

**LABOR CONTROL AND WORKER IDENTITY MEANING MAKING:  
THE CULTURE OF MOTHERHOOD AND EDUCATION**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Social Work and Sociology)  
in The University of Michigan  
2010

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## **DEDICATION**

To the Three Jewels.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I need to thank all the women who let me watch, listen and learn from their experiences this past few years. I feel thankful to the company who opened their doors to my work. To my advisor through this process, Karen Staller, invaluable in helping to keep me focused on how to vertically integrate all the pieces that seemed so difficult to put together. Pam Smock stepped in to help and I am grateful for her ease and confidence in seeing me through this. Sandy Danziger and Renee Anspach both provided great feedback and challenges that helped improve this work. I also want to thank Muge Gocek for some useful initial feedback. And to C.K. Lee, who I missed greatly, thank you for believing in this initial work.

To the amazing staff at the School of Social Work Doctoral office: Lorraine Gutierrez, who helped in endless ways, Todd Huynh, who always answered my endless questions, and to Laura, for just chatting with me and trading stories about our sons and Thomas the Tank Engine. To Tim at the desk in Sociology, and Annie (Di) for letting me sit and spout off.

To my Qualitative Writing Group without whose support and guidance I'd have been much more isolated. And especially to my friend Katherine Luke who died the morning after my defense. Her support was not only felt by me but she touched countless lives in this doctoral program. I wish her family and loved ones comfort in knowing that this great woman influenced so much of my academic life, and the lives of many others.

To Dana Levin, and Jeannie Thrall, good friends and great scholars. You both are excellent company, and helped me stay sane throughout.

To Doug Keasal, who helped with any financial need or question. Your help made this process less stressful.

To my loving Sangha who supported the unusual and daring. To Amy who reminded me not to worry about ghosts and dreams. To Susan Caya and Michael Miehn for listening with interest and endlessly helping with Archer. To my friends Tammy and Miriam, brilliant friends who helped me forget about grad school. To Cham Cham, what is coffee without you and Guru Rinpoche's art?

To my mom and dad, Silvia y Jose, who never floundered in their support. And who always understood what this was always about. Thank you for coming to help with Arco when he was born, for the transcribing and most importantly for your tireless love.

To my wonderful husband Garin, whose love, and support made all this craziness an adventure of love. I truly respect you, my love, and look forward to decades beside you. You are truly my best friend and deep love. To my beautiful boy Arco, who started life when I started the doctoral program and who patiently sat through lectures, symposium, and other academic programs. May my work be for your benefit, and may you know the taste of freedom.

Most importantly to Traktung Rinpoche, Khandro, and Sangchen who over a dinner of pizza in West Virginia helped me take a step to beyond the rigidity of conventionality. Their love, support, and truly radical nature inspire all who happen across their path. To Rinpoche, who leaves breathless even the most cynical, hard-hearted academic.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

The phenomenon called authority is at once more ancient and more fundamental than the phenomenon called state; the natural ascendancy of some men over others is the principle of all human organizations and all human advances.

—*Bertrand de Jouvenel*

Authority in the workplace has been a primary concern for researchers in the social sciences (Burawoy, 1979). Partly this is due to scientific and philosophical interest in the nature of power, but also largely owing to the significance of the labor market. It is important then to understand some of the history regarding work and the United States. The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century marked the U.S. labor and economic framework's radical shift from its rural agricultural base to that of urban industrial production. Industries began to thrive in the northern regions of the country as southern U.S. and European immigrations fed into the largest cities. Vibrant social structures grew, drawing from the energy and resources of a readily available labor pool:

The period was one in which science and invention progressed rapidly and created a base for growth in all phases of the economy—transportation, communications, agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. Population increase, the discovery of additional natural resources, the extension of transportation, the development of new means of communication, the appearance of hundreds of new industries, the evolution of new forms of business organization, the growth of credit institutions, the further concentration of economic power, the beginning of effective organization of a free labor class were all components of the new wealth. Population

doubled...gross national product rose from about \$6.7 billion to an estimated 16.8 billion (Axinn and Levin, 1992, p.81).

Work was perceived to be plentiful; worker supply endless. But the relationship between workers and employers remained a tumultuous one. Scholars have pointed out that “many aspects of employment are determined not by laws but by the contracts between employers and employees” (Barusch, 2009) and these particular contracts that protected both employer and employee remained largely informal<sup>1</sup>. Not until the labor movement formally unionized did more formal mechanisms exist to help protect workers from unfair labor practices, including inadequate wages, hazardous work environments, unfair hiring and firing practices and so on. These ever changing labor relations not only affected the principally male worker supply, but had consequences on the growing number of women entering the labor force as well. Women had even less power to negotiate workplace conditions than men (Barusch, 2009).

In short, the beginnings of the formal labor movement during the industrial revolution were marked by contentious employer/worker relationships. Despite these chaotic times of negotiation new opportunities for women to enter the formal labor force<sup>2</sup> manifested. Women’s presence in the workforce altered due to shifting traditional social institutions. Such changes manifested in work, marriage, class standing, and racial classifications (immigrants and ex-slaves). As women earned money and opportunities, the social roles they played also expanded. For example, marriage shifted from an economically driven contract to an emotional union, opening the door for a new

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<sup>1</sup> By informal, I mean that these contracts were made between individuals without any formal policy or law. These arrangements were made mostly verbally.

<sup>2</sup> I specifically use the word “formal work force” to distinguish the work that women were already doing at home. Women worked in the home as homemakers, as caretakers, and at times took on informal work such as laundry and mending to help subsidize the family income.

understanding of women's place in the home and labor market. The possibility of earning money helped promote the changing roles of women from exclusively wives and mothers to pay-earning single women<sup>3</sup>. These single women populated the cities and took on newly organized positions in department stores, sweatshops and factories. Yet women experienced widespread market disparities in relation with their male counterparts with regards to work and compensation. In addition, the female labor force was excluded from union participation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Barusch, 2009), and instead reacted by forming their own unions, such as the early 1900s Women's Trade Union League.

Yet women's presence in the workforce had ambivalent reactions. Women were seen as both necessary to the economy but also problematically taking over a traditionally "male" sphere of everyday life, that of the formalized labor market. As a result the changing "female" social spheres were seen as a moral threat to U.S. culture and social stability. The hesitant acceptance of women in the workplace affected various social groups and movements. The maternalist movement of the U.S. Progressive Era debated on the one hand the extent to which a government should assume the role of caretaker for non-working mothers, versus angling for more progressive and equitable labor laws (Bussiere, 1997). The tension between (1) having the government assume a caretaking role (providing support for women to stay at home, i.e. welfare) versus (2) pushing for equal rights (women experience equitable labor practices, such as the ERA Amendment) remained a hotly contested debate. These social problems of the day also permeated the employer/employee relationship, and especially affected women's pay. Since they were

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<sup>3</sup> Note that though women could not earn money, they were far from being able to live independently. Not only were their wages meager, in relation to men, but many young women were expected to send home remittances from their labor.

not seen as primary breadwinners, nor as valuable as male workers, employers often did not attempt to compensate women equally for their labor.

Larger social institutions moved to counter this emerging freedom with highly regulated imagery and moral discourse. Rather than focus on women's unequal economic, social, and racially divided status, several institutions and leaders latched on to the discourse of female promiscuity, youth degradation, and marriage regulation.

Connolly sums up this succinctly by noting that

“the cultural sum of these developments was an acute awareness that rapid industrialization and urbanization had profoundly undermined the traditional role and status of women, which for centuries had been perceived in the context of stable and predetermined sequences: marriage, childbearing, and rearing, and homemaking. There emerged a rather widespread sense of the problematical position of women in the modern industrial society” (p. 29).

This new role for women illustrates a type of hesitant certainty. Hesitant because dominant social forces worked to undermine the power women were gaining during this time, but a certainty nevertheless due to the growing U.S. economic need and dependence on women's labor. Even today, there remains an ambivalent reaction to women in the formal workspace, and how to balance private (mothers, caregivers) and public (workers) identities.

