Keeping Up with the Transition: Sex for Compensation and Women with Asylum and Transgender Experiences in Sweden

Anttila 2023, Transashian

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SIMV21 (30 ECTS) – Spring 2023

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To my mother. And my mother's mother. And my grandmother's mother. To my pink roots. To my feminine tree.

Abstract

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Title: Keeping Up with the Transition: Sex for Compensation and Women with Asylum and Transgender Experiences in Sweden
Master's thesis SIMV21, 30 credits
Word count: 18 466
Supervisor: David Wästerförs
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This thesis focuses on the practice of sex for compensation performed by women with transgender and asylum experiences living in Sweden. It aims to explore the complexities of sex for compensation by positioning this practice as both strategy and a tactic for obtaining income used for gender affirmation, considering that gender-affirmative healthcare is not available for asylum seekers in Sweden. The thesis analyzes the multiplicity and intersections of nine women's narratives derived from nine semi-structured interviews and three hundred twenty-six hours of participant observation, including autobiographical elements of the author. The focus of this study does not lay on legal or ethical aspects of sex for compensation but on lived experiences and acts within positionalities of women with transgender and asylum-seeking identities in Stockholm, Malmö, and Gothenburg. Their narratives are structured in the thesis around their accounts on waiting, the dimension of appreciated accessibility in selling sex, the derivation of empowerment and pleasure from it, as well as a dimension of vulnerability. The thesis concludes that sex for compensation practiced by interviewees is sometimes agential, sometimes precarious, and sometimes paradoxically both at once. This practice is cherished by them due to being relatively easy to access, being able to give social confirmation to their female identities and being able to give sexual gratification. The author concludes that sex for compensation can be seen as a consequence of waiting for approval from authorities to access transgender healthcare, the highest priority and acute necessity of the women in focus.

Keywords: sex for compensation; transgender; asylum; gender affirmation; waiting; strategy; tactic.

Popular science summary

Imagine living in Sweden with twenty-four Swedish kronor per day, while not being allowed to get medical assistance from your doctor for something that you consider as a critical need. The scenario that you are imagining right now is a reality for some of the individuals whom my thesis will introduce you to.

In a political moment when public debates about transgender healthcare and migration politics are central, this thesis focuses on nine women who have both transgender and migrant identity, live in Sweden, and sell sex to pay for their social and medical transition. While the decision to obtain funds in this way is their own, it is also a result of their circumstances. Namely, asylum seekers in Sweden do not have access to transgender healthcare. This thesis suggests that women who engage in sex for compensation are both empowered by it and made vulnerable at the same time. Sex for compensation is attractive to them because it gives them easy access to money, reinforces their sense of being feminine when being desired by heterosexual men, and provides sexual pleasure. This is a conclusion from the interviews with them and participant observation, in combination with personal reflections of me as the author who share many identities with the research participants.

The stories of these women are significant because they provide readers with an opportunity to hear about their experiences directly. Instead of reading statistics and listening to public discourse about sex for compensation, asylum, and transgender people, the pages that you are about to read open doors to their intimacy and emotions. They intentionally opened these doors because all ten of them, including me, want to humanize their circumstances and leave a space for interventions.

1 Introduction

To begin with, I believe that a specification is needed on why "women with transgender experience" is used to refer to my interviewees and myself instead of "transgender women". The reasons for that are partly personal. I often feel that my whole existence as a woman in this world is summoned in one and only identity when someone chooses to describe me as a transgender woman. At the same time, I feel othered as a woman who is somehow always attributed to the other side of the spectrum, where an exemplary ideal of womanhood stands on the opposite side, unreachable and impossible for me, or women like me, to embody.

I make a similar argument for using "women with experience of sex for compensation". According to Hulusjö, "through othering processes, women with prostitution experience are constructed as different from other women" (2013, 176). The practice of providing sex for compensation is not something that defines women and, indeed, is a changeable variable in different aspects, contexts, and times of one's life, as this thesis will show. In that fashion, I do not refer to my interviewees as "sex workers" or "prostitutes", but as "women with experience of sex for compensation". Here I argue that not just sex for compensation and transgender experience but also being in the asylum process are parts of lived experiences of the individuals in question. We are not "migrant women" or "asylum seekers", but "women with migrant experience" and "women with asylum experience".

It is no secret that the existence of individuals with transgender and migrant identities is subjugated to the dominant discourse of cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and citizenship in the outside, real world. We are often forced to navigate a social world that is hostile to our personal existence. Many times, we do not get to choose how we are identified or defined, and we are constantly subjected to the constitution of ourselves as "the other".

In light of these challenges, it is important that we create and maintain safe spaces where we can explore our identities and experiences on our own terms. This master's thesis is one such space that I can provide from my positionality. Here, I can centralize "woman" as a stable and inclusive formation that encompasses all our diverse experiences and identities. I wish to do that for the sake of all those spaces and days when I was not allowed.

In doing so, I am reclaiming my right to exist on my own terms, and I let my interviewees define themselves in ways that are authentic and empowering. We aim to create a safe space where we can share our stories. We are asserting our right to be seen and heard, and to live our lives free from the fear and shame that so often accompanies our existence in the outside world.

In short, I hope that the following pages will serve as a beacon of hope and empowerment for all of us who have struggled to find a place in a world that often seems hostile to our existence. Through our collective efforts, we aim to create a future that is more inclusive, more compassionate, and more just for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

1.1 Research problem and research questions

The available data from The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Rights (RFSL) suggest that the waiting time for the first appointment within gender-affirmative healthcare units in Sweden, once the referral for a person in question is sent, takes around two years (RFSL 2023). The investigation process only for getting diagnosed with a condition of 'transsexualism', in the case of women with transgender experience, is usually twelve months (Transammans [my translation] n.d.). The National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen* in Swedish) is a state institution that can either grant or reject one's application to have gender-affirming surgery. There is no publicly available information on how long one waits after getting a positive decision since

it greatly varies in different regions and changes depending on the available staff and number of persons in the queue. According to Dr. Cecilia Dhejne, who works within a transgender healthcare unit in Stockholm, ANOVA, the waiting time is three years (Cecilia Dhejne, personal communication, February 1, 2023). In total, it means that it would take around six years of waiting "to become". However, these regulations apply only to those who are citizens of Sweden or have a residence permit.

If a person is in the asylum process, they cannot access gender-affirmative healthcare since it is not considered "health care that cannot wait" (The Swedish Migration Agency 2022). The asylum process can take years, and if the asylum decision is positive, those with transgender experience who wish to access gender-affirmative healthcare in Sweden could spend more than a decade to complete the gender-affirming process. Lastly, many individuals whose asylum claims are rejected by the Swedish Migration Agency often decide to stay in a country as undocumented persons. For many of them, returning to their home countries where transgender identity is either criminalized or a reason for constant violence and abuse is a less favorable option than living in an everyday fear of being deported.

My thesis builds on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with nine women with transgender experience who have, at some point, applied for asylum in Sweden. While waiting to access gender-affirmative healthcare, all of my interviewees have reported a practice of providing sex for compensation in order to privately finance gender-affirming procedures, services, and products. Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to explore the practice of sex for compensation among women with transgender and asylum experiences in Sweden. This aim is both a reaction to an insufficient number of studies that focuses on the mentioned practice, as well as a response to a need to provide an analysis of these women's experiences by centering them as a norm of the research study, as explained below.

The existing studies in Sweden about women with transgender and asylum experiences engaged in sex for compensation have a tendency to be fragmented, partial, and intermediary. The studies are fragmented in the way of positioning these women as a part of a larger group, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, sex workers, or youth (RFSL Ungdom 2015; Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson 2021; Vuolajärvi 2018; Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal 2011). The studies are partial in the way of being only partly relevant to them where, for example, a focus lays on transgender identity and sex for compensation, but not asylum (Byström 2015; RFSL Ungdom 2015). The studies are intermediary in a way that they are not conducted by persons who share similar experiences, be it of transgender, of migration, or of sex for compensation (Byström 2015; Vuolajärvi 2018; Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson 2021). In many instances, the existing studies encompass mentioned fragmented, partial, and intermediary dimensions at once.

The field of studies of sex for compensation can be characterized as strongly politicized and polarized between two perspectives, either pro-sex work or anti-prostitution. The former approach sex for compensation as a form of labor, or work in some instances, where the emphasis lies on sex workers' agency (Grant 2014; Scambler 2014). At the same time, this perspective is connected with advocacy for the decriminalization of sex work, where Red Umbrella Sweden would be an example of a sex workers' organization in Sweden that has a pro-sex work perspective. The anti-prostitution perspective generally describes sex for compensation as "violence against women" or "men paying for a woman for the right to rape her" (Farley 1994, 14). In a Swedish context, Talita is a good example of an organization that holds the view that buying sex should be criminalized, as it is in this country (SVT Nyheter 2020). According to Sweden's sex purchase law, often referred to as "the Swedish model", which dates back to 1999, those who buy sex commit a crime, but not those who sell it (Global Network of Sex Work Projects 2015, 1:1).

The point of departure in this thesis is neither of these two perspectives. Instead of that, I am providing a framework that makes it possible to understand sex for compensation performed by women with transgender and asylum experiences as a strategy and tactic for gender affirmation on the one hand, and, at the same time, as a result of specific kinds of precarious situations in which they are situated. Consequently, the ambition of this thesis is to show the complexity of sex for compensation as a practice employed by women with transgender and asylum experiences in Sweden.

The research questions are the following:

1. What social functions and uses do sex for compensation have for women with transgender and asylum experiences in Sweden?

2. How do waiting processes for gender-affirmative healthcare and residence status in Sweden intersect and affect one another?

3. What are the outcomes of conditions provided by asylum status and lack of access to gender-affirmative care in Sweden?

The narratives that provided me with responses to the above questions are narratives of nine lives, nine women with whom I share dysphoric, euphoric, and those-in-between moments. Lastly, this is my narrative of finally having overcome the post-traumatic dynamics of fear and shame, fancier and less raw in order to respond to the academic requirements. At the same time, the autobiographical elements are articulated in that way so they could fit my zone of comfort at a particular moment of writing this thesis.

1.2 My arrival at this topic

The arrival at this topic started a long time ago. It started with me building a way out from the patriarchal, conservative, and violent context in which I was born and raised. I focused on overperformance and getting scholarships to study abroad and consequently ensuring safety in that way. My destination became Sweden in 2016 when I started an internship at Oxford Research. My primary task included work on a research report in collaboration with RFSL, where I interviewed persons who were in the asylum process in Sweden (Lukac 2018). All interviewees were members of RFSL's members' group, Newcomers, which consists of those who are in the asylum process in Sweden based on either their sexual orientation or gender identity. During the same year, I started a two-year master's studies at Lund University and later became a member of Newcomers. Today, I am a project manager of the Newcomers' project and a full-time employee at RFSL in Stockholm, where I live, prosper, and thrive.

