relationships between prostituted women” (p. 76), my research reveals that women’s experiences working in the same metaphorical family is complex and varied. Some sex workers discussed caring about the other women in their families and even helping with child care. Others discussed family situations with extensive conflicts and sometimes brutal violence. Yet others, such as Frankie, a 33 year old African American sex worker, discussed having a sexual relationship with her wife-in-law. Frankie explained:

As we became one, as a family, ummm, he came on to her and you know, he wanted us to have a little threesome thing, and ummmm, she told him that she wasn’t in the relationship for him, she was in the relationship for me...She would go out and make money, whatever, but sexually-wise, she didn’t want him, she wanted me.

According to Frankie, sexual relationships within the families is quite common, though no other interview participants spoke of this, yet many acknowledged and accepted that their Daddy had sex with other women within the family. Some interviewees discussed jealousy that was sometimes present within the familial structures, as Valerie said, “Oh, there’s always one that’s jealous.”

Renegade and Other Terms of Disloyalty

Renegade: A street-level prostitute who does not have a pimp is often called a “renegade” or “renegader”. The term “renegade” reflects the arguably traitorous nature of the woman who chooses to work for herself, and by definition is a disloyal person who betrays or deserts others. In this street-level sex work community, she works without a pimp, although it is problematic to assert that she works solely for herself and keeps all of the money she earns, as many renegades support boyfriends, husbands or children with their income. Interviewee reactions to renegades were mixed. To some, being a renegade was an egregious act of selfishness against the community. This disloyalty on the street is regularly met with physical violence, especially if a renegade is trying to encroach upon a physical space worked by other women. As Dalla (2006) suggests, “One could speculate that relationships between prostituted women...are, on the one hand, highly competitive and destructive, as each attempts to procure more and better paying clientele” (p.76)—which is true of renegades who are not part of a family.

While renegades do not hand their money over to a pimp, per se, often their money is handed to a man in another powerful position: drug dealer (Ratner 1993; Maher 1992, 1996; Inciardi et. al. 1993; Johnston 1998). Yet this does not seem to be the reason for animosity between street-level prostitutes in a family and renegades. As Renee said, “She’s gonna come all up in here and make that money and don’t give it to nobody but keeps it for herself? Oh, hell no.” The idea of autonomy for a woman on the

street seems almost offensive to the other women—as if an economically independent renegade is a personal affront to another woman’s family. Certainly, the renegade threatens the entire notion of the “family” structure created by pimps, so pimps often try to persuade renegades to join their family or instruct their women to “beat down” a renegade when they see her (Renee).

Out of pocket: If a woman “steps out of pocket” she is doing something to disrespect her pimp, usually by acknowledging another pimp, even if just by a glance, which is called “reckless eyeballing.” Taylor said:

They call it reckless eyeballing, when you’re looking at other people, when you’re not supposed to. Like when you’re talking to [your pimp] and with [your pimp] you only look at them. Like, say, he was sitting here in this room and we were both talking to you. I would have to talk to you like this [turns her body to face away from me to look at where her pimp would be sitting]. To where I was only looking at him but I could talk to you but only looking at him. Like, I wouldn’t be allowed to look at you right in your face...They want to have control over your mind, body, and spirit. Everything about you, they want to have control of it. Because if they have control over all of that, they know that they can tell you to do anything and that you’ll do it.

According to all almost of the interviewees, if another pimp, who is not her Daddy, catches a sex worker “out of pocket” he then has the power to take “ownership” of her. He can take her money, her cell phone, call her pimp and say something to the effect of, “Oh, I got your bitch now, she’s outta pocket” (Renee), and express that her pimp has 24 hours to “serve her papers,” meaning, offer that pimp money for her, or the latter pimp gets to keep her. Often, as Diamond explained, the former pimp will confront the new pimp and the worker and she has to “choose up” in front of him,

meaning, make her choice in front of him. If she chooses the other pimp, then she becomes “his” and part of his family. If she chooses her former pimp, he will often pay the other pimp for her “wasting his time” and “beat her down” (Diamond). As Renee explained, “When you’re in his pocket, that’s where you stay.”

Many interviewees relayed stories of being out of pocket, especially when they were new to the life. Diamond said “Thank you” to a man who opened a door to the 7-11 for her and she got called out-of-pocket and subsequently got “in trouble” from her pimp, though she would not specify what that meant. Renee says she “went as far as to get into a car with a guy” thinking he was a customer but she quickly learned he was a pimp and she was caught “out of pocket.” She said she could not remember how it all ended but that she went back to “her man.” There are several interesting aspects to this transaction. Primarily, the original pimp has exercised an extreme form of control over his sex worker by controlling her physical demeanor. He has taken control not just of her money, not just of her labor, but also of her physical movements, even when he is not physically present himself. Linguistically the term is significant as it suggests objectification of the woman, as if she is a literal, owned object that a pimp carries with him. When some of the interviewees discussed being in and out of pocket, they would literally gesture to being in his back pocket.