In the past two decades, feminist scholars began contributing new lenses to female labor practices. Theoretical inquiry into work that affect women include: inequity in pay (England, 1992; Budig & England, 2001; Petersen & Morgan, 1995); sexual harrasment (Gutek & Done, 2001; Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, Sexuality 1999); income insecurity (Corcoran, Danziger, Kalil, & Seefeldt, 2000; Edin & Lein, 1997); domestic work (Ehrenreich, 1999; Romero, 1992); and balancing family/work (Di

Leonardo, 1987; Walzer, 1998; Hochschild, 1990). In short, the field of labor theory has received an infusion of scholarship attenuated to the issues, needs, concerns, of gendered analysis.

Two aspects of these gendered analysis that have become hallmarks of women's challenges in the workforce are wage discrimination and penalties for motherhood (Budig & England, 2001; Di Leonardo, 1987; Hochschild, 1990). But others (Henly, 2009) assert that *new* research should be equally interested in the work *place* as much as the worker themselves:

Much research concerned with low-income workers highlights the characteristics of workers that make employment difficult for them – limited education and skills, health and mental health deficits, child care and transportation barriers, and so on. Similarly, most programs directed at this population focus on preparing workers to better meet the demands of the workplace.

In contrast, the projects you heard about today are quite different. They locate the problem of concern in the workplace not the worker, and ask what it is about the job that fails the worker. This is a critical difference, and one that really separates [newer] studies from much of the research on job training, welfare-to-work, and workforce development currently being done. (Henly, 2009).

These new and interesting foci on differing workplaces, complicate how workers make meaning of their identities<sup>4</sup> (i.e., mothers and as workers) and how the workplaces themselves act as processes of identity making (i.e., labor control). Location and space are now informing scholarship in addition to the gendered and social identities at work for women in the labor market.

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<sup>4</sup> Work identity is important as it concerns issues of how individuals make sense of their lived realities, how they understand oppression, opportunity, equal rights, and so on. Also, a fundamental aspect of labor control is that of alienation (Marx, 1888), which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Scholarship can thus be enhanced by considering how multiple social structures and identities interact and integrate into understanding the social complexities of the labor market. In other words, it is important to further understand how women make meaning of their personal and work identities to themselves, to co-workers, to friends, to family, and to actual and potential clients. Why is the consideration of identity important? Issues of identity are fundamental in addressing the human condition. Scholars have grappled with dehumanization (Freire, 2000), alienation (Marx, 1844), subversion (Butler, 1991) and empowerment (Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1999). Examining identity in the labor market is vital for scholars interested in women and work.

This dissertation looks at a population of women from the low-wage labor market working for a direct selling organization called “Love Dreams.” I am defining low-wage labor as work that is “characterized by low wages, few benefits, and little upward mobility” (Berstein & Hartmann, 2000). The organization operates using a home-party direct selling plan, distributing sexual enhancement products for adults. In the following section, I will provide an integrated overview of (1) women’s work and direct sales in the United States; (2) introduce the company, Love Dreams, and its organizational structure; and (3) finally introduce the analytical lens for this dissertation, which will be labor control and how the workers experienced, resisted, altered new forms of social and organizational control. Labor control, the ability for an employer to exert power over a workforce, proves to be an useful lens to consider both how employees makes sense of the work and their identities, as well as how they function to integrate these identities within the work space. I will also further address why issues of identity and making sense of personal work important to consider, and why these issues have concerned scholars

interested in the labor process.<sup>5</sup> These issues will be explored in Chapter 2 in the literature review.

### **Women, Work, and Direct Sales in the United States**

A renewed interest has emerged with women involved in part-time and non-traditional labor (Kalleberg, 2000). Kalleberg (2000) argues that married women have often looked for these work arrangements in order to meet the needs of their families and home life. Little sociological attention, however, has been paid to part-time female laborers in direct sales organizations (DSOs). In part this is due to the long-standing disinterest in studying female work, but also due to the methodological difficulties in conducting such research. Though important, it is a challenge to capture how meaning making occurs for women drawn from the low-wage labor market, and working in a highly decentralized organizational structure. Direct sales is an significant part of the labor market with over \$30 billion in direct sales and 15 million U.S. salespeople of which 87.9% are women<sup>6</sup>. It is important then to look more closely at the women involved in this work. I begin with clarifying the structure of direct selling in general.

Direct selling is “the sale of a consumer product or service, person-to-person, away from a fixed retail location<sup>7</sup>.” In 2007, direct sales netted \$30.8 billion dollars in the United States. Over 15 million distributors or one in five Americans sold products using

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned in the previous footnote, I will further go in to why meaning making is important, but at the heart of these issues is the Marxian “alienation” concept, which has defined the oppression of workers since the publication of the Communist Manifesto.

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from web, Direction Selling Association, [www.wdsa.org/aboutselling/](http://www.wdsa.org/aboutselling/), on June 1, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from web, Direction Selling Association, [www.wdsa.org/aboutselling/](http://www.wdsa.org/aboutselling/), on June 1, 2009.

this method<sup>8</sup>. There are three major sales strategies in direct selling, (1) Individual/Person-to-Person Selling, (2) Party Plan/Group Selling, and (3) Customer Direct Order (such as internet, catalog orders and so on). This thesis concentrates on the second method, that of the party plan selling.

Party plan selling, the second largest subset of the direct retail sales<sup>9</sup>, encourages the sale and purchase of products in the home during informal gatherings to groups of people in a party-like atmosphere. Some well-known party-plan direct sales include Tupperware, Mary Kay cosmetics, and the Pampered Chef (Biggart, 1989; Connelly & Rhoton, 1987). These parties often include women gathering at a hostess' home. Most commonly they occur in the living room, with food and refreshments available. Women sit on couches, and gather around to hear a sales presentation. The importance of the home as a site for consumer exchange must be underscored. First, "home" is a complex and meaningful symbol. As mentioned at the start of the chapter, the integrity of the home life has been of great concern for U.S. society. Women's identities are inexorably linked with the cultural and social constructs of this powerful living symbol<sup>10</sup>. The issue is made more complex by the multidimensionality of the "home" concept. As scholars have discussed, the home carries with it a "diversity of meaning" (Peled & Muzicant, 2008). These diverse meanings include how an individual's personal identities such as race, sexuality, and gender impact their lives and their relationships to larger social structures such as religion, education, and governmental oversight *within* the context of

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<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from web, Direct Selling Association, <http://www.dsa.org/pubs/numbers/07gofactsheet.pdf>, on January 11, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> The first being direct sales. This is when an individual will come to your home such as an insurance salesman, or vacuum cleaner salesperson.

<sup>10</sup> I use the work "living" here to denote that the symbol of the home is vibrant and changing, it has been known as a symbol of American ideals and values. These values however are constantly shifting and adjusting throughout the decades.



the meaning of home (Ahrentzen, 1997). Normative social constructions of home as, for example, a safe haven for the family to be nurtured and supported are confronted at times with personal experiences of the home as a place of degradation and humiliation. For some women, the home is a site of oppression and violence<sup>11</sup>, and for others a distinct and necessary refuge from the days' small tyrannies<sup>12</sup>. In addition, the home traditionally is the "women's sphere" and as such a unique power base for the women to have emotional and physical control (as mother and caretaker). Thus, having the home as a location for direct selling carries many emotional and social forces.

Although though the home is often considered a private domain, it is mediated in many ways by both adherence and resistance to public mores and laws. As a result, individuals make sense of their own identities in reaction to these multiple spheres<sup>13</sup>. Individuals both create their identities within the home, in relation to the home, and in response from the home. Within the home, one might gain a sense of themselves as "wife" or "mother" or "daughter" and thus be filled with the sense of what these roles mean. In relation to the home, one might characterize their identity in reaction to the home as a refugee. In response from the home, one might understand their own identity as a response to social constructions (being a gay man, but being married to a woman and having children). In this way, the home both creates and reflects social values (Peled & Muzicant, 2008). The home can empower and oppress, enliven and diminish, support and

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<sup>11</sup> Domestic Violence, e.g.

<sup>12</sup> By this I mean the various ways expectations of life that drain an individual, having to stand in line forever at a bank, being berated by a boss at work, getting stuck in traffic, and so on.