In addition to my observations within Newcomers, the final decision to work with the topic of this thesis was the result of my student internship in the organization LGBT Denmark in Copenhagen in 2018. As a part of this internship, I interviewed women with transgender experiences where I could learn more about sex for compensation practiced by some of them. Many of the narratives also included experiences of self-medication with hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and the findings are summarized in an article published by Shuddhashar (Lukac 2020). This unsafe practice of self-medication, unsafe in the sense of not being supervised by a healthcare professional, started at the point of long waiting time to access the gender-affirmative healthcare system in Denmark. I was dumbfounded by how our transgender female stories are similar and how a starting point for practicing sex for compensation often occurs in a period of waiting to receive (health)care. Lastly, I must admit that these findings made me feel a bit better about myself. It helped the process of fighting both internalized transphobia and xenophobia and understanding that maybe my experiences are not a reflection of who I am as a person. Maybe, just maybe, I could be a part of a pattern ranging from societal circumstances to state negligence.

At the beginning of 2018, I contacted curators from RFSL Ungdom (*RFSL Youth* in English) and their project Pegasus who agreed to share on their social media that I was looking for interviewees for my peer-to-peer master's project. Pegasus focused on non-heterosexual/cisgender youth who had experience with sex for compensation. The same year they published a report where they found that 51 percent of the survey participants had a personal experience of providing sexual services for compensation, ranging from money and accommodation to food (RFSL Ungdom 2018 [my translation], 8). In addition to Pegasus, Röda Paraplyet (*Red Umbrella* in English) was another RFSL's project that helped me to get in touch with my interviewees. Röda Paraplyet offers online support and information to men who have sex with men and persons with transgender experience who are engaged in sex work in Stockholm. Today Röda Paraplyet is called Sexperterna Sexwork, and that is another project that I am responsible for as part of my work at RFSL Stockholm. After completing interviews in April 2018, I presented the preliminary findings in the form of a lecture at Trans Fest Stockholm. Five years after, in 2023, I am continuing with my analysis and finally arriving at the topic on my own terms. Those are terms that exclude fear of being deported and fighting daily for survival in a new context that did not support me medically, socially, and politically.

1.3 Thesis disposition

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter contains a notice from me as the author concerning the choice of words used to describe research participants and myself, as well as the background of the research topic – a practice of sex for compensation employed by women with transgender and asylum experiences in Sweden. The chapter continues with an explanation of the conditions that made me pursue this research topic and ends with a presentation of relevant research done in the field. In the second chapter, I present and discuss my methodological choices and the process of selecting participants. The third chapter focuses on theoretical frameworks, namely standpoint theory and intersectionality, that help me

understand the research problem, as well as definitions of concepts and theories used in the subsequent, analytical part. In chapter number four, I present my interviewees and analyze their narratives in combination with my personal been-there-done-that moments. The chapter is finalized by drawing analytical conclusions related to the findings and provision of a response to the research query. In chapter five, I write about ethical guidelines used throughout the research process and the challenges experienced from a position of a social scientist. The last chapter, number six, includes my final thoughts and conclusions, five years after conducting the interviews. These are also my reflections as a resident of Sweden concerned with current political developments in this country.

1.4 Survey of the field and previous research

In a Swedish context, there are important studies that focus on the practice of selling sex among young lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. An RFSL study from 2011 includes fifty interviews with persons who have experience with sex for compensation where twelve of them were born outside Sweden, and three identify as transsexuals (Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal 2011 [my translation], 24). In relation to those interviewees with transgender experience, a confirmatory dimension of selling sex is mentioned where this practice function as an affirmation of one's gender identity (Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal 2011 [my translation], 50). For some interviewees, pleasure and sexual satisfaction are also mentioned as feelings that sex for compensation brings (Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal 2011 [my translation], 118). In the same study, another interviewee with transgender experience reported selling sex in exchange for hormonal medications used for gender affirmation purposes (Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal 2011 [my translation], 55).

In addition to the mentioned interviews, this study includes an analysis of different online platforms in Sweden where sex is sold. The authors identified sixty male-to-female transsexuals with a high number of those who are born outside of Sweden

Some of them used the earnings from sex for compensation for gender affirmation surgeries. One of the examples given by the authors is an online advertisement by a male-to-female transsexual, as the authors refer to the person – "Im lookin for someone dirty ritch guy who can pay for my surgeries... aprox. 44000 USD/ 32000EURO´s... I would be a dream come true." (Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal 2011, 74).

According to RFSL Ungdom's report focusing on young persons in Sweden (up to 25 years of age), LGBTQ youth reported a greater occurrence of experiences with sex for compensation in comparison with cisgender and heterosexual youth (2015). The young persons with transgender experience were the second largest group within LGBTQ survey respondents who reported experience with sex for compensation (17,1 %), after cisgender men (21%) (RFSL Ungdom 2015 [my translation], 6). The authors state in the same study that there are very few studies in Sweden that are specifically focused on the experience of sex for compensation among transgender persons (2015 [my translation], 24). At the same time, a perspective from asylum seekers is missing from this study of RFSL Ungdom, and the authors point out a huge need for research with this particular group (2015 [my translation], 27).

One of the latest and most extensive national studies on the sexual exploitation of young persons in Sweden was conducted in 2021 by a state charity and research foundation Public Children's Home (*Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset* in Swedish). It included 3 282 survey respondents from Swedish high schools who were between sixteen and twenty-three years old, and where 11 percent of the respondents were born outside of Sweden (Svedin, Landberg, and Jonsson 2021 [my translation], 20). Thirty-seven respondents reported that they have experience in selling sex (Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson 2021 [my translation], 51). Of those who had experience with selling sex, 42 percent reported that they did it because they find it fun/exciting (*roligt/spännande* in Swedish), while other reasons ranged from the need for money and the simple fact of liking sex, to feeling psychologically bad (Svedin, Landberg

and Jonsson 2021 [my translation], 56). At the same time, those respondents who had experience with sex for compensation reported having suicidal thoughts to a higher degree compared with those who did not sell sex, as well as more symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson 2021 [my translation], 57). Although 11 percent of the respondents were born outside of Sweden, note that this research included only those who spoke Swedish and attended high school education.

According to Niina Vuolajärvi (2019, 152), there are very few studies that focus on the actual experiences of people who sell sex, while "the knowledge on migrants is scarce". Her ethnographic fieldwork is important because it includes migrant sex workers in a Nordic context who, according to the author, make up the majority of those who sell sexual services in this region (Vuolajärvi 2018; Vuolajärvi 2019). For this group, selling sex means an agency that brings income and mobility, "as well as a future strategy for having a stable residence in Europe" (Vuolajärvi 2018, 1094). A strategic function of sex for compensation is also analyzed by Crawley, Hemmings, and Price (2011) whose research focuses on the survival and livelihood strategies of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. One of these strategies is sexual relationships "in exchange for meals, cash, shelter, or other daily necessities" that help this group cope with destitution (Crawley, Hemmings and Price 2011, 5). Crawley, Hemmings, and Price concluded that "compared to other livelihood strategies, potential earnings from sex work are much higher" (2011, 50).

It should also be noted that the majority of Vuolajärvi's interviewees are cisgender women for whom income earned via sex work is used mainly "to finance their studies, home renovations or other temporary monetary demands, or to support their children while they are growing up" (2018, 1096). A study from the United Kingdom by Crawley, Hemmings, and Price (2011) does not provide us with information on whether the mentioned asylum-seeking men and women have transgender experience. Additionally, the interviewees from this study use earnings from sex for compensation for similar purposes as those persons Vuolajärvi met

throughout her fieldwork. A focus of this thesis, on the other hand, is specifically on women with transgender and asylum experiences, where the primary motive for engaging in sex for compensation is feminization, or gender affirmation, to be more specific.

Lastly, there are important qualitative research findings on the reasons why women with transgender experience engage in sex for compensation. Some authors see discrimination within other, non-sex work-related forms of employment as a cause of mentioned connection (Nadal, Davidoff and Fujji-Doe 2013). Although these authors conclude that workplace discrimination in the United States leads women with transgender experience "to view sex work as a feasible option", no explanation is given on whether some interviewees would have sex work anyway as their preferred occupation had the discrimination from employers and customers not existed (Nadal, Davidoff and Fujji-Doe 2013, 170).

According to the analysis conducted by the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, which includes 6,400 persons with transgender experience across the United States, "the sex trade can offer greater autonomy and financial stability compared to more traditional workplaces, with few barriers to entry" (Fitzgerald et al. 2015, 7). In the same study, "Black and Black Multiracial respondents had the highest rate of sex trade participation" (Fitzgerald et al. 2015, 14). Lastly, "sixty percent (60.4%) of survey respondents who were involved in the sex trade reported that they had attempted suicide, a rate 37 times that of the general population" (Fitzgerald et al. 2015, 24). No explanation is given whether the very fact of practicing sex for compensation made their respondents attempt suicide, in the same way as no explanation is given in a study by Public Children's Home in Sweden on whether the practice of selling sex was a cause of higher degree of reported suicidal thoughts in this group compared to those who did not sell sex (Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson 2021).

2 Methodology and Selection of the Participants

This thesis is a feminist narrative study that originated from participant observation, namely my use of a participatory ethnographic evaluation and research (PEER) method. This method is defined as "a qualitative research method based on the anthropological approach to studying social life, in which a relationship of trust and rapport is built up between the researcher and the researched" (Crawley, Hemmings, and Price 2011, 12). The fieldwork conducted included my active participant observation in dialogues and conversations set in Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg. Our common activities consisted of shopping tours, picnics, accompanying participants to hairdresser appointments, club nights out, rave parties, and unavoidable after-parties at participants' homes.

As someone who identifies with many experiences of my interviewees, I recognized the importance of adopting a participatory and collaborative approach in conducting our interviews, as well. For many of them, the very word "interview" can conjure up negative associations with the word "investigation", evoking memories of encounters with authority figures such as case officers at the Migration Agency or medical experts at gender-affirmative healthcare clinics. In many cases, the interview process can be experienced as a form of validation or proof, where individuals are required to demonstrate that they are "enough" in order to access the resources and support that they need. "Enough refugee" to get further refugee protection or "enough trans" to get their condition of "transsexualism" and start with the medical transition.

Given these dynamics, it was essential that I approached my interviews, together with the participant observation, in a way that emphasized collaboration and mutual respect. By acknowledging the power imbalances that exist in our society and within the research process itself, where I am a researcher together with research participants, I was able to create a space where my interviewees felt comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives. My insider perspective as someone who shared many of their experiences allowed me to establish a sense of trust and rapport

with each of them in this "femme-inist ethnographic research with/in 'ones own community'' (Dahl 2010, 144). Through this participatory and collaborative approach, I was able to dismantle some of the fear and apprehension that my collaborators may have had regarding the interview process. I was able to create a safe and supportive space where they could share their stories without fear of judgment or retribution. This approach also allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted experiences of each interviewee, and to ensure that their voices were heard and valued.