Choose-up: To “choose-up,” as previously mentioned, is to make the choice to have a different pimp. Described by many of the interviewees, it is the process of a sex worker leaving her pimp, and sometimes her folks, for a different pimp. It appears almost as a regulated business transaction with rules of appropriate behavior where the former pimp delivers her clothes to the new pimp and sometimes she has to look her former pimp in the eye and say that she chooses a new pimp; Renee said sometimes “they’ll shake hands.” As Lakoff (1990) so aptly states, “Language is powerful; language is power. Language is a change creating force” (p. 13). In

this moment of *saying* that she chooses a different pimp, the sex worker creates a change in her life. The term “choose-up” implies some sort of autonomy on the sex worker’s behalf, that she has a choice in this matter. Often, however, the interviewees admitted to being enticed by empty promises of less work, less violence, more drugs, more freedom. It would seem, then, that street-level sex workers have some form of power or agency. However, many interviewees conveyed that a sex worker’s decision to choose up is often met with physical violence from her former pimp, which her new pimp allows as part of the transaction. Sometimes, in the event the sex worker who left her “family” encounters her former wifes-in-law, they have “the right” to beat her up (Diamond and Renee). As Diamond stated, and Renee confirmed, when a woman leaves the family, the other girls have to work more to earn higher quotas, as well as deal with the emotional pain from the break and feelings of abandonment.

Discussion

As Neil Websdale states, “Whatever culture an ethnographer studies, there will always be limits to his or her understanding of that culture” (1998, p. 214). Therefore, I am remiss to draw any overarching conclusions regarding this research. However, even from this small set of interviews, we can conclude that linguistic constructions of fictive kinships among illegal street-level sex workers have a significant impact on how female sex workers conceptualize their relationships. This paper concludes that kin structures represent an important element of the social lives of female sex workers in this study. Kinship terminology reconfigures the intimate world of sex work, and kin terms serve as an identity-making strategy. This terminology constructs identities that ostensibly connect to power, and as Gayle Rubin states, “Kinship is organization, and organization is power” (1975, p. 37). Yet, within the context of this street-level sex work community, certain family actors hold more power than others. Certain identities that are repeatedly reinforced with terminology suggest that some

positions within the kin structure (“Daddy” or “bottom bitch,” for example) are imbued with power.

It is also important to note that many interviewees were uncomfortable with the term “pimp.” My initial interview question was “Do you have or have you had a pimp?” I received a lot of mixed responses to this question, including, “No, he’s my fiancé” (Renee), or “He’s more like my, he’s my husband,” (Frankie). I then began asking, “Do you have anyone that you consider a pimp, or maybe a boyfriend or husband?” Depending on the interviewee’s response, I would continue to ask questions to clarify her relationship. Although some women in the interviews described violent or volatile relationships with their pimps, not all of them did. In fact, two interviewees specifically noted that their pimps *never* hit or physically threatened them. While violence within pimp/sex worker relationships is prevalent, it is important to understand the complex economic, familial, and social ties that bind these relationships as well as the structural factors that necessitate such kin structures.

David Schneider and Raymond Smith assert, “cultures not only adapt people to their environment, but also provide the conceptual framework through which the environment is experienced and social relations are mediated” (1973, p. 6). For sex workers who participate in kin structures, social relations reflect kinships. Kin terms, in turn, function to create, support and maintain relationships in criminalized and potentially dangerous spaces. Street-level prostitutes face many unique circumstances within their community and are one of the most vulnerable of all prostituted groups (Kinnell, 2006, p. 143; Dalla, 2006, pp. 115-126). Street-level prostitutes are more exposed to the elements, more open to arrest, and take more physical risks with clients as they often perform sex acts in cars or hotel rooms with no protection from physical assaults (Dalla, 2006, p.115-126; Williamson and Cluse-Tolar, 2002, p. 1074). There would appear to be more incentive for street-level sex workers to maintain kin

structures and the sense of obligation and protection that accompany such structures. It is my sense that within this street-level prostitute community, kinship structures constitute a normative framework for relationships.

This research certainly merits further investigation to see just how pervasive fictive kin structures are in different sex work communities and how those relationships are linguistically constructed and maintained, specifically in male and transgender sex work communities. Additional research should also relate to the formation of kin structures in legal and illegal sex work settings in an effort to better understand the implications of these kinships. It is worthwhile to investigate how their establishment and maintenance may or may not connect to the criminalization of particular kinds of sex work. Ultimately, this paper hopes to serve as a springboard for future research into the linguistic constructions of fictive kinships within sex work communities.

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³ Names have been changed.

⁴ See Carol Stack (1998) who discusses kin terms as a means of survival in the Black community; Kath Weston (1997) who discusses kin terms in the homosexual community; Hilary Smith (2008) who discusses kin terms among homeless street youth.

⁵ For more information about pimps, see *Pimpology: The 48 Laws of the game* by Pimpin' Ken and *Games pimps play: Pimps, players, and wives-in-law: A qualitative analysis of street prostitution* by James F. Hodgson.