<sup>13</sup> Such spheres include regulating how children are treated (Social Services), how husbands and wives are treated (calling the police for a domestic violence dispute), or for how sexuality should be regulated (homosexuality and anti-sodomy laws).

devastate. And the interplay of these social dynamics are constructed and embodied through the individual's experiences of those actions.

This dynamic is further complicated when the home becomes the site of work, as in the party-plan model of direct selling. In this setting, multiple identities are confronted and shaped. The salesperson (or distributor) presents various items for the women gathered there to see, feel, touch, try out, and eventually purchase. The party not only serves as a fun space for “girls to hang out,” but it also transforms the home into a site for capitalistic venture. The selling and buying, the trading of commodities, exist as both external commodities of product, and internal commodities<sup>14</sup> of social identity. By selling in a woman's home, the parties gain access to a more relaxed and familiar atmosphere, one that is conducive to the selling and purchasing of products. This is in contrast to retail selling where one drives to a boutique, mall, or other store, looking for merchandise. In one's home, you sit on a sofa, chair, or even on the floor as products are passed around. The private space affords an intimacy that heightens the relationship between seller and purchaser. One using the legitimizing force of the home to sell their product, and the other negotiating a new identity of consumer in the privacy of home.

The atmosphere is welcoming towards women. The ease of the party reflects the home<sup>15</sup>: the only time one needs to get up is to access more food, drink, or to go to the bathroom. This is also different from mail-order or internet ordering as you can have tactile interactions with the products and ask questions directly to the salesperson (distributor). The product itself is allowed to make use of the intimate setting of the living

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<sup>14</sup> By internal commodities I mean the beliefs that we hold about ourselves, that make up who we think we are. For example, successful business woman, savvy bondsman, respected community leader, and so on.

<sup>15</sup> These aspects are significant because they lend comfort to an otherwise uncomfortable topic and they legitimize the product.

room to overcome potential client aversions. With regards to selling sex toys, the consumer consent to the notion of sex as a public consumption and the distributor works to capitalize on the legitimizing force of the home to promote sales.

Direct selling negotiates the multitude of personal meanings that the symbol of the home implies. For women who are empowered by the home, as a source of their own internal (pride associated with being the controller of the home) and external mastery of their domain (the physical representation of the home, e.g. décor), direct selling is a nod to their power and command. By attending to the woman in her place of dominance, direct selling compliments her influence by acknowledging and catering to her power. However the reverse is also effective, for women who may feel disempowered in or by the home, direct sellers can aim to empower women to take charge of their lives through the exchange of products that promise new possibilities. Direct selling capitalizes on the duality of the woman as authority and woman as subjugated. The contested terrain of the home *enables* the direct selling approach as a space to mediate and negotiate those complexities.

The social identities are constructed in relation to others as well as the symbol of the home. As is noted by scholars studying this field (Biggart, 1989; Bone, 2006) as these parties take place in the home, they rely on the hostess' social networks which include family, friends, co-workers, and friends of their guests. The importance here, however, is that the changing identity dynamic is channeled through the flux of the social dynamic *of the party itself*. That is, the meanings attributed to the products<sup>16</sup> and to individuals present are a complex dynamic of self, other, and group characteristics. By this I mean

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<sup>16</sup> Such as slutty, naughty, dirty, or possibly fun, exciting, new.

that how a participant understands sexuality and acceptable sexual behavior is affected by their meaning of being in a safe home environment. Those meanings also get filtered through who they believe to be at the party, and potentially judging their interest in sexual products. The party itself is a combination of women who are trying to figure out how to deal with their own sexuality in relation to the public display and the social interactions going on. The meaning of home saturates these relations and offers the potential for multiple lived realities and complexities. For a woman who has never seen a dildo, for example, to see one and to see her friends touch and explore one, can be shocking. Her identity as a mother, wife, or professional may or may not be consistent with a woman who uses clitoral stimulators. Meanwhile, the seller must be aware of these potential identities conflicting for her audience, and she must negotiate them in order to help sell her products. Thus the home enables the construction and reconstruction of the worker identity, the party participants, and the structures of the “home.” The identities become a process, dynamic, and fluid, as a response to and from each other.

These gendered social structures (in this case the home) are supported through the requirements and structure of direct selling organizations. Distributors often occupy multiple marginalized identities that, on the surface, appear to be insignificant to success in direct selling. There are no “work skills” required for signing up. This easy entrance (there is no application process) and flexible time commitment, attracts distributors, mostly women, with little or no formal education. The process up front is simple: buy a kit (costs range from \$100 to \$1000) that you will use to demonstrate and sell products, and sign a brief form.

The result of the “sign-on” and the appeal to busy mothers with children who must balance multiple time constraints echoes the needs of low-skilled women in the workforce. According to (Biggart, 1989) these women are especially attracted to direct selling:

More recently, direct selling organizations grew because they resolved what became problems for two usually competing social groups—capitalist businesspeople and a pool of modestly educated labor, particularly women...For workers today, DSOs are a way to enter the labor force without the usual liabilities of bureaucratically organized work. Participants maintain control of their work hours and are at least apparently free from supervision. Distributors integrate spheres of life normally separate in modern society: children, spouses, neighbors, and even political and religious values are brought together in the enterprise. Most important, perhaps, direct selling promises, and occasionally grants, status and recognition to workers largely excluded from both in most workplaces (p. 11).

Though these types of organizations provide important ways for women to enter the workforce, they are potentially able to exploit a vulnerable population that has had little formal education and fewer work opportunities. This is essential to consider when looking at labor control practices in organizations that have few formal management mechanisms. The message of direct selling is compelling and attractive, but also can sow the seeds of an exploitative relationship between the company and the distributor. These potential risks will be discussed later in this thesis, but also contribute to how the workers make meaning and sense of their identity via oppressive policies within a company.

Why direct selling as the site for investigation? For the most part, scholars have ignored the importance of studying direct selling organizations. Sociological scrutiny tends to focus on firms with more formalized business structures. Scholars have looked at industrial labor (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979), the apparel industry (Collins, 2003),

service work (Hochschild, 2003; Leidner, 1996; Williams, 2006), retail sales (Lichtenstein, 2005), office corporations (Kanter, 1977). Direct sales, on the contrary, with its divergent structure create multiple dilemmas to its study: the structure is hard to study because the work is so decentralized, the industry is not well known and often stigmatized, and the workforce is primarily made up of low-skilled women with little education.

In addition, some scholars (Biggart, 1989) have suggested that since many individuals who work in direct sales are women<sup>17</sup>, and most work from their home, there is little interest in uncovering their work habits. Traditionally work studies have been conducted either directly on men, or on women in traditionally male work environments. “Many sociologists and historians remain unconvinced that gender is central to economic relations” (Rose, 1993, p.3) and studying women does not add any vital knowledge to the literature. This bias is imperative to acknowledge if scholarship is to consider how other forms of labor control (rather than just pure physical force) function in the management of workers.

*Who is the salesforce?* The site of direct selling offers a fascinating look at the intersection of compounded marginalized identities of the workers. Many workers have limited options in the formal labor market. The southern regions of the United States, where many direct selling organizations have seen their largest growth, is reflective of historically limited employment opportunities. One reason for this may be that whereas in northern and industrialized cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York, opportunities for women to enter the workforce were more numerous and more formalized as a result

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<sup>17</sup> Female Direct Sellers: 87.9 vs. Male: 12.1, Ibid.

of the industrial revolution, Southern women did not have the same formal structures to enter the labor market as quickly and thus turned to structures such as direct selling.

The majority of the distributors range in ages 35-44 and are married. They engage the work at a half-time level. The direct selling organization Love Dreams, not only incorporates many of those marginalized identities including gender, age, education, geographic region, but because of its nature as a sex toy company adds the dimension of sexuality and sexuality identity of the female distributor. This is important to consider because scholars have in recent decades begun to consider how gender influences work dynamics (Kanter, 1977; Williams, 2006); the differing barriers and effects of part-time workers vs. full time workers (Kalleberg, 2000); and how the decentralized labor of direct selling is managed (Biggart, 1989). And though sexuality has been studied in the workplace (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 1999; Bradley-Engen & Ulmer, 2009; Weitzer, 2009), few have looked at how female sexual identity is used to control the labor process. Why is looking at sexuality important? First of all, sexuality is an important part of the human experience, yet it is misunderstood by many scholars (Paglia, 1994). Much like the early studies of gender, little has been done in this area to examine how labor control practices can be used as functions of an individual's identity, in this case their sexual identity. Moreover, these studies can extend beyond just looking at overt sexual organizations (such as those that sell sex toys) to understanding the possibly hidden ways that sexuality is used to control labor in other firms.