Overall, the participatory and collaborative approach adopted is something that I find essential in order to ensure that my research is ethical, respectful, and empowering for all involved. By prioritizing the needs and perspectives of the participants, I was able to create a research process that was truly collaborative, and that centered their experiences and perspectives at every step of the way. In doing ethnography "in a more collaborative way" (Back and Sinha 2008, 171), the first step were my dialogues with fellow women with transgender experience who surrounded me. I was transparent that I was aiming to do research with women who have transgender and asylum experiences, but I did not know what its primary focus would be exactly. Back and Sinha describe their dialogic ethnography as "the art of listening, learning and telling and showing – is well placed to make sense of the ways in which cultures combine, move and are situated in particular contexts, while remaining linked across place and time" (2018, 172). In that process of active participant observation, my final topic and focus on sex for compensation emerged. I also learned that my peer perspective of doing research with them instead of "on them" opened an array of further contacts that became not just my interviewees, but my chosen family.

In total and during 2018, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews in Stockholm, Malmö, and Gothenburg. The interviewees selected by snowball sampling ranged from 19 to 43 in age. In this way, I wanted to avoid a sole focus on the youth, which was the case in many mentioned research studies of a similar type. The

interviewees' countries of birth were Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Egypt, Uganda, Iraq, and Iran. Each of the interviews lasted between one and a half and two and half hours. I conducted the interviews in informal and familiar settings for the interviewees, such as the apartments where our common friends lived and their homes. In this way, I aimed to avoid the possibility that they connect our interview to investigations they have been through and where a certain risk was involved, be it the one at the Migration Agency or a gender-affirmative healthcare unit. While interviewing women with transgender and asylum experiences, my focus was their practices of sex for compensation, as well as the potential precarities that the embodiment of both transgender and asylum experiences brings within that practice. Each of these interviews is then set "to the broader social location embodied by the individual" (McCall 2005, 1781).

The interviews were inclusive for both my interviewees as participants and me as a peer researcher. "Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably *active*" (1995, 4), as Holstein and Gubrium claim. There were moments when I felt to share my experiences, as well as the moments when I was asked to do so. In both instances, I felt that it enriched the research process, but did not determine it. Consequently, my interviews aim to serve the function of "explanatory narratives incorporating cause-effect accounts of unfamiliar phenomena or of exceptional events", such as the experience of being a gender minority and asylum seeker engaged in sex for compensation in order to finance gender affirmation (Tilly, 2008, 15**).**

A generalization of a researched phenomenon is not my purpose; a presentation of the complexity of its depth is. Thanks to the peer perspective, I deem that it was possible to reach that depth and provide a framework for understanding sex for compensation practiced by my research participants. As Ulrika Dahl states, "a central value of queer studies resides in collaborations and conversations that aim to produce knowledge collectively" (Dahl 2010, 145).

Ultimately and very intentionally, I do not claim that this work has the autoethnographic methodological framework. There are autobiographical elements, but I approach them as documented particles of "femme-on-femme" (Dahl 2010) framework where one belongs to the community within which the research is conducted in a collaborative way. This very collaboration, I argue, means, and includes my willingness to be self-referential. While claiming this, I want to make sure that the focus is on collaboration and not self-centeredness. Let's set aside the latter for another opportunity.

On the other hand, I must acknowledge that there were consequences stemming from my close relationship with the interviewees, which often left me feeling overwhelmed and burnt out. Following the interviews, I found myself being contacted by individuals whom I had never met, referred by some of the research participants who believed I could offer assistance in various matters. Many situations arose where I invested considerable emotional labor, time, and resources in aiding individuals with transgender and asylum experiences. This involved tasks such as reaching out to the Migration Agency on their behalf, accompanying them to doctor appointments, and seeking out lawyers who could provide guidance. Lastly and more personally, I was asked if I can help them to find someone who can provide them with HRT, sometimes even requested to send photos of my body parts and show how my bodily transition is going. Over time, I have acquired the necessary skills to politely decline such requests, recognizing the importance of asserting my boundaries and feeling comfortable saying no. By doing so, I strive to maintain my own well-being and put a line not just between private and professional, but personal and private.

Lastly, the final aim of this thesis is certainly the improvement of the Swedish state's policy in relation to both migration and gender-affirmative healthcare. The research participants were aware of it, and it did not clash with the aim of their participation in the study. Some of them also wanted to try to change our circumstances, some to raise awareness, one of them found it satisfactory that her

"real story will be published by a university". What these nine women get from their participation and what is important to them were the leading factors in finalizing this research study. This is not just an ethical perspective of mine, but also a personal statement. The circumstances somehow made it possible that what is important for other women with transgender experiences who fled to Sweden is also important for me. In many instances, "trans people were often the object of the study" (Marshall et al. 2022, 187). In this study, on the contrary, I saw my research participants as my collaborators and powerful women whose resilience and agential capacity reject any kind of objectification. I used the language "that respects the lived experience of trans people" in terms of always asking for their preferred pronouns before starting the interview (Marshall et. al. 2022, 199). In addition to having their experiences as the norm of the study (not combined with the experiences of cisgender persons), I aimed to provide a safe space for different narratives and not approach women with transgender and asylum experiences engaged in sex for compensation as a homogenous group. Of course, homogenous only in terms of their shared transgender identity and experiences with sex for compensation and asylum process in Sweden.

3 Theories, Concepts, and Mode of Analysis

The bodily experiences of my research participants, which are characterized by dysphoria and a sense of dislocation, are closely intertwined with their socio-political experiences of asylum, sex for compensation, and the need for gender-affirmative care. Because their experiences are so closely situated within broader systems of power and oppression, I find feminist standpoint theory as a useful epistemological framework for this thesis. The women with transgender and asylum experiences engaged in sex for compensation in Sweden have "shared histories based on their shared locations in relations of power" (Collins, 1997, 376). By using feminist standpoint theory as an epistemological framework, I can better understand how these experiences are shaped by broader social and political structures, and how they intersect with other forms of marginalization and oppression.

An essential aspect of this thesis is also the incorporation of an intersectional analysis, which enables a comprehensive examination of the intricate and intertwined nature of the participants' experiences. By acknowledging that they exist at the intersection of transgender identities, asylum-seeking journeys, and involvement in sex for compensation, I can delve into a more profound understanding of the intricate interplay between these dimensions. The intersectional lens allows for a nuanced exploration of the ways in which these diverse facets of identity and experiences intersect, influencing and shaping the lived realities of the individuals involved in this research. It underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the intersecting forces of oppression that have the potential to impact the lives of individuals in focus. By embracing an intersectional analysis, this thesis strives to contribute to a broader understanding of the complexities of lived experiences at the intersections of gender, migration, and sex for compensation.

At the same time, an intersectional analysis allows me to be more attentive to the differences between the research participants and to avoid treating them as a homogenous group. By recognizing the ways in which their experiences are shaped by various intersecting systems of power, I can better appreciate the diversity and complexity of their lived realities. For example, while all of my research participants share experiences related to gender identity and migration, they may differ in terms of their age, race, nationality, and other factors that shape their experiences. Instead of having selling sex, transgender and asylum identities as the singular categories of analysis, I am interested in "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall 2005, 1771).

While standpoint theory and intersectionality have constituted important theoretical frameworks from the beginning of my project, many of the concepts with which I work in the analysis have emerged in a more inductive way throughout the research process. After collecting the data, I analyzed it with the help of concepts such as

destitution, waiting, punitivist humanitarianism, and precarious intimacies, as well as theories on strategy and tactic.

Crawley, Hemmings, and Price approach destitution as "not simply a technical or legal term to describe a lack of resources: it is about the denial of any hope for the future and the possibility of rebuilding a life" (2011, 24). In my analysis, I am further developing this concept and positioning it in relation to femininity, or a perceived lack of it by my interviewees. In a similar way as these authors approach survival strategies of asylum seekers as "a consequence of asylum policy in the UK", I have come to see that sex for compensation practiced by my interviewees can be linked to the challenges of not being able to access gender-affirmative healthcare in Sweden due to migration policies (Crawley, Hemmings and Price 2011, 6).

Michel de Certeau's (2011, 36-37) theory on strategy as "an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other" and tactic as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" is the starting point of my analysis. If we analyze sex for compensation in Michael de Certeau's terms and in the context involving my research participants, the phenomenon of selling sex could be understood as a tactic affected by the waiting experienced by the women in focus. On the other hand, the waiting imposed on the research participants can be looked upon as a strategy employed by the authorities. I feel confident to position these actions, sex for compensation and imposed waiting, in the following way since it goes hand in hand with the author's reasoning on the difference between strategy and tactic in terms of their operations and relation to the space. According to Michel de Certeau, "strategies are able to produce, tabulate and impose those spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces." (2011, 30). Lastly and in my further conceptualization of mentioned waiting as a condition of my research participants, I use Shahram Khosravi's definition of waiting as "lived experiences of temporal stuckedness" (2021, 9).

According to Vuolajärvi (2019, 151), punitivist humanitarianism represents "governing in the name of caring", or "a double standard in the governance of national and foreign sellers of sexual services". As per the author, this creates the deportability of migrant sex workers, and it is a switch from prostitution to immigration policies. Although the focus of my thesis is not the Swedish legal regulations related to sex work, this concept is applicable in exploring an operative role of the Swedish state at the intersection where the needs for gender-affirmative care and asylum protection meet.

Another concept of Vuolajärvi (2018, 1090) that I find useful is precarious intimacies, with which she describes social relations among migrant sex workers that are produced by the border regime: "the ways in which intimacy, commerce and borders often intertwine in the lives of migrants engaged in commercial sex work". One aspect of precarious intimacies mentioned by the author is the agency of migrant sex workers which I find effective in analyzing sex for compensation as a strategy for gender affirmation among my research participants. Another aspect of it, precarity, is something that is applicable to them in relation to their non-citizenship identities.

In this thesis, narrative analysis serves as the chosen analytical method, enabling me to explore the intricate and multifaceted narratives that emerge from the interviews. According to Woodiwiss, Smith, and Lockwood, "feminist narrative research offers the possibility of going beyond exploring women's lived experiences to also examine how and why women come to understand and narrate those experiences in particular ways" (2017, 5). At the same time, the narrative analysis helped me to reflect on both unique and subjective interpretations and "reality-constructing" practices (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, 4). By focusing on the ways in which my interviewees construct and tell their own stories, I can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of their lived realities. As part of this approach, I am particularly interested in the ways in which my interviewees use

storytelling to make sense of their experiences, to build a sense of identity, and to navigate the challenges and struggles of their lives. By examining their narratives closely, I can gain insights into the ways in which they understand themselves and their place in the world, and how they make meaning of the various challenges and obstacles they face.

It is important to note that the chronology of events is not the focus of this thesis. Rather than providing a linear narrative of events, I focus on the key themes of their experience-centered narratives, something that Ann Phoenix describes as a part of interviewees' processes of "sense-making" (2018, 66). I am interested in the ways in which my interviewees construct their own narratives, and how those narratives are shaped by their experiences, identities, and social contexts. By examining the ways in which these narratives are constructed and told, I can gain insights into how my research participants make meaning of their experiences, and how they navigate the challenges and opportunities that come their way.

In the case of nine women who participated in my research process, there are recurrent dimensions of sex for compensation identified by them. Consequently, their personal experiences, or what Phoenix (2018, 64) calls "small stories", become relational to a group of women with transgender and asylum experiences. A focus is on "the ways in which canonical narratives are represented in personal narratives and local and wider societal contexts are interlinked in 'small' or 'big' story narratives" (Phoenix 2018, 74). A synthesis between "I" and "we" is, in that way, not just a part of identity construction, but the construction of their entitlement to speak on the topic.

4 Analysis: The return of the repressed

By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation (Certeau 2011, 30).

In this section, I aim to analytically approach the condition of waiting for both residence permit and gender-affirmative healthcare. I analyze this condition as a possible explanation for engagement in sex for compensation in the case of the women in focus. Further on, the analysis is divided into different dimensions of sex for compensation when practiced by women with transgender and asylum experiences. Prior to it, and in the upcoming paragraphs, I am presenting my arguments on why sex for compensation can be both strategy and a tactic for my research participants, in contrast to Michel de Certeau's conceptualization where this practice would stand solely as the strategy.

Michel de Certeau's definition of strategy conceptualizes it as management based on prediction. On the other hand, he defines a tactic as something that does not involve planning, and its field of operation is within isolated actions. The author makes a clear distinction between these two by stating that "a tactic is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power" (2011, 38). Strategy is, in that way, connected to the place, while the tactic is related to time. Consequently, the strategy is an agency that one has over its surroundings, while the tactic is a reaction to the given opportunities.

With an intention to contribute to the field of studies related to sex for compensation, I am offering the following explanations in my analysis of nine women with transgender and asylum experiences. The practice of sex for compensation in this context has both strategic and tactical functions. A strategic function of sex for compensation is it being a practical tool for women with transgender and asylum experiences, a way to achieve their desired femininity. On the other hand, sex for compensation is a tactic in terms of being a coping mechanism to deal with waiting for both gender-affirming healthcare and residence status in Sweden. While the latter functions as a survival instinct similar to a situation of trying to fit into wider society, such as trying "to pass" as a non-transgender woman, the former includes the decision and choice-making process

from a limited array of possibilities that waiting for both Swedish healthcare and residence status impose on them.

Sex for compensation, both as a strategy and a tactic, is analyzed as a product of a specific condition. It is the condition of waiting for the Swedish state to recognize these women as subjects who have the same right and obligations as other persons who live in the same territory. The strategic function of sex for compensation represents the new subjectivities that emerged from that waiting – a practice of mobilization of these women that came from a refusal to wait to be taken care of. Sex for compensation as a tactic is about vigilance, very similar to Michel de Certeau's reactions to given opportunities. Lastly, and in contrast to the mentioned author, I argue that strategic and tactical dimensions cannot be strictly divided into planned action in the case of the strategy, and isolated action in the case of the tactic. In this thesis, I am offering the framework in which the same action, which is sex for compensation, can function as both strategy and tactic. I am arguing that the strategy does not provide a framework where tactic occur – waiting does.

One would say that in that case, this analysis would not need two concepts, strategy and tactic, that denote one and the same phenomenon, sex for compensation. That is not my viewpoint. I find the existence of both concepts necessary since selling sex is strategic in a way of being an intentional response to the condition of waiting, as well as tactical in a way of being a more instinctive reaction of their bodies and minds, like a drive for self-preservation. Ultimately, the same practice by the same actors can be both strategy and tactic. In some circumstances, contexts, and times, selling sex is more of a strategy, in others more of a tactic, sometimes even paradoxically both at the same time.

As part of this analysis, I focus on different dimensions of sex for compensation when practiced by women with transgender and asylum experiences. I find that a sole analysis of sex for compensation is necessary for this context, as it serves a complex function of both strategy and tactic for my research participants. By

engaging in selling sex, they may be able to gain access to resources that they may not otherwise have, while also navigating the complex and often precarious conditions of their lives. By examining this phenomenon from multiple angles and dimensions, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the lived realities of the women in focus.

4.1 Waiting as a Strategic and Tactical Source

"Keeping people in prolonged waiting is a technique to delay them. Delaying is a technique of domination, making the other's time seem less worthy. No one better than a migrant can testify to it" (Khosravi 2021, 65).

Anttila 2023, Waiting

There is a specific moment in time that fused all nine research participants into consideration of sex for compensation to achieve the femininity that they longed for. It is a specific moment of realization that accessible gender-affirming healthcare in Sweden is only a part of their imaginaries, at least while being in the asylum process. On the other hand, the daily allowance given by the Migration Agency was insufficient to afford any form of gender-affirming products, procedures, and services.

> Kim: You know, my sister always used to say that Iraq is not Sweden; someone will kill me if they know who I am. I remember that every time when I saw anything about Sweden on the TV, I got butterflies in my stomach. I give up everything just to come to that paradise. But this is not my paradise.
> Ines: What do you mean by that?
> Kim: They told me that I had to wait to get my hormones till I had my residence. I came to Sweden to be a woman, but I realized that it was as if I was in Iraq again. I don't remember that I was ever more depressed than I was in that period.
> Ines: Have you got any help in that period of dealing with depression?
> Kim: I helped myself. I would be stupid just to wait so many years. I started to say to people that I take money for sex, it got so much better after that.

An unbearable waiting for Swedish healthcare is something used by Kim as justification for engaging in sex for compensation while in the asylum process, a calculated strategy in her journey that gave her access to desired femininity symbolized in her first dress in life bought by money earned via selling sex. This dress can be understood as an initial gender-affirmative product obtained by Kim, while the upcoming item was hormonal medication. In difference to the interviewee from RFSL's study, Kim did not get compensated directly with HRT for her sexual services (Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal 2011). Money was the only way of compensation she accepted, and every month, she paid 5 000 Swedish kronor to get her medication via the underground market. Namely, she paid this amount to a Swedish woman with transgender experience who had a prescription for HRT.

On the other hand, Chloe's reflections on sex for compensation reveal an additional dimension of the practice, namely its tactical mode as a means of survival. In her narrative, she emphasizes the importance of time in her decision to engage in this practice, explaining to me during our long shopping tour that she "did not have time to lose". For Chloe, the practice of sex for compensation came more abruptly and instinctively, driven by a fear of being deported to Iran while still in the physical shape that exposes her transgender experience, and potentially facing the death penalty as a result. Being able to pass as a woman as soon as possible was a matter

of survival, offering a way to secure her safety and protection on the streets of Iran in case her asylum appeal is rejected in Sweden.

Chloe's story highlights the complex and often precarious conditions that women with transgender and asylum experiences face, and the difficult choices they must make in order to survive. Despite the risks and challenges of engaging in sex for compensation, Chloe concluded during the upcoming interview that she would do it again, if necessary since it offered a higher income than other work positions that were available to her. This reflects the economic and social pressures that women with transgender and asylum experiences often face. Chloe's reflections on sex for compensation show the importance of understanding this practice as a tactical mode of survival, one that is often driven by a complex interplay of economic, political, and social forces.

While using Shahram Khosravi's description of waiting as temporal stuckedness, I argue that stuckedness of my research participants is two-dimensional. Women with transgender experience who are in the asylum process in Sweden are waiters for both gender-affirmative healthcare and residence permit in Sweden. In that condition, sex for compensation came up as a temporary solution for their temporal limbo status. Regardless of if sex for compensation is strategically planned by them or was an immediate response to the circumstances, it is a uniform practice employed by all nine of them. While being left with a perception that nothing else is offered except to wait for both healthcare and residence status, sex for compensation was the only agential field that these women saw as an option.

The mentioned two dimensions of waiting, both for healthcare and residence status, are something that I further conceptualize as waiting for becoming and waiting for belonging. The former one is waiting related to our medical transition to our female selves. Waiting for belonging is not just connected to becoming a part of Swedish society in terms of citizenship, but also belonging as passing in a world of the majority that is cisgender, white, and Swedish. In that way, both waiting for

becoming and belonging started in their respective home countries, while it became institutionalized in Sweden via both healthcare and migration authorities.

Caitlyn's narrative exemplifies the tensions between two aspects of waiting. She identified being in a public space in her home country as one of the most traumatic experiences. While walking on the streets of Tirana or using public transportation, panic attacks and constant fear of being physically attacked if recognized as "transsexual" were more than common. Unfortunately, Caitlyn's mental health did not get any better in Sweden. Although she did not expect it, she said that she received a similar type of judgmental looks from random persons on the street as she experienced in Albania. She got diagnosed with social anxiety and was willing to leave her apartment only when it was absolutely necessary. This was also a point when she started to sell sex to pay for facial hair removal in one private clinic, as she narrated it. Once she completed a couple of sessions of facial laser treatments, she was comfortable enough to spend more time in public and live with less anxiety. On two occasions during the participant observations, she was the one initiating going out in a local club and enjoying the attention she got from the persons she met there. As she put it in an informal conversation, she started to live "without fear of being beaten up". Consequently, Caitlyn's waiting for belonging was a response to a requirement coming from the outside world, the world which did not show acceptance to a woman with facial hair. Waiting for becoming is what was more personal to her. As Caitlyn said during the interview, "I am a woman with or without facial hair; many real women that I know have the same problem". This waiting for belonging, at least one aspect, got terminated for Caitlyn with approval from the others. That approval is given to her by the very fact of not being stared at. Contrary to this approval that is informal and comes from random strangers, approval needed by my research participants is also formal and institutional, such as being granted a Swedish residence permit and consequently being able to access what was, up to that point, inaccessible.

The complexities of private and public spheres, and the interplay between becoming and belonging, are crucial to understanding the experiences of women with transgender and asylum experiences. These two dimensions can be seen as yin and yang, with each side necessary for achieving a balance. On the internal side, becoming the physical version of the women they aim to be is a process that often involves medical interventions, social transition, and other forms of personal transformation. On the external side, belonging is a process that is often shaped by societal norms, laws, and cultural expectations. In the mentioned case of Caitlyn, sex for compensation represented a possibility for achieving this balance between becoming and belonging. For her, selling sex offered a way to finance her gender affirmation as a part of her becoming process. At the same time, it provided a means of fitting into the external sphere by helping her establish herself as a member of the wider community, and by offering her a sense of belonging among others.

However, while sex for compensation may offer a temporary solution to the complexities of becoming and belonging, it also comes with its own set of challenges such as the stigma around it, as well as the emotional toll of engaging in a practice that is often viewed as taboo or immoral.