Finally, an important aspect of direct selling is the promise of personal satisfaction by owning your own business. Americans have long been attracted to the personal and pecuniary promises of entrepreneurial work. The value of this direct selling

is based on the idea that through hard work successful careers can be built. This work captures the spirit of the protestant work ethic that links hard work with personal salvation through worldly goods (Weber, 2001). In addition, the United States as a country founded by immigrants has often promoted the success of innovative entrepreneurs. The popular saying of “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” elucidates the culture of American work and rests the onus of responsibility squarely on the individual to succeed<sup>18</sup>. Even though the distributors in direct selling are affiliated with a particular product and company, and often have to sign a form of agreement on how they will represent the company and product, they consider themselves to be independent business owners. This notion is encouraged by the organization. Distributors purchase products from the main organization and then re-sell them. Direct sellers must find individuals to host parties in their living rooms, manage all their own paperwork including taxes, purchase orders, recruitment materials, receipts, promotions and marketing. The use of the entrepreneurial spirit legitimates the work of direct selling. That is, direct selling is not a highly prestigious occupation, but engendering the noble quality of entrepreneurship enlivens and uplifts the identity, and this process must exist not only from the distributor on their own, but in relation to the general public, potential consumers, friends, families and so on. In regards to labor control, the ethic of individualism is in direct contradiction with the edicts of being managed by corporate offices. This tension, of being independent but also following the employer, is an important barrier that traditional (control over body) labor control practices could not address. New forms of labor control exist to manage the decentralized workforce.

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<sup>18</sup> One could of course argue that this sentiment has been called into question both during the Great Depression and in our current economic times. However, the American personality is infused with the notion of individualistic success based on hard work and innovation.



One of the most salient aspects of making money in this marketing plan is by convincing other women to join the company under your management. These structures are called a distributors' *downline*. A downline is the group of individuals that the primary distributor recruits to join the company. For example, if a consultant named Abby is selling products during at-home party gatherings and she meets Betsy, she may suggest that Betsy join the company and begin herself to make money distributing the products. If Betsy agrees to sign up then she joins Abby's downline. As part of Abby's downline, a percentage of Betsy's sales will start to go directly to Abby. If Betsy then recruits Charlene, a percentage of Charlene's sales will start to accrue to Betsy and to Abby. If Charlene recruits Darla, then Abby will get a percentage of Betsy's, Charlene's, and Darla's sales. The downline tier system usually ends after 3 tiers of individuals. The primary recruiter is responsible<sup>19</sup> for the distributor directly under them. Per Love Dreams' policy, there is no limit as to how many individuals a distributor can recruit. Thus direct selling also capitalizes on highly gendered networks for the distribution of products. Gender has been used "to emphasize the ways networks are embedded in place-based social, economic, cultural, and political structures" (Hanson & Blake, 2009, p.135). The structure of organization through these downlines, becomes an important way in which the information (labor control edicts) are passed along and enforced.

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<sup>19</sup> The extent of the work that the distributor must do is examined further in chapter four.



who work for Love Dreams are also told they can find their dreams coming true through financial independence, time freed up to spend with children, work enjoyment, money security, social and personal fulfillment. In addition women are encouraged to make enough for a monthly credit card or car payment debt, or purchase a luxury item such as jewelry, designer purses, or ipods. Love Dreams advertises, as do most direct selling agencies targeted at women, the ability to purchase household “extras.” This belief is shown through the notion of pin money (Rose, 1993) which claims that women occupy disproportionate percentages of the low-wage labor market because their overall pay is insignificant in comparison with the total family income (Harkness, Machin, & Waldfogel, 1997; DeRiviere, 2008). This point is important. The use of the pin money metaphor does not imply that the money they will earn will necessarily be used for “extras,” it merely provides a legitimizing framework for selling sex toys. For a company that already challenges moral boundaries, to use the concept of “pin money” helps legitimate this work as it will not threaten hegemonic masculine ideas of working mothers. The work can be entertaining, but not undermine the traditional family earning framework. Women can work, but still be attentive to their children and home duties. This outward public advertising is logical and rational, and perhaps is one reason why scholars have neglected this workforce as it seems inconsequential to the labor market economy.

Consultants also use this construction to frame their work identity, especially when they are attempting to recruit other distributors. Co-opting the language of pin money is a valuable tactic that shields potential recruits from viewing the selling of adult

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This will be discussed in chapter 6 on the use of language to change public perception of the consumption of sex.

romance products as threatening. The advertising efforts do not, for example, claim that this work will “liberate you from all dependence on your husband and family.” Rather, the recruitment efforts support traditional social structures (family) in order to appease the potential recruit’s interest in selling sex toys.

Another powerful framing of the company is the appeal to the U.S. value of freedom; in this case the freedom to control one’s time is advertised in many recruitment efforts such as this one:

**“You can Have it All”: recruitment brochure<sup>22</sup>**



Interestingly, and in line with a masculine labor market this freedom is billed as a “freedom to” and not a “freedom from;” it is the freedom to buy, or to spend time with family, or to take a vacation. This is not a freedom from male dependence, or freedom from inequality in the work sphere. These advertisements work to construct and enforce the identity of the consultants in Love Dreams as particular ways of being a worker, one that is compliant and in line with traditional gender roles. But these powerful filters of hope and easy success do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of a larger meaning-making

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<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from the web, December 2006, from ([www.passionparties.com](http://www.passionparties.com)). Text reads: “You can have it all. Unlimited income, new dream home, company car, exotic trips, flexible hours, family, fun, freedom.”

system beginning with the founder and chief executive officer of Love Dreams, Linda Patters.

Linda Patters<sup>23</sup> has owned and operated *Love Dreams* since the early 1980s. She first began selling sex toys through a different company which originally folded in its first ten years due to her superiors' poor management. Patters responded to this potential defeat by starting her own company out of her basement. In one year, she was successful enough to move her business to a warehouse. Love Dreams experienced rapid growth and dramatic change in the twenty years since, mirroring national growth trends for other firms (Chinn, 2007). Sales have escalated from \$1.2 million in 1995 to over \$60 million today. While there were only 55 consultants in 1993, today there are over 10,000.

This growth rate also demonstrates an explosion in the development of the organization as well as the sector of selling sexual enhancement products. A staff of over 80 individuals is employed in the Cincinnati hub, where the products are housed and distributed. In addition to the consultants, administrative and warehouse staff, Love Dreams employs a separate unit within the company called the Health Education Department. This unit's purpose is to keep the products updated and safe for public use, to train and educate the public on sexual health measures, and to answer questions from distributors and customers. Currently, this unit has two full time employees. They also answer questions regarding sexual health problems, product failures and relationship issues. The advice and consultation they offer is fed through a partnership with the Kinsey Institute to improve sexual health and behavior. The Kinsey Institute is a leading research institute in the United States concerned with issues of sex and sexuality. Named

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<sup>23</sup> Not her real name.

after Alfred Kinsey, whose research during the 30s, 40s, and 50s spurred new interest and quantification into American sex lives, the institute now functions with various purposes to help improve and disseminate the latest research on sex, sexual health, and sexual practices. Taking a cue from their forefathers, current researchers conduct cutting edge, scientifically based, research. Their reputation and renown is widespread.

One division of the Kinsey Institute is currently concerned with public sexual health, and how to help the public choose safe, effective sexual aid products. Specifically, they are interested in how practices and behaviors of individuals can be better understood so as to provide them with more informed information on sex and sexuality. Such information can serve the public and improve sexual health by decreasing sexually transmitted diseases and assisting individuals with sexual dysfunction. The idea of providing a widespread sexual public health educational model, however, is very difficult. In recent years, many sexual education programs in the United States designed for youth were mostly limited to federal funding. These programs often came with restrictions such as having funds available only to programs advocating abstinence before marriage. When then president George W. Bush pushed for doubling federal funds for sex education in 2005, but limiting the funding to abstinence programs, the debate quickly pitted moral proponents vs. health advocates (Bowman, 2004). The Kinsey Institute, on the other hand, is not necessarily interested in abstinence, but rather how to improve access to appropriate sexual aids or practices for the sexual health of individuals. Enjoying sexual activity with or without a partner is assumed.