> Caitlyn: When I started, many people didn't like it. I lost my best friend because of that. But I needed to do that for myself. Those people do not deserve to be around me when they left when I needed them. But fuck them all, they are not in my skin.

Speaking of stigma, note how the same is internalized in the case of Caitlyn who rarely uses words and syntagms such as sex work or selling sex. Instead of concrete formulation to refer to this practice, she used simply “that”. Despite the challenges of drifting apart from her friends, she saw “that” as a necessary means of achieving a balance between her internal and external spheres. “That” gave her an opportunity to achieve a sense of belonging and agency in a world that often denies these to women with transgender and asylum experiences. Caitlyn’s story highlights the complex interplay between becoming and belonging for women with transgender

and asylum experiences, as well as the ways in which sex for compensation can function as a means of achieving the balance between these two dimensions.

4.2 Sex for compensation: Dimension of accessibility

Anttila 2023, Accessibility

As much as selling sex can be an unsafe practice, as explained in the upcoming section on vulnerability, women like us are rarely excluded from it based on either migrant or non-white status. Sex for compensation is valued by my interviewees due to its reachability- being "easy to get into for foreigners" as Amber put it and "you don't need a diploma for this" as Irina stated. It is also described by some as being more "trans-friendly", as well as inclusive in comparison to other types of work, such as working in a shopping mall or restaurant.

During the interview, I asked Jeffrey if she considered doing some other type of work that brings income. She clearly stated that she never did that because other work positions would always include transphobia, be it from employers, colleagues, or persons that she would meet throughout some other job.

> Ines: Have you ever thought about some other ways of getting the money you need?
> Jeffrey: You mean to get a regular job? No, I like to be my own boss [laughing]. No way, I didn't bother. I don't want to deal with some transphobe. It's just not worth it.
> Ines: But you never know, there are bosses who can be very nice and friendly.
> Jeffrey: Yes, but you know how people react when they see me. It would be hell, I know, from the people I work with…everyone who I meet there.

Once Amber and Irina became undocumented after their asylum claims got rejected, both stated that sex for compensation was their one and only option. They did not have a legal right not just to work in Sweden, but also to reside in this country. In that precarious situation, sex for compensation was more accessible to their positionalities, both undocumented- and trans-friendly, in relation to other jobs that required one to have a permit to work in Sweden. Amber added that she really wanted to get "a proper job", but it is impossible for persons who are undocumented. If we approach Amber's conceptualization of a "proper job" as a socially acceptable work position, it can be argued that being "proper" is a question of privilege in the case of Amber and other undocumented persons in Sweden. Simply put, The Swedish migration policies did not give a chance to Amber to be "proper".

For Kourtney, sex for compensation was a way of dealing not just with exclusion in the Swedish job market, but also racism. Kourtney, a young black woman with transgender experience, said to me that she submitted her CV physically to seventy-eight companies before getting her first job in a clothing store.

> Kourtney: I always devoted three days a week to going around the city, presenting myself, and leaving my CV to different stores here. I worked in Uganda as a store manager for many years; I have this business in my little finger. Each time I was met with judgment. It is not a nice feeling to see so many black folks on the streets

> of this city and then not meet even one who is a store manager. That tells you something.

For Kourtney, the experience of finally finding a supportive environment in the workplace with her "sister" demonstrated the importance of gaining a sense of belonging. It was a stark contrast to the numerous instances of discrimination and exclusion that she had experienced prior to this. Namely, the Swedish woman with transgender experience who managed a clothing store provided Kourtney with a glimpse of what it might be like to belong to a supportive community. This woman completed her gender-affirming procedures via the Swedish healthcare system many years earlier, as she explained to Kourtney. After a long time, Kourtney felt accepted for who she was. This sense of belonging went beyond just finding a job. It extended to a place where Kourtney could feel valued, without having to compromise or hide her identity. This experience of belonging was a significant period in Kourtney's life, and it highlights the importance of having supportive social networks and workplaces that value diversity and inclusion.

Unfortunately, the conditions for belonging were disrupted only a few weeks after. The judgmental looks and questions such as "Are you a guy or a girl?" were something that Kourtney could handle during those weeks. An event that preceded her decision to quit this job involved a group of young Swedish men who recorded one of their friends while he was pulling her wig off. When she confronted him, he used racial slurs and hit her. After the incident, Kourtney attempted suicide, and she ended up at a psychiatric healthcare unit. Since she already had some friends with transgender experience involved in sex for compensation, Kourtney decided to give it a try. Selling sex made it possible for Kourtney to be herself, as she said, and that was the main reason for choosing to continue with this practice.

In the context of the United States, a mentioned study by Fitzgerald et al. (2015, 14) found that black women with transgender experience had higher participation in the sex trade in relation to women with transgender experience who are not black

or black multiracial. According to a survey report published by the National Centre for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force that included 6,540 transgender and gender-non-conforming participants, African American transgender respondents experience the highest discrimination in the US in relation to other transgender respondents due to "combination of anti-transgender bias and persistent, structural racism" (Grant et al. 2011, 2). Additionally, "of those who were physically assaulted, 64% attempted suicide" (Grant et al. 2011, 45). In terms of the authors' analysis of risk for suicide by race, black respondents were among those with "dramatically elevated rates in comparison to their rates in the population" (Grant et al. 2011, 82).

If there is a relationality between Fitzgerald's black study participants' decision to engage in sex for compensation and the intersection of racism, transphobia, and misogyny that this group experience, the same type of relationality can be proposed between Kourtney's decision to engage in selling sex and racism experienced in Sweden. Additionally, if there is a systematic relationship between suicide attempts and discrimination or violence that black persons with transgender experience face in the United States, a similar relationality can be proposed between Kourney's suicide attempt and workplace discrimination or violence that she experienced in Sweden. Lastly, relationality on a level between a decision to engage in sex for compensation in order to finance gender affirmation and the simple fact of not being able to access gender-affirmative healthcare in Sweden is something that could be affiliated with all nine research participants.

The intersectionality of my research participants' experiences, which are situated on a nexus of transgender and asylum experiences, provide the conditions for systemic barriers to accessing gender-affirmative healthcare in Sweden. Their practice of sex for compensation can be approached as relational to the imposed barriers. However, the complex and intersectional nature of their experiences means that the relationality cannot be reduced to a singular cause-effect relationship. Rather, it involves a multitude of factors, including the lack of access to affordable

healthcare, racism, and discrimination of individuals with transgender backgrounds. In this context, sex for compensation becomes a means of survival for these women who are trying to navigate a system that is failing to meet their basic needs, be it a need for healthcare, an anti-racist setting, or anti-discriminatory spaces.

4.3 Sex for compensation: Dimension of empowerment

Anttila 2023, Empowerment

What is common for all ten narratives, and here I am including my own, are stories of violence, assaults, and physical abuse back in our motherlands. Our bodies, such as they were, in combination with our gender expression, were undesirable and restricted from entering public spaces. Most of these public spaces reflected the patriarchal societies in which we grew up. Namely, they were dominated by men. Sweden provided the conditions in which the men's fists started to open. Instead of seeing vertical uppercuts reaching to our chins, there were sensual hands reaching

to our developing breasts. Sexual objectification instead of violent acts. The former proved to be a much better alternative, regardless of how anti-feminist this may sound for someone in a privileged position. We somehow learned to love being objectified instead of being beaten up. We learned to love being someone's fetish instead of a punching bag. Broken ribs or someone's kink. I choose the latter.

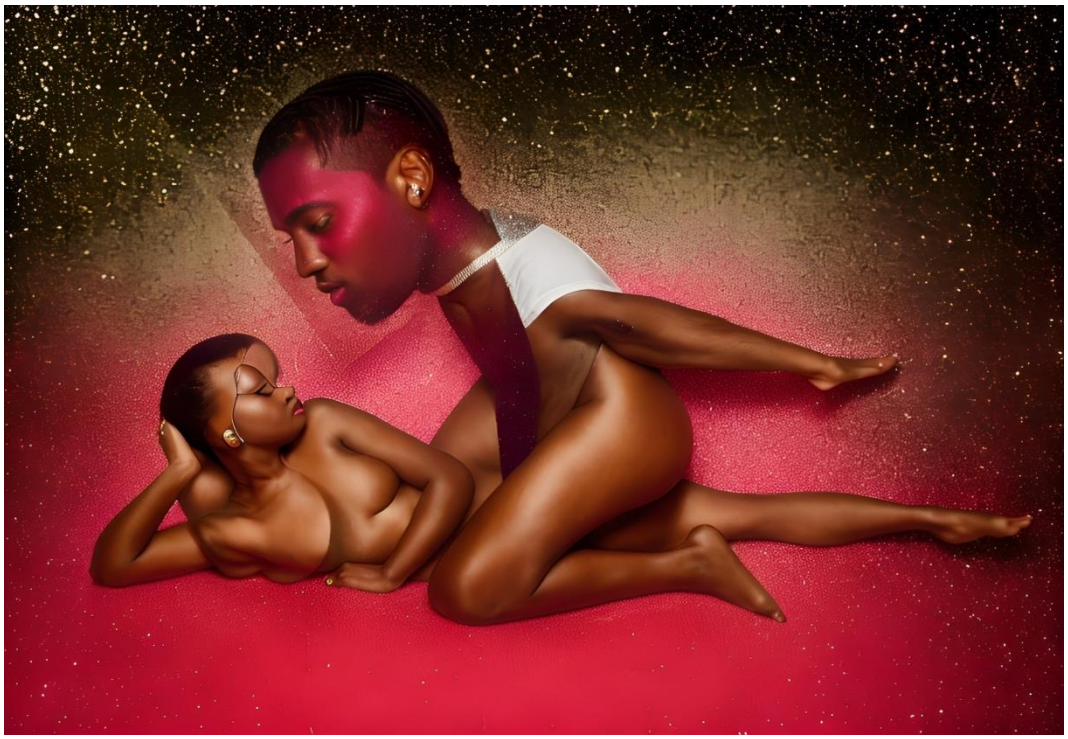
After getting over a phase of the shock of being in a context where men do not equal threats, new managerial and economic strategies emerged for some of us. Right in front of us was a new market of cisgender men who were interested in our bodies merely because they were what they were. This demand from men provided us with conditions for belonging, while at the same time making it easier to deal with gender dysphoria. What was once perceived as undesirable and disgusting now has its market value, and it is perceived as feminine enough. At the same time, one aspect of precarious intimacies, which is the agency, was practiced by my research participants who used their gender and sexuality "from an angle that does not reduce them to objects or properties of identity, but as resources that can be used and combined in various ways" (Vuolajärvi 2018, 1094). Their intimate relations are positioned as both resources and agential strategies to provide what they deem necessary.