The sexual health information is passed on to the consultants in the forms of live presentations (training sessions), DVDs, online chat rooms, phone calls, and emails. The

consultants in turn pass the information on to their customers during the parties and in a private ordering room.

Linda Patters understood that this product line was in direct contradiction with many conservative social values and that it made public what is in essence was private behavior. Sexual pleasure targeted for women, sold by women, to women in their living rooms threatened many social mores. Patters found that she was limited in expanding her business because of the unscrupulous reputation of the overall sex toy industry via associations with porn and back-alley sex shops. As a consequence, her customer base remained limited and this restricted her growth and profits.

Desiring to expand her consumer base in the conservative and lucrative southern “Bible Belt,” Patters initiated a new direction for the company. In this effort to mainstream her business and her product line, she undertook a major policy shift in 2005-2006 toward a more professional image. This policy shift directly affected how the female workers were dressed, their language (use of language to sell products), and how they presented themselves in public and at the parties. For example, although the female workforce was always called “consultants” instead of “distributors,” she began to emphasize the health education aspect of the worker identity. “Consultants” were not only sex helpers, they were sexual health educators, and could legitimately consult with women on their sexual needs. For the women around during this time, their identities were re-constructed via the direct policy change from Linda, but also through their own enacting of that image during parties, and the reactions from women to the consultants.

My dissertation research covered this policy enactment<sup>24</sup>. The research question I pose is: *how does Love Dreams manufacture labor control consent<sup>25</sup> in a decentralized work environment?* Another guiding question that stems from this initial question is: *how do workers make meaning of their work identity through these labor control mechanisms?* I look at the mechanisms, specifically gender and sexuality, which are used to ensure worker compliance. I also consider how the workers make meaning of the labor control practices in regards to their work, and at times their personal, identities. In other words, I am looking at the process of how the consultant's identities were managed and the process of agreeing to the labor control practices. As discussed earlier, identity meaning is of great concern for scholars of labor control. Such issues get at the core of the human experience and translate into vital considerations of an individual's worth and sense of self.

This thesis is not much concerned with the transformation of the workers, i.e. the before and after effects of policy changes, but rather how consultants made meaning of their identities within the constraints of the workplace and labor control practices. This is consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective where individuals respond and behave towards things in accordance to the value that those things have for the individual (Blumer, 1969). This view “sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer, 1969, p.5). The social reality of Love Dreams was redefined as the image of what they

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note temporality here. When I began my research with Love Dreams I was right on the heels of the shift to professionalization. In other words, I had spent no time with the company before the policy change, but only during and after. Clearly I was able to capture how the women were affected by labor control practices, but I had to rely on narrative accounts and printed materials such as pictures and company policy papers to fully understand the company prior to this shift.

<sup>25</sup> The concept of manufacturing consent is taken from Burawoy and will be further acknowledged during the literature review in Chapter 2.



presented to the world changed (for a timeline of events, see Appendix A). It shifted from a socially marginalized “sex company” to a professional organization advocating women’s health through empowerment and education. This empowered some women by educating them on the sexual mechanics, biology and emotional aspects of sex via the selling of sex toys; and for other women this new direction led to the alienation from their work.

With these new structures and alliances in place, the images of women who sold the products were also altered: they were now required to dress, speak, and act as if they were part of a professional class. The “new women” were prohibited from speaking or dressing in overtly vulgar ways. They were given new scripts to follow, and new directions about how to present themselves and the products. Linda Patters insisted that this line of products could be sold without the taint of immoral hyper-sexuality and this policy remained firm; her goal was the uplifting of her company in the eyes of the American public. By using this model, the company was indeed able to recruit thousands of new consultants and totally remake itself into a multi-million dollar company.

As a social work and sociology researcher, I was attuned to issues of social justice and individual empowerment. This focus then naturally led me to look at this particular low-wage labor force of women to note how issues of identity through attitudes and behaviors were managed, how the women received the changes, negotiated them, criticized them, legitimized them, or were disempowered (or empowered) by them. By looking at labor control processes, then the contribution to the field of women and work is as follows: (1) adds to the dynamic of looking at the workplace effects on the workers

in a decentralized environment, and (2) extends the field of labor control to include an integrated consideration of gender and sexuality.

After this introduction, chapter two reviews the existing literature. I begin with an overview of the major trends of labor control theory, specifically looking at Marx and Weber and then more recently feminist theorists. My own work is an extension and integration of the various labor control theorists. I focus specifically on how labor control mechanisms are filtered through the construction of worker identity and behavior through a process I term “cultural shilling” which uses cultural aspects to control labor through: (1) Institutionalized culture of motherhood and obedience presented via the company; (2) Medicalization of female sexuality through the company’s relationship to the Kinsey Institute. These two areas were chosen as they emerged deductively through the research as two of the most salient points in this study. In conversation with my advisors at the time, and with the literature on labor control, it appeared that it was important to look at how gender and sexuality informed each other as mechanisms of control. The data, in this way, drove the clustering of the labor control practices into these two areas.

Chapter three outlines the data collection process. One important issue I had was accessing both the corporate offices and the individual consultants: the process was arduous at the beginning since it was marked by distrust and fear from the company. I explain how I gained access, recruited informants and conducted individual interviews. I also discuss the various levels of data I gathered including participant observation and in-depth interviews. I analyze by subjectivity, including an assessment how I was perceived by the company and the consultants. I finish the chapter by discussing the long and circuitous route of data analysis and writing up the data.

Chapter four begins with the examination of my findings through the lens of institutional culture and worker change. Borrowing from organizational studies, institutional culture is defined here as “the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work” (Peterson & Spencer, 1991, p. 142). This marks the start of how the company constructs the worker identity, focusing on the methods it employs to aid the transformation into a professionalized workforce. Chapter five continues with the examination of how science and medical discourse enabled the worker identity making process by providing the necessary “content”. I specifically look at how the medicalization of female sexual pleasure bolsters the submission of worker compliance. The Kinsey Institute disseminated scientific information to the consultants in order to create new sites of sexual health intervention as well as aid the consultants in the selling of their products. This work facilitated the transformation of the worker to sexual health care professionals.

Chapter six concludes the dissertation with a synthesis of my findings and implications for future work as well as for policy and theory. Included are social work and sociological implications for women in the workplace. I also offer up the limitations of this study and suggest how other research can improve the discussions for women and work beyond the direct selling model.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

Renewed interest in the field of women and work has sparked research that extends conversations on gender differences in the labor force. Women who work in the low-wage labor market face unique constraints in their occupations and lives such as motherhood and lower wages. In addition, researchers have considered how welfare and work affect women (Corcoran, Danziger, Kalil, & Seefeldt, 2000; Edin & Lein, 1997) and how domestic work is politicized (Ehrenreich, 1999; Romero, 1992) and how space and location affect discriminatory practices (Williams, 1989, Hochschild 1983, Leidner, 1993). Within the low wage labor market, researchers have turned an eye specifically towards hourly workers and non-traditional workers in relation to their *quality*<sup>26</sup> of work (Kalleberg, 2000). In this area of low-wage labor work, sociologists and social workers have looked at employer supports, benefits eligibility, number of hours worked, government supports such as TANF, unemployment, and other areas of quality of work (Lambert S. , 2003; Glass & Estes, 1997; Golden, 2001; Swanberg, Pitt-Catsoupes, & Drescher-Burke, 2005). For women in direct sales, many of these issues listed above directly have impacted their own abilities to enter the workforce. Direct sellers are not

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<sup>26</sup> Kalleberg specifically uses the phrase “quality of work” to address this new area of research.

only drawn from a low-education and working class pool but are employed in a highly decentralized work structure.

I begin this literature review with a focus on traditional labor control mechanisms, then shift to how feminist researches have extended these beliefs to include a gendered narrative of labor control, and finally I posit that by integrating these various traditions we can see a new operation of labor control in the direct selling market that includes a discussion of gender and sexuality. This extension of the labor control theoretical literature not only shows how labor can be controlled in a direct selling market, but also how the workers themselves make meaning of their own identities within that process. By extending the Marxist lens of functionalism, the experience of women in the labor market elucidates how social identities interact and converge or diverge within labor control mechanisms.

### **Labor Control Models: what we have been working with**

In the field of labor control, arguably initiated by Karl Marx's and Max Weber's works on capitalism, powerful models illustrate how theorists have understood the complicated negotiated process between worker and employee. Early work done by Edwards (1975) created a typology outlining systems by which workers were organized. His work however does not explore more nuanced aspects of labor control such as managing workers emotions or directing behavior by using gendered notions of work. Rather his focus centers on a functionalist paradigm. The typology includes "simple control, technical control (with union participation), and bureaucratic control" (p. 21). Edwards argued that despite variances in specific job functions, the typology held over

differences and explained the nature by which employers capitalized on the potential labor of their employees. Edwards notes that each level of control builds upon the other and is affected by size of the company/firm, the work itself, and the surrounding forces. Simple control which still permeates the small business sector of modern small firms (family businesses and the like) is organized by one or a small group of owners who rule over the company. The control is, as Braverman notes, despotic in nature, “the boss ...combined both incentives and sanctions in an idiosyncratic and unsystematic mix....was both close and powerful, workers had limited success when they tried to oppose his rule” (p. 19).

Technical control emerged with the growing size of the firm. The company conducted its business and physically organized its workers through a new process of technical control; most famously the Ford assembly line. Henry Ford created a system by which each employee had one job to help build a car along an assembly line, and as the car moved along a conveyer belt, the car’s parts were added one by one. In this way, the laborers had little control over their output and repetitively exchanged their capacity to work for the resultant automobile. This revolutionary process also accompanied other more sophisticated mechanisms of control. Braverman includes in this model, for example, labor unions, scientific management, and welfare capitalism.

Finally, the last form of control in this typology, bureaucratic control, also occurs in larger companies, but rather than structural control, it operates within a more cultural or social sphere. As technical control functioned in blue-collar work, bureaucratic control formalized with white-collar workers. Braverman remarks that the “defining feature of bureaucratic control is the institutionalization of hierarchical power” (p.21). The

difference between hierarchical power and that of technical control lies in the nature of the authority resting in more socialized forces. Hierarchical power that is suffused through the company then keeps employers in line with the wishes and dictates of the company. The worker is then invested in the bureaucracy, and order is thus enforced through company rules and regulations. In relation to the worker, technical control is the control over the worker/consultant that is introduced from the forces of production (supply side) and those that supply the labor (the worker and labor union). Bureaucratic control on the other hand is the control that is introduced from the demand side, those who demand labor (such as the individuals who own the business or factories).

Recently, researchers extended labor control theories beyond traditional management and labor practices. Asserting that labor control manifests beyond mere physical and hierarchical constructs, scholars have claimed that looking in untraditional labor groups can offer new insights into the tumultuous relationship between employer and employee. As Burawoy puts it

It is necessary to explain not only why workers do not act according to an imputed set of interests but also why they attempt to realize a different set of interests. The labor process, therefore, must be understood in terms of the specific combinations of force and consent that elicit cooperation in the pursuit of profit. (Burawoy, 1979, p. 30)

He goes on to assert that consent to labor control practices can be seen as a series of mechanisms that organize consent, rather than physical coercion. In addition, women working in direct sales can offer new insights into how individuals conduct and work in gendered informal work environments. Their relationship with their employers and within the company deviates from normative constructions of how laborers are organized. The highly decentralized structure

does not fit neatly in the traditional typology of traditional forms of labor control. Feminist theorists have likewise called attention to differing structures beyond these normative understandings.

### **Gender and Labor Control: beyond Marx and feminist theory**

Theories of labor control and alienation are of great concern for Marxist scholars (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979; Burawoy, 1979). According to their conceptualization, in the labor market process employers and employees exist in a tumultuous relationship as employers desire control over their workforce since increased control over their workers leads to higher productivity and profits. This relationship according to Marx (1844) is rife with class conflict, and therefore inevitably leads to oppressive and alienating (dehumanizing) outcomes for the worker. The worker becomes so distanced from the work product<sup>27</sup> that they lose a sense of their humanity in its creation. Terming this the “contested terrain” where the employee and employer battle out the negotiation of buying and selling the capacity to work, Edwards (1979) describes how the introduction of new control methods leads to worker resistance. That coercion and rebellion line the fabric of labor relations is consistent with Marxian analysis. Braverman (1998) succinctly discusses this negotiation between employer/employee over the *capacity* to work as follows:

Labor, like all processes and bodily functions, is an inalienable property of the human individual. Muscle and brain cannot be separated from persons possessing them...the worker does not surrender to the capitalist his or her capacity for work. The worker retains it, and the capitalist can take advantage of the bargain only by setting the worker to work. It is of course

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<sup>27</sup> As opposed to tradesmen, or skilled laborers who feel invested and in some ways identified with their product, the worker in the capitalist regime is merely a cog in a large wheel, used up and discarded until the next cog can take his/her place.



understood that the useful effects or products of labor belong to the capitalist. But what the worker sells, and what the capitalist buys, is *not an agreed amount of labor, but the power to labor over an agreed period of time*. This inability to purchase labor, which is an inalienable bodily and mental function, and the necessity to perform it, is so fraught with consequences for the entire capitalist mode of production that it must be investigated more closely (p. 37 [emphasis in original]).

This important point concerning the power to labor comprises the source of labor control theory's dilemma: workers possess an ability or a potentiality of work within themselves and those individuals who seek to profit from the workers (in Braverman's case the capitalist) then engage in this dance of negotiation. Yet within this context, the focus has been on the control of the body, thus the result of control methods such as Taylorism's scientific management and Fordism (Littler, 1978). These two labor control mechanisms were possible in the highly regulated world of the factory, and delivered favorable profitable outcomes.

More recently, other scholars have challenged the class-based paradigm of labor control theory through the gendered lens. For instance, Hochschild (1983) introduces emotion management as a new method for how labor can be controlled. For the flight attendants in her study, the regulation of smiling and accommodating behaviors was on par with Marxian self-alienation theory. In analyzing this regulation, Hochschild equated emotional labor with physical labor stating that "both are subject to the rules of mass production;" she further expounded that this emotional labor was owned by the firm and left the worker confused about her emotional identity (p. 198). Delta Airlines trained women to be obliging and smiling flight attendants, even in the face of overt abuse by customers. This emotional management led to the alienation of the women's identity. By

uncovering how the labor control process extends beyond physical control into a gendered realm of emotional work that is specific here to women, Hochschild broadens the theoretical base: work can be managed using a woman's emotional repertoire to curtail and alter her work performance.

In her discussion of interactive service work, Leidner (1993) likewise expounded on how the routinization and deskilling of work employed larger frameworks than bodily control. She especially noted that employers' use of gendered stereotypes promotes uncontested realities of purpose and meaning for the worker. However, Leidner claims that not all acquiescence to labor control leads to dehumanization or oppression, and may for some workers have a protective quality to it. "Sticking to the script" may protect workers from hostile customers or threatening situations and she argues that labor control literature has demonstrated an "unsatisfactory treatment of workers' subjectivity" (p. 22-23). Her work thus challenges Hochschild and Burawoy who lean towards more simplistic dichotomies of oppression and self-alienation in labor control. Gender not only illuminates how labor control is managed, but also how it is consented to or even upheld. This theoretical move is highly important because it illuminates the varied ways in which employees can make meaning or be given meaning to their identities in the labor control process. The labor control process can lead to oppressive alienation, yet it may also reveal patterns of protective purposes. While some labor control practices are indeed oppressive, when workers engage hostile environments these very practices also constitute defensive and helpful tools by which the worker can manage their work and identity to the outside world.