Irina got to be called "daddy's girl" for the first time, Kim became a "sexy lady", and I was a "doll" that I was never allowed to play with. A feeling of reclaiming femininity meant reclaiming power. It started a process of "feeling in control" as one of the interviewees described it, and it was difficult to let it go. Instead of agreeing to be subordinated bottom waiters for both asylum decisions and access to healthcare, my research participants became active dominatrixes with a business strategy in their hands. They penetrated and discovered an alternative way of financing gender-affirmative procedures that they longed for. Thanks to sex for compensation, two-dimensional empowerment happened to them. The first dimension mentioned by these women in different phrases is something that I describe as a reclamation of femininity, while the second one is financial stability.

The former is not a new phenomenon, as the confirmatory dimension of sex for compensation is pointed out when practiced by persons with transgender identities (Larsdotter, Jonsson and Gäredal, 2011).

Since my interviewees had different positions in relation to their residence status in Sweden, I observed that their strategies tend to change over time. Namely, those who got a permanent residence permit in Sweden after the asylum process inhabited different positionalities in relation to those who are in the asylum process, as well as those whose asylum claims got rejected. The women who were in the asylum process at the moment when the interviews were conducted reported that selling sex is something that they practice actively. The same situation was for those interviewees who were living as undocumented persons. In difference to the first group that almost solely referred to the agential capacity of sex for compensation, both interviewees who were undocumented saw selling sex as the best option they had, but not something that they would necessarily do if they were not undocumented. The interviewees with permanent residence permits talked about sex for compensation only in the past time, while one of them stated that occasionally she goes back to the same practice. The new standpoints of those who were legal residents at the point of interviews provided a possibility for the formation of a higher standard for men than "not to be violent" or "being attracted to women like us". Regardless of different circumstances, these interviewees remembered their first moment of empowerment that sex for compensation brought.

4.4 Sex work: Dimension of pleasure



Anttila 2023, Pleasure

All my research participants identified as heterosexual women. Irina, the youngest of them, reflected on her experience during the interview in the following way:

> Of course, I was with men in Serbia, but all of them were gay. When I told my boyfriend that I want to do surgery, he said he would leave me. He even did not want me to put on eyeliner because he was not into feminine men. And when I had sex, it always felt like something was missing. I think that they did not see me as a girl. That's it.

Once she arrived in Sweden, Irina was open to expressing herself in a feminine way, "24/7", as she said. Consequently, Irina's arrival in Sweden equated with the beginning of her social transition. She got rid of her "male clothes" and started to wear wigs and dresses in public. At the point when we had the interview, Irina was in a relationship with a Swedish cisgender man who identified as heterosexual. Irina lived together with him and referred to this relationship as her "first real one". She also proudly stated that he was only with "real women" before. With this man, Irina

experienced sexual pleasure that was unfamiliar to her. She also shared that he was the first person she experienced an orgasm with. When I asked her why she thinks he is the first one who made her experience sexual pleasure in that way, she replied shortly with, “he can see a woman in me”.

Irina’s boyfriend was also aware of her being engaged in sex for compensation. Although he told her that he could be able to support them both financially, Irina wanted to continue selling sex.

> Irina: My boyfriend pays for the apartment and electricity. Food also. But I also need my money, I cannot ask him every time when I buy my hormones, do nails, hair extensions. I love to have my money. It’s nice, I have always fun. I think I also became a little bit crazy now when I can be a woman. I enjoy sex very much [laughing]. I can relax because men love when I have nails… long hair. Look at me, like Kim Kardashian!

Irina’s statement of becoming “a little bit crazy” now when she can be herself can be analyzed as a statement of sexual liberation that was impossible to achieve in the previous context. For the first time, she is desired for what she is. To be desired is to be wanted, and to be wanted is to be accepted. That desire from the outside world embodied in heterosexual men she had sex with became a new source of pleasure, unknown up to that point.

At the same time, being with persons that she prefers in terms of their sexual and gender identities is another type of pleasure that is more intimate and embodied within her as a person. A context of sex for compensation brought these two types of pleasures together. Sex for compensation was Irina’s platform where these two pleasures met. At the same, this platform provided her with a fertile ground for her self-realization, the realization of Irina’s real, female self. She got a chance to be “like a real woman”. Via the practice of selling sex, I argue, Irina got a chance to perform femininity through pleasure. She got a chance to get confirmation of her gender identity on multiple occasions, which can be related to the affirmative aspect

for transgender persons involved in sex for compensation mentioned by Larsdotter, Jonsson, and Gäredal (2011).

4.5 Sex work: Dimension of vulnerability

Anttila 2023, Vulnerability

In conjunction with the agency that sex work gave to my research participants, there is a complementary and undeniable layer of vulnerability contained in their narratives. One of the most striking examples is Kendall's experience of becoming HIV-positive a few weeks after she had unprotected sex with one client. Although unsafe sex was never her preference, as Kendall said, and she was always responsible with condom usage, her client was persistent. Rejecting to sell unprotected sex to him is something that Kendall did not see as an option, while the only way that he agreed to pay is to have unprotected sex.

> Kylie: I remember I booked my breast surgery six months in advance, and the clinic agreed that I could pay on the day of my surgery. I was so worried that I would not get the money in time, so I did not want to say no to him.

In addition to sex for compensation being a platform for empowerment and pleasure experienced by my research participants, it was also a platform where their safety was compromised. Being in the asylum process or having undocumented status in

Sweden with little or no income from other sources, resulted in the creation of precarious situations. One of these women who was undocumented got beaten up by her customer and could not go to the police because she equated that with deportation. This reflects on another aspect of precarious intimacies that Vuolajärvi (2018) refers to, the very precarity drawn on migrants engaged in sex for compensation who cannot contact the police if they need assistance. Another interviewee who was in the asylum process explained that she was forced to provide sex without compensation to one customer since he threatened her to call the Migration Agency and tell them about what she does. "He wanted to make sure that I do not get my residency", as she put it.

As Vuolajärvi explains when referring to the contexts of Sweden and Finland, "selling sex is a sufficient reason for deportation" (2018, 1092). This is a part of punitivist humanitarianism of the Swedish state that, according to the author, is formalized in the Swedish Aliens Act, "as an 'assumption that "he or she will not support himself or herself by honest means'" (Vuolajärvi 2019, 155). The deportations of migrants who sell sex in Sweden have been documented and "tied to the overall goal of Swedish society to "prevent prostitution" (Vuolajärvi 2019, 155). Consequently, and regardless that selling sex is not criminalized in Sweden, the reality looks different in relation to those who are not Swedish citizens. A strong possibility of being deported, "pushes one towards the margins of the labor market without possibilities to make demands or take control of one's situation and hence produces flexibility and precarity" (Sager 2015, 31).

The precarity of intimacies imposed on my research participants is differently positioned in relation to those who practice sex for compensation as Swedish citizens. Namely, the former's practice of selling sex can result in deportation, while that is not a possibility for the latter. The precarity of non-Swedish women engaged in sex for compensation was amplified by their dire need to finance their gender affirmation. Kim's experience is a telling example of this. During our interview, she recounted an occasion when she had to travel to an unfamiliar area of the city,

with little to no knowledge of whom she would meet or what they would expect of her.

> Kim: Once I went to meet a client at the address he gave me. There was no house or apartment there, just trees around me. It was very late that night. After some time, he came with his friend, some Arab guy, who drove him in a car. He was so drunk, and he wanted to have sex there in the forest. He grabbed my hand and just took me with him. In the end, nothing happened. He was so drunk that he could not get it up. But he could be some maniac or serial killer, you never know.

Since my research participants felt that they had limited rights as either asylum seekers or undocumented persons, a condition of precarity was created while engaging in selling sex. On the other hand, their almost instinct-like need to get financial resources for their gender affirmation process was stronger than any potential risks and menace that the practice of selling sex can cause. Consequently, sex for compensation was also a platform where vulnerability could arise.

Instead of approaching sex for compensation as a cause of their vulnerability, I argue that its original source is mentioned two-dimensional waiting that affected all nine women at some point. Waiting "to become" via the Swedish healthcare system and waiting "to belong" via the Swedish Migration Agency is what I consider the central aspects. Regardless of which dimension is in focus, this is waiting for the Swedish state to do them justice by providing them with the same rights as other persons who reside in Sweden.

The waiting they experienced is vicious because there is no guarantee that it will result in a positive outcome. It is not like waiting for the pain to stop once a painkiller is taken. Neither is it a romantic kind of waiting portrayed in Disney movies with cisgender princesses expecting their male saviors to arrive. It is waiting that could result in a negative decision by the Migration Agency that denies them not just a residence permit, but also the possibility to access gender-affirming healthcare. For many of them, returning to their home countries where transgender

identity is criminalized, also meant the possible death penalty. It seems that what is a light at the end of the tunnel for those who got their residence permits to paradise is a symbolic and potential death row for those who don't.

According to Khosravi (2021, 13), "prolonged waiting not only endangers new vulnerabilities but also aggravates vulnerabilities that are already present, revealing socio-political regulations that result in an unequal distribution of risk and hope". After analyzing the narratives of my research participants, it can be argued that selling sex certainly brought vulnerability to these women. At the same time, I propose a framework where sex for compensation can be understood only as a platform that enables vulnerability to be realized. Sex for compensation is a conductor, a wire that stems from the original source of vulnerability. The original source of vulnerability is waiting, characterized by Khosravi's prolongation, and two-dimensionality, something that I conceptualize as consisting of the need to become and the need to belong.

At the same time and in addition to providing conditions for vulnerability to be realized, sex for compensation could also provide conditions for empowerment and pleasure. It is neither heroic nor villainous. It is both feminist and sexist. It could be a potent carrier of hope for a better tomorrow, or a faulty wire that should be touched with precaution.

4.6 An analytical conclusion

I argue that sex for compensation is both a planned strategy and an unplanned tactic employed by some women with transgender and asylum experiences in Sweden. It is a way of responding to conditions of destitution provided by the state. Destitution in focus is not just the one related to resources that persons in the asylum process cannot obtain due to economic disadvantages. It is also the destitution of femininity that functions as one of the driving forces for my research participants to choose to

sell sex in order to escape it. Sex for compensation is a course of action used by the women in focus to achieve their ideal of femininity. This ideal represents a medical completion of the gender-affirming process, as well as access to gender-affirming products, such as wigs, dresses, makeup, hormonal medication, services such as laser hair removal, and surgical procedures, such as breast augmentation.

While financing gender affirmation is a goal of my research participants' engagement in sex for compensation, this engagement resulted from waiting imposed by the Swedish state. This waiting provides conditions for a cause-effect relationship in a way that getting a residence permit means getting access to gender-affirmative healthcare. The waiting is two dimensional because it includes both waiting to become women in a medical sense via accessing healthcare, as well as waiting for belonging that is external, coming from both a state institution such as the Migration Agency, as well as belonging to a wider, cisgender society. To belong is to be approved, and to be approved is to be recognized as the subjects we feel we are. Recognition is, therefore, a fundamental aspect of justice, both in our interactions with others in society and with the state as an institution. When recognition was denied, a response emerged in the form of agency in the case of these nine women. Sex for compensation became a form of agency in response to the lack of recognition and access to healthcare for persons in the asylum process in Sweden who have transgender identities.

Sex for compensation is a way of dealing with precarious situations for some women with transgender and asylum experiences. These complexities are part of precarious intimacies positioned as both agency and insecurity. The same complexities include mentioned dimension of accessibility, empowerment felt from gaining financial stability and feeling of reclaimed femininity, as well as pleasure. Lastly and in relation to vulnerability, sex for compensation acts as a conductor of waiting, which is the original source of vulnerability. The waiting is something designed by the state for this specific group of non-citizens, where the Swedish state

shows its punitivist humanitarianism by positioning potential deportation as an act of caring for its legal residents and achievement of public safety.

Persons who are engaged in sex for compensation are often described in studies as more suicidal in relation to the general population, while it stays unclear if the very practice is what causes this tendency (Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson 2021; Fitzgerald et al. 2015). In the case of my interviewees, Kourtney is the one who reported this experience, but only as connected to a traumatic event where she was humiliated and physically assaulted. Transphobia, racism, and the fact of experiencing physical assault can be positioned as factors affecting Kourtney's mental health and eventually suicidal attempt. I argue that sex for compensation, as such, has the potential to provide a framework for these factors to affect one's self-harm behaviors, but it is not a factor itself.

The same set of arguments, in relation to my research participants, is what I propose when it comes to challenges related to mental health. Caitlyn's anxiety was a result of feeling unsafe as a woman with a transgender experience in Albania, as well as being seen as a non-woman in Sweden while being in public. Kim clearly stated that she experienced depression because of not being able to access gender-affirming healthcare. Lastly, post-traumatic stress disorder is positioned autobiographically in this context as related to a traumatic and violent event, not my practices or field of work. Consequently, the challenges in relation to mental health are positioned as the consequences of waiting to become, as well as to belong.

What I could also conclude from both interviews and participant observation is that many of the women practiced self-medication with HRT due to not having access to gender-affirmative healthcare. Having the wrong dosage or wrong medication is not rare in this precarious practice since there is no available supervision from medical professionals. The self-medication with HRT can lead to serious health problems such as liver damage, glucose or lipid metabolic imbalances, or heart

disease as a result (Asya Catalyst 2015, 42-23). Therefore, the denial of gender-affirming healthcare undermines the right to health and well-being of individuals in question.

Sex for compensation can function as an agential tool for women with transgender experience who moved to Sweden because it brings income necessary for their priorities. At the same time, this practice is borderless in the way of not depending greatly on language skills and territory. A mentioned study by Vuolajärvi (2018) argues that sex for compensation functions as an agency because it brings mobility to women who move from their home countries to Sweden. I propose that, in the case of my research participants, sex for compensation enabled their mobility within Sweden. It is a movement from subjugation to agency, or from not having access to gender-affirmative healthcare to discovering alternatives.

Approaching the choice of selling sex among women with transgender experience as caused by discrimination within other employment arrangements could be a solid argument in the case of Kourtney, as it was the case for participants in a study done by Nadal, Davidoff, and Fujji-Doe (2013) in the United States. This argument is further solidified by the fact that the authors refer to both systemic and interpersonal discrimination where transgender identity intertwines with one's race and ethnicity (Nadal, Davidoff, and Fujji-Doe 2013). On the other hand, Chloe claimed that higher income obtained via selling sex in relation to other types of work positions is what was appealing. Some research participants did not even want to try applying for other types of jobs due to fear of discrimination, while two women stated they could not choose another type of work not because they were concerned with discrimination, but because they were undocumented. This multitude of experiences shows us that positioning discrimination in the employment of women with transgender experience as a reason for choosing to sell sex cannot be solely attributable, having in mind dynamics that are personal, intersectional, and circumstantial.

For all nine women, coming to Sweden was supposed to be something positive. “Paradise” for Kim, “a way to save myself” for Chloe, “new chance”, “getting my dignity back”, and “escape from death” for others. The meta-narrative of Sweden as a paradise for women and minority rights has become a solid part of international imaginaries. The moments of romanticizing the imaginary future in Sweden gave hope to women like us, all way down to the Balkans, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Uganda. Unfortunately, many of us witnessed that gender-equality policies in Sweden are often “incapable of problematising transsexual issues, racism and class differences or of relating to global inequalities” (Martinsson, Griffin, and Giritli Nygren 2017, 14). Access to healthcare is one of those examples which show how the state policies are exclusive and beneficial only to those who have Swedish residence permits. Additionally, there is a creation of a contested relationship between persons with transgender experiences living in Sweden that has the potential to produce unequal power relations. Although a Swedish woman that Kim was in contact with got her medicine free of charge in the pharmacy, she was earning 5 000 Swedish kronor per month on Kim’s precarity. Kim and her fellow asylum seekers were othered in the way of being banned from accessing gender-affirmative healthcare, which in turn created conditions for manipulation and playing on someone’s vulnerability.

The othering processes are institutionalized through policies and practices of the Swedish state. At the same time, these othering processes are challenged by the agential capacity of sex for compensation employed by some women with migrant and asylum experiences in Sweden. Instead of submissively accepting an assigned identity of “waiters”, they created a possibility of new identities via sex for compensation. These new identities include competencies ranging from business development to strategic management, although the official employers in Sweden would probably not recognize these competencies as the merits in these women’s résumés.

Unfortunately, “the nationalistic norm that is said to represent everyone excludes many inside its frame (Trinh, 2011)” (Martinsson, Griffin, and Nygren 2017, 212). In the context of women with transgender and asylum experiences in Sweden, the state takes a form of punitivist humanitarianism – a state that “operates in the name of gender equality and protection of the vulnerable, but when it examined in action punitivist and exclusionary practices become visible” (Vuolajärvi 2019, 163).

On the day of writing this analytical conclusion, a daily allowance given to asylum seekers in Sweden is 24 Swedish kronor (The Swedish Migration Agency, 2023). For that amount, one can buy one liter of milk, but not lipstick. One can afford chewing gum, but not a laser hair removal treatment. One can get gummy bears, but not silicone breasts. If a person’s asylum claim gets rejected, no daily allowance is given. In this process where the Swedish Migration Agency enables the destitution of resources, I argue, the destitution of femininity among persons with asylum and transgender experience prevails. In addition to being subjectively felt as a part of the self-perception of women with transgender experience who are in the asylum process, this destitution is also a cause of misgendering, violence, and humiliation in the outside world. Crawley, Hemmings and Price (2011, 60) state that there are “survival and livelihood strategies that refused asylum seekers pursue in order to cope with destitution”. In the case of destitution that my research participants experienced, which I conceptualize as the destitution of femininity, a survival strategy is uniformly sex for compensation. From one perspective, the role of engaging in sex for compensation can be seen as a structure imposed by an institutional framework that fosters circumstances of precarious intimacies. However, from another standpoint, sex for compensation can also provide an avenue for escaping a state of waiting while representing a form of personal agency. It is neither entirely villainous nor purely heroic. Rather, it embodies elements of both. It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, often marked by paradoxes. It represents a constrained choice that is stigmatized and deprived of dignity by society, yet it can also serve as a means for reclaiming one's own sense of dignity.

In essence, the nature of sex for compensation defies simplistic categorization and underscores the contradictory aspects of one's experience.

5 Limitations, challenges, and ethical considerations

Instead of the real names of interviewed women, pseudonyms are provided. Kim, Chloe, Caitlyn, Jeffrey, Amber, Irina, Kourtney, Kendall, and Kylie are the names borrowed from an American reality television series, "Keeping Up with the Kardashians". In one of the dialogues in the late hours at the home party, Kim came up with a suggestion to name my thesis, at least partly, "Keeping up with the Transition". I made my promise. It was not surprising to me that this suggestion was appealing to other research participants as well. Kim Kardashian, the main role of this reality program, was someone whom we considered an ideal of femininity. Thanks to the popular culture and ideal of that point in time, she was that stereotypical representation of how a woman "should look like"- big lips, big breasts, and an unavoidable big butt. Superficial, but realistic. Feminist, but sexist. She represented an embodiment of that end result of feminization that most of us wanted to achieve. Today, not just that her TV show is in my thesis title, but many of us ended up looking like her.

The decision to use pseudonyms in research involving vulnerable groups is a common practice in order to protect their privacy and grant them anonymity. However, the choice of using names from a popular reality TV show, such as "Keeping Up with the Kardashians," adds an interesting layer to the process of anonymization. This choice is not only a way of protecting the identities of the participants but also a way of allowing them to choose a name that resonates with their desired gender identity and presentation. The suggestion made by Kim to name the thesis "Keeping up with the Transition" further emphasizes the importance of popular culture in shaping the experiences and aspirations of women with transgender experience who seek to achieve "the ideal". Moreover, the reference to Kim Kardashian as an ideal of femininity points to the ways in which mainstream

media can play a role in shaping the standards of beauty and gender expression. According to Rosalind Gill's analysis of media representation around the year when I conducted the interviews, "possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as woman's key (if not sole) source of identity (2007, 149). In this sense, the use of pseudonyms in this research not only serves a practical purpose but also highlights the broader social and cultural contexts in which women with transgender experience navigate their identities.

Besides the reference to Kim Kardashian, the Swedish Research Council's guidelines are used throughout the research process. All nine interviewees in the study gave their consent to be interviewed and signed the written approvals related to their participation. All nine participants gave me consent to use the real names of their countries of birth, but to connect it only to their pseudonyms. Considering that information used in my thesis is sensitive in the way that sex for compensation is not recognized as an official job occupation in Sweden, I anonymized and kept my data confidential in order to disable "unauthorised persons partaking of the information" (Swedish Research Council 2017, 40). I also provided the participants with the information that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any point if they feel that my published work can be harmful to them in any way. As O'Reilly states, "an ethical approach to ethnography attempts to avoid harm to, and respect the rights of, all participants and to consider the consequences of all aspects of the research process" (O'Reilly 2009, 57). I found this of particular importance in relation to two women who had an undocumented status in Sweden and were concerned about possible deportation becoming their reality in the future.

On the other hand, I find it also essential to acknowledge the differences in my own lived experiences compared to those of my research participants. While I shared various identity categories with them, it is important to reflect on the privileged position of not having an asylum experience in Sweden, at least back in 2018. As a recipient of a scholarship from the Swedish Institute, I resided in Sweden on a student visa. In contrast, all nine women had undergone or were going through the

asylum process within the country. At the time of the interviews, some had obtained their residence permits, others were still in the asylum process, and some had unfortunately become undocumented due to rejected asylum claims. Transparency regarding my status was maintained throughout the research process, ensuring that the research participants were fully aware of my position.