However, Leidner concludes by warning that despite the complexities of service work interactions, routinized labor leads to “an instrumental orientation toward others and toward the self” (p. 231). That *instrumentalism* thus negates the workers sense of humanity and sides with Marxist critiques of final alienation of the self. The worker becomes the *tool* of the employer as the worker identity becomes a distilled version of compliance. Here Leidner uses the framework of Taylorism, yet complicates the notion of routine work as labor control by showing that gendered constructions of labor re-enforce worker compliance. Tapping into socially constructed gender identities creates a systematic and discernable pathway leading to labor control. In part this is due to how the workers makes meaning and sense of not only their work identity and how they present it to the outside world, but also how they internalize these various processes to ensure their compliance to or resistance of management policies. For women in the service industry, to be seen as feminine and involved in feminine routinized work accomplishes the work of internalized acquiescence to labor control and an external representation of the self *to the outside world* as a gendered object. Thus, gendered social identities catalyze worker compliance.

A vital aspect, however, of considering gendered constructions of labor control especially for women is where and how those constructions are created, managed, and resisted (Burawoy, 1979). The “contested terrain” of employer and employee is made more problematic when that negotiation is undertaken primarily within the context of a highly meaning-loaded place; in the case of direct selling this space is the home. What does it mean for women to transform the home space into a capitalistic space? Are there any negative effects to taking the public life of work into the private space of the home?

Ehrenreich (2004) calls attention to the problematic issues that arise in viewing the home as a work site. In her discussion of home cleaning-service chains, she posits that “the most interesting feature...is that they are finally transforming the home into a fully capitalist-style workplace, and in ways that the old wages-for-housework advocates could never have imagined” (p. 335). She notes that the home is now a site for capitalism to reenact its alienating and discriminatory practices. The effects of this on the psyche of the individuals engaged in work, both worker and employer, have important consequences for the field of labor control, as the door is opened to an expansion of the physical, emotional, and intellectual domain of negotiating work practices.

Moreover, other negative effects may hinder women who tend to dominate the home/work sphere. Morgan and Martin (2005) assert that in “homosocial settings like golf and strip clubs, women’s disadvantage takes the form of exclusion, an extreme form of disadvantage where one’s productivity—access to critical information along with actual sales volume—may hinge on the personal relationships she develops with customers and colleagues” (p. 26). In this regard, male homosocial settings limit the opportunities for women and therefore re-enforce the male position of access to information. Storr notes that in turn, female homosocial settings, “helps heterosexual women to further men’s interests... [and] there is a favoured form of femininity within female homosociality” (p. 51-52) which she claims regulates the norms of sexual desire and thus expresses an inherent hostility towards non-heterosexual women (what Storr refers to as “lesbophobia”). The home becomes the public site for the reification of sexual stereotypes and gendered identity making.

However, Ogasawara (1998) draws upon the work of Susan Rogers as

“social science’s traditional preoccupation with authority structures, [where] men appeared to be dominant. In reality, however, women’s power in the *household* [my emphasis], although informal and covert, is more effective than the overt, formal power of men; women grant their husband authority, prestige, and respect in exchange for power, thus perpetuating the “myth” of male dominance” (p. 7). For Ogasawara, women participate in the creation of power by *granting* power and authority structures, and thus as identifiers with the “household” benefit from such constructions. In other words, Storr’s portrait of the direct selling as a female heterosexual-homosocial gathering space laden with a thick male hegemonic cover is problematic. In fact, women can choose to be “more effective” through such gatherings. The home and how workers attend to their identities within and in regards to it, shape meaning of the work identity, the home, the product that is sold, and the individuals that purchase those products; in sum, the site of selling complicates, enhances, and illuminates labor control dilemmas and practices.

These important contributions to the dialogue of labor attempt to go beyond the traditional frameworks. Pointing out how the “class nature” of work, as expounded by Marxist scholars does not fully understand the power of gender, for example, Lee notes that “we cannot see division of labor, hierarchy, technology, and human relations in the workplace as neutral or innocent”, in this case as apart from gender, hence “labor control is the fundamental problematic of the labor process perspective” (p. 15). As Lee (1998) further adds, “bringing in gender can significantly advance our understanding of the labor process” (p. 18). And if gender becomes an important domain to uncover, sexuality also can provide insights into the labor control process.

## **Labor Control: the Medicalization of Sexuality**

Medicalization and its processes have been understood differently by scholars. The medical profession saw a rise in its credibility from 1890 to 1945 (Clarke, Shim, Fosket, & Fishman, 2003). In the years following 1945, the profession further extended its reach within private and public institutions<sup>28</sup> that supported the cultural and social structure of a medicalized framework (p. 163). Adopting a scientifically based, empirically grounded profession flew in the face of more traditional and provincial approaches that believed a divine force, such as the Wrath of God, accounted for individual illness and desolation (Reverby, 1972). The medicalized model injected a shift in the psyche of the American public by dismissing religious explanations for disease for scientific inquiry.

Medicalization and its function within a sociological context have been understood as a mechanism for social control (Conrad, 1992). Conrad states that medicalization

“consists of defining a problem in medical terms, using medical language to describe a problem, adopting a medical framework to understand a problem, or using a medical intervention to “treat” it. This is a sociocultural process that may or may not involve the medical profession, lead to medical social control or medical treatment, or be the result of intentional expansion by the medical profession....occurs when a medical frame or definition has been applied to understand or manage a problem” (Conrad, 1992, p. 211).

Conrad goes on to explain that the power inherent in defining “sickness” and its subsequent “treatment” not only further delineates the arena of medical intervention, but

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<sup>28</sup> One such public institution is the National Institute for Health..

demarcates boundaries of deviance and social acceptability. He illustrates four types of medical social control: “medical ideology, collaboration, technology, and medical surveillance.” (p. 216). He borrows from Foucault<sup>29</sup> in his description of medical surveillance in suggesting that the overseeing of activities and behaviors translate into close monitoring by the medical establishment, and uses childbirth as an example. Conrad traces the path of having babies from a primarily female orientated undertaking (with midwives helping during birth) to fundamentally an activity that takes place in hospitals under the supervision of doctors and nurses.

The recent medicalization of sexuality indicates a new trend for medical social control, in both dictating the terms of sexual functioning and also regulating and administering treatment. The boundaries of acceptable sexual activity, thoughts, and behaviors are thus related to the needs of current social structures such as the medical community.

The above issues call in to question fundamental issues of how we define sexuality. Not only do researchers disagree on the definition of sexuality but, the term *sexuality* is often lumped together with *gender*. In discussions of how sexuality affects female work, scholars have employed sexuality when in fact referring merely to gender differences (Adkins, 1995). How then is sexuality defined? One scholar views sexuality and sexual behavior within the framework of three main traditions (Plummer, 2002): (1) The clinical tradition, characterized by Freud (2) Epidemiological tradition, characterized

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<sup>29</sup> Foucault (1978) argues that western culture is obsessed with sexuality. He notes that sex as a secret or private topic leads to potential repressiveness. One example Foucault explains is the emergence of sexual categories of homosexual and heterosexual. He argues that the construction of these identities inflicts a moral judgment on the *person* rather than on the *behavior* of the sexual being.

by Kinsey (3) The experimental method, characterized by Masters and Johnson. All have widely advanced the field of sexuality and their work has challenged perceptions of behaviors and attitudes. However, these three traditions privilege the biological or “natural” ordering of sexual behavior and attitudes. Sociologists have understood that though sexual behavior may have biological determinants, culture and society influence how sexuality is understood (Schwartz & Rutter, *The Gender of Sexuality: Exploring Sexual Possibilities*, 1998; DeLamater, 1983; Davenport, 1977). In addition, researchers have examined the ways and methods by which some forces of social control exert influence over the regulation of sexual acts and identities. DeLamater (1983) argues that “social institutions, primarily the family and religion, are the source of both general perspectives and specific norms that govern sexual expression” (p. 264). Levesque (2002) adds to these institutions by demonstrating the regulatory influences of school, media, social service delivery, and the law. One example of this was the 1960s emergence of sex therapy, with sexual acts and proclivities now viewed as problems to be solved (Schwartz & Rutter, *The Gender of Sexuality*, 1998). New language was being used to describe the physical problems in sex. Diagnosis such as “dyspareunia” or painful intercourse was now understood as a symptom of women not being adequately aroused<sup>30</sup>. Such new medical opinions on sexuality permitted people to seek treatment (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998, p. 144-145). In the 1970s, sexual dysfunction morphed into a new concept: sexual performance. Now, “couples sought sex therapy to learn more control” over their sexual experiences (Schwartz and Rutter, 1998, p. 145-146). Medicalized sexual discourses changed from the “inhibited sexual desires” of the 1980s, to the “sexual addictions” of

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<sup>30</sup> Also at this time “erectile failure” was introduced.



the 1990s. As major sexual problems altered during the decades, female sexuality also was impacted by similar social structures<sup>31</sup>.