As I delved deeper into the research process, I found myself grappling with the challenge of maintaining objectivity, given my shared identity categories with these nine women. At times, I was plagued with self-doubt and wondered how much my emotions and personal experiences might be influencing my analysis. As a researcher, I felt that I am expected to be impartial and objective. However, it was difficult to maintain that professionalism when my own experiences mirrored those of the women I was interviewing. I often found myself questioning whether I could truly be considered a social scientist given that my own experiences differed so drastically from those of the scholars I wanted to cite in my thesis. However, as I reflected on these challenges, I came to realize that my own experiences and emotions were not a hindrance to my research, but rather an asset. My personal connection to the interviewees allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of their stories and experiences, ultimately enriching my analysis.

Reconciliation with my positionality happened when I admitted to myself that I could not avoid being partial. I could not get rid of my "feminist emotion" (Hemmings, 2005, 120). Also, I could not, and I cannot avoid being myself. I came to understand that my contribution, a singular situated knowledge, can maybe be important for someone in further academic discussions within the fields of sex for compensation, transgender rights, and migration. As Donna Harraway says, "feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge" (1998, 583). In the sea of singular feminist standpoints, I want to embrace my own subjugated standpoint as something that contributes, but not bothers. It is not too much, but needed.

In positioning ourselves, we show maturity by taking "responsibility for our enabling practices" (Harraway 1998, 587). I concluded that there would be no way to be scientifically objective if I was not transparent and reflexive throughout these pages. At the same time, I personally felt that I could not be ethical if I othered myself completely from the women with whom I share common identities with. However, I must admit, it was a little bit scary. Scary because being transparent in my motherland brought pain to young me. On the other hand, my transparency today, or the fact of being fine with who I am, seems to make me scientifically objective, as well as righteous in relation to my research participants.

A twist.
A transition.
From cocoon to butterfly.
From dishonorable lady to ethical slut.
From pain to scientific objectivity.
From Kardashians to Swedish Research Council.

6 Epilogue and the overall conclusion

Sex for compensation is used both as a strategy and tactic for women with transgender and asylum experiences in Sweden to deal with waiting to access gender-affirmative healthcare. It functions both as a source of empowerment and pleasure, as well as vulnerability.

The waiting for gender-affirmative healthcare and residence status has a cause-effect relationship where the latter provides the condition for the former to be actualized. While this certainly responds to my second research question, I felt that I got more than I asked for. Namely, not just that I learned about how these two processes of waiting intersect, but also how waiting for belonging is related to one's need "to pass" into a wider society that does not have to do with one's residence status.

Lastly, the outcomes of conditions provided by asylum and lack of access to gender-affirmative healthcare are embodied in a practice of sex for compensation, with both agency and precarity of those persons involved in it. While it may not be possible to scientifically prove the Swedish state's liability for the conditions of women with transgender and asylum experiences, it is important to acknowledge the role of state policies in shaping the experiences of marginalized groups. While it may not be possible to quantify the level of liability, it is important to consider how policies and actions of the Swedish state contribute to the challenges faced by women with transgender and asylum experiences. Lastly, it is important to listen to the perspectives of those who have been directly impacted by these policies, such as my research participants, who hold certain state policies accountable for their experiences. By centering the voices of communities directly affected, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex intersections of power and oppression that shape their lives.

It is essential to emphasize that the narratives shared by both my research participants and myself should not be taken as an absolute universal truth or seen as wholly representative of a larger phenomenon. We do not hold such an influential position (at least not yet). Instead, my primary objective has been to present the intricate and sometimes perplexing nature of our experiences, offering a perspective deeply rooted in a shared understanding. While our narratives provide valuable insights into the unique experiences we have encountered, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of generalizability. Each person's journey is inherently unique, influenced by a myriad of personal and contextual factors. Consequently, it is essential to approach our stories with the understanding that they offer glimpses into a particular subset of experiences rather than an exhaustive representation of a larger group.

As a peer researcher, I embarked on a profound and meaningful journey of engagement with the stories shared with me through participant observation and interviews. It was a process that involved establishing a genuine connection and

obtaining their consent to delve into the profound emotions and perspectives that shaped their lives. Through this collaborative exploration, I sought to bring forth the findings that authentically captured the essence of their lived experiences.

It is also crucial to note that this perspective of peer researcher is not something that I consider a requisite replacement for the analysis without peer perspective. Rather, it is meant to supplement and enhance our understanding of these complex issues by offering an approach that I longed to see while being a student at the university. By incorporating the peer researcher perspective, my intention is to bridge the gap between academic analysis and lived realities that also include my own example.
As I reflect on my telephone and in-person conversations with all nine women, which took place once again in March and April 2023, I am more convinced that my final thesis' aim is important. This aim includes the provision of information and possible improvement of the Swedish state's policies related to both migration and gender-affirmative healthcare. I am particularly driven by the stories of two of my interviewees who remain undocumented and live in a state of constant risk and vulnerability. Their experiences illustrate the urgent need for policy change that will provide greater support and protection for those in precarious situations.

Moreover, my research sheds light on the challenges that individuals face when seeking gender-affirmative healthcare in Sweden, including long waiting times for necessary procedures that some of the interviewees still wait to access. By addressing these issues, my thesis can help in showing how it is important to ensure that all individuals have equal access to the care they need and deserve. By delving into these challenges, my thesis seeks to bring to the forefront the systemic issues and structural barriers that contribute to the lengthy waiting times in gender-affirmative healthcare. Through an in-depth exploration of the experiences shared by my research participants, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of the far-reaching implications of these challenges on the overall well-being and quality of life of those with transgender experience. There is an urgent need for the state,

healthcare providers, and society as a whole to recognize the importance of timely and inclusive care for persons like us.

Lastly, these pages are also a testament to the not just challenges, but resilience and courage of many women with transgender experience who are currently going through the asylum process in Sweden, even those whose stories I have yet to hear. Through this thesis, I hope to give voice to the experiences of some of them and contribute to a better understanding of the challenges that they face. Consequently, I wish to contribute to the possible suspension of these experiences being positioned as never-ending seasons of "keeping up with the transition" where the actors change, but the conditions stay the same. Let's change the show, it is becoming a little bit overwhelming.

Persons with migrant backgrounds selling sex in Sweden to finance gender affirmation is a known phenomenon. In 2011, Larsdotter, Jonsson, and Gäredal found that a considerable number of those who advertised their sexual services online were not born in Sweden. However, this study, like many others, did not focus on possible explanations of this phenomenon. In the case of my research participants, this decision was affected by not having access to gender-affirming healthcare. Focusing only on the consequences bring solution neither to those who are involved in sex for compensation nor to the Swedish state which has a zero-tolerance policy on prostitution (Ekberg 2004). A spotlight has to be refocused from the effect to the trigger. From treatment to prevention. From deportation to universal access to healthcare.

On the other hand, I want to be clear that my intention is not to claim that women in Sweden who have transgender experience and are in the asylum process sell sex solely because the state does not provide them gender-affirming healthcare. If that is true, I would probably be bestowed as an honorary citizen of this country, while "the Swedish model" would be renamed to "Keeping Up with the Transition". In relation to my research participants, I only argue that waiting to access gender-

affirming healthcare stands as their primary justification for a decision to sell sex. I do not claim that other types of essentials would not come up in case they have access to healthcare. Maybe sex for compensation would be a strategy and tactic again. Maybe not. There is no way to know when the conditions are not provided to test this assumption.

Lastly, remember that the recent national study with more than 3,000 young persons in Sweden found that 42 percent of those involved in selling sex do it because it is simply fun (Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson 2021, 51). I do not deny that the women I talked with have fun. On the contrary, many of them did. Human beings can define what it means to have fun in different ways. Maybe selling sex for someone is equally fun as a game night to someone else. A conclusion that states that newly arrived persons with transgender experience sell sex in Sweden because they do not have access to transgender healthcare would be a pathologization of a phenomenon, rather than a recognition of complexities shaped by structural, social, systemic, cultural, and historical factors. It would also exclude those women with transgender experience who do not wish to go through gender affirmation in a medical sense.

During my recent conversations with the women I interviewed, there was a particular concern that kept coming up, and it had to do with the political situation in Sweden. The rise of a right-wing nationalist party, the Swedish Democrats, was causing them collectively deep worry. Namely, many of them were genuinely concerned about what might happen if this political shift led to new policies being put in place. Some of them were anxious about being forced to leave the country since they are undocumented. Some of them were worried about the possibility of not having access to the gender-affirming healthcare that they have today. Lastly, some of them were worried if they will ever get a chance to access the gender affirmation process since they are still on the waiting list. They are still waiting “to become”.

Amidst these worries that the research participants shared with me, I could witness the very same resilience that was so empowering five years ago. Nothing changed. Their collective strength still illuminates a path forward. They still want their concerns to be heard, acknowledged, and addressed. They are still loud in the most beautiful way. They are still unapologetic. And they are here to stay.

One should understand that the lives of these nine women I had the privilege to interview, as well as my own, are characterized by the dual transition. Firstly, there was the physical transition, which encompassed leaving our respective home countries and embarking on a journey to Sweden. This physical relocation was not merely a change of territory. It signified a profound shift in our lives, as we sought to establish new roots and reach our "paradise". Simultaneously, there was an intimately intertwined bodily transition, wherein we traversed from inhabiting bodies that felt unfulfilling to embracing and embodying the forms that resonated with our true selves. These two types of transition, the physical and the bodily, are intrinsically connected and inseparable for women like us. Our migration to Sweden was not solely a geographic move; it was an inherent migration toward femininity. A magical journey toward expected recognition and acceptance of our right to exist. It encapsulated our pursuit of the right to live authentically, unshackled by societal expectations or constraints. Consequently, our physical and bodily transitions intricately reinforced and amplified one another.

As we embarked on the physical journey to Sweden and a bodily trip to comfort, we simultaneously went through an internal spiritual journey. We became the persons that we are today. Brave, compassionate, and mature. From "sisters" to each other, we became "mothers" to new children that arrive, those children that are on their way, as well as those who will never make it. We want to provide them with conditions to feel safe and "at home", although we never knew what home means.

On the other hand, the reality of living in constant fear and uncertainty is overwhelming for individuals who have experienced displacement and discrimination. As we navigate through the process of rebuilding our lives in a foreign country, the possibility of that being taken looms over us. This ongoing sense of insecurity can make it difficult for individuals like me to fully embrace their new lives and identities, as well as to be there to support others without a break. The burden of resilience can become too much to bear, leading to exhaustion and mental health challenges. We are fabulous, but sometimes very tired women. As one of my interviewees shared, "I am always alerted because I don't know if and what shit can happen next". The feeling of constant vigilance can take a toll on an individual's ability to function and thrive. Sometimes it is heartbreaking to witness individuals who have already been through so much continue to struggle. We need to recognize and address the systemic issues that create these conditions of displacement and discrimination, rather than placing the burden on individuals to constantly be resilient in the face of danger. I would argue that you did the former by reading this thesis. I am deeply grateful for that.

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