The point here is that sexuality in general and female sexuality in particular are not static constructions. They are a process, and that process works at macro and micro levels. At the macro level, sexuality can be understood as a function of power (Foucault). At the micro level, sexuality can be understood as a way that individuals make meaning of their identity in relation to the social order (Plummer, 2002). Such questions as “am I normal” and “are these expressions of my sexuality okay” are part of how an individual regulates their understanding of who they are. They are fundamental issues of identity.

In order to understand how female sexuality can be seen as malleable, Plummer (2002) asserts that sexuality is socially constructed by noting that “human sexuality—as opposed to biological functioning—only comes to exist once it is embroiled with partners (real or imagined), activities, times, places and reasons *defined* as sexual” (p.23). This approach opens the door to examining female sexuality as a malleable identity that can be altered and transformed within social contexts; in this case, the context of the labor market. Theorists such as Foucault argue that sexuality has little inherent force outside the regulative forces of implicit and explicit social power. And the power structures inherent in the labor market serve as an interesting framework for discussing their mutual interdependence.

Tiefer (2000) warns of the unintended consequences of medicalizing sexuality, and in particular the field of sexology. She calls attention to the dramatic rise in treating

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<sup>31</sup> And for the purposes of this thesis, one particular form of social structure, that of labor control will be examined.

sexual dysfunction with the introduction of the massively popular sildenafil citrate, or Viagra. This was a significant period for the pharmaceutical community. However, Tiefer (2000) questions the framework of the biomedical model by stating that “the process explicitly selected particular elements of men’s sexual and reproductive potential as medically normal (just-right erection, just-right ejaculation and orgasm, just-right desire frequency and object), and promoted them as natural, universal, and sufficient for proper sexual conduct and experience” (p. 89). In other words, in order to treat the “problem” of male sexuality the parameters needed to be created. For men, the parameter focused on the inability to perform (and more importantly sustain) the biological function of penetration.

Viagra proved to have the record sales of in comparison to other pharmaceutical products (Keith, 2000). Not only were the sexual lives of the users enhanced but also the pecuniary interests of the pharmaceutical companies that benefited from Viagra’s distribution. Tiefer warns of a “pharmaceutical takeover” as a result of the success of Viagra. She cautions that “because pharmaceutical industry-funded research is likely to focus only on the most narrow, pragmatic, and technical effects of the sexuopharmaceuticals, it is incumbent on sexologists to train their lenses on three other types of drug effects: psychosocial impact, unintended consequences, and long-term follow-up” (Teifer, 2000, p. 280). Although Tiefer’s admonitions read a bit defensively and sometimes overly vague (she makes broad assertions of “unintended consequences”) her caution is an important one. There are long-term consequences for framing sexuality in medicalized language. It can turn consumers into drug seeking, product purchasing

automatons rather than examining other social or personal issues; or limit sexual health research to performance-based products only.

Propelled by the success of Viagra, drug companies have been searching for the equivalent female sex product cure. The process of encountering and marketing a “female Viagra” is complex and problematic. Wood, Koch, and Mansfeld (2006) assert that “biological reductionism” and “use of the male model as the standard” to frame female sexual desire has created an overly monolithic and harmful standard for the expression of female sexuality. The medicalization of female sexual desire, they argue, creates dysfunction where they may be none. McGann (2006) further explains the medical model of sex:

“This view posits sex as an innate, natural essence or drive contained in and released from the body. Bodies, in turn, are understood as machine-like composites of parts. When the parts are in proper working order, bodies are able to achieve their functional purposes. Sexual organs become engorged as blood and other bodily fluids accumulate in anticipation of sexual activity. These changes, as well as sexual drives, patterns of sexual behavior, and even sexual types (bi, homo, hetero), are understood as universal properties of individuals independent of society” (p. 368).

The medical model, she continues, comes equipped with a laundry list of “how-tos” with the beginning, middle, and end stage sexual activities. Beginning stage activities include arousal, perhaps foreplay, middle includes penetration or other sexually engaged activity, with end stage activities resulting in climax and release. Biologically driven definitions tend to highlight the receptive nature of sexuality. Female sexuality involves being penetrated, clitoris stimulation, and orgasm to help facilitate the biological function of reproduction. The limited and troubling biomedical assertions of a “function-

based” sexuality must still be reconciled with critical scholars who ask for more complex considerations. This model can be a very helpful one, however; and it can aid individuals who are somewhat lost and perplexed by the various sexual identities and practices that they understand both for themselves but then also have to navigate with another individual (if that is the purpose of their sexual activity, i.e. not private masturbation).

Basing normative behaviors and attitudes of sexuality as referents to the male model potentially inhibits a true understanding of what we mean by female sexuality. This model of sexuality relies on women falling into potentially “two strands of sexist ideology: contempt for women as weak and defective, and fear of women as dangerous and polluting” (Ehrenreich & English, 1973, p. 14). This scholarship implies is that larger structural forces have the potential to shape the “healthiness” and acceptability of female sexual identity. In the case of medicalization, sexuality becomes a scientific examination, rather than a socially constructed phenomena. Implications emerge. Wood et al. caution against a “culture in which women’s sexual lives are labeled “normal” or “dysfunctional” (p. 242). And that “women’s own conceptions of sexual desire and sexual problems should supplant those purported by the strictly biomedical model” (ibid). The issue here is one of boundary making and meaning of appropriate sexual expression.

The effects on social structures of regulatory processes of sexuality have been considered by scholars. Gilman (1985), for one, asserted that female sexuality could be used to maintain British male hegemony, “the ‘white man’s burden’, his sexuality and its control, is displaced onto the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Others as sexualized female” (Gilman, 1985, p. 107). By linking hyper-sexuality (prostitution) to female sexuality, the white female was kept in her social place, thus reifying colonial

power. This is not to claim that the “othering” processes underway in the U.K. are exactly the same as what is seen in the United States, however, as a country founded on the moral and legal social welfare system of Britain, the United States shares some common features with how deviance and sexual deviance is dealt. For example, Mark Connelly’s study of prostitution during the progressive era further extends this view by asserting that:

Antiprostitution became a psychological clearinghouse for an extraordinary range of troubling issues: the appearance of independent and mobile young women in the cities, widespread clandestine and sexual immorality, a conspiracy to flood the nation with alien prostitutes, catastrophic physical and social consequences of the unchecked contagion of venereal disease, the depersonalization and commercialization of sex and the metropolises, an alien-controlled conspiracy to debauch American girls into lives of “white slavery,” and, by 1918, the ability of the nation to wage war for democracy, decency, and civilization (Connelly, 1980).

For Connelly, the response to prostitution was a powerful symbol aiming to unite a booming and unregulated new nation. The nation identity searched for the end to chaotic living which was indeed showing signs of threat and destabilization. As both Connelly and Gilman assert, this woman is the one held in place by strong moral contracts that would impede sexual behavior, and thus by controlling female sexual behavior, the social structure of power remains upheld. This is because such struggles over morality, and in this case morality buffered by the strength of scientific discourse, arise to deal with the potentially threatened social power structure (Beisel, 1993).

## Summary

In the above discussion, I considered how labor control practices have been considered by various authors and the implications each have had on the wider theoretical body. This excellent body of work has contributed greatly to our understanding of the difficult dilemma between employer and employee, which is a truly contested terrain (Edwards, 1979) that still puzzles scholars and researchers today.

However, even with these advances there remains a gap in the literature looking at how sexuality shapes labor control; see table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Theoretical Perspectives on Labor Control and Direction of this Research**

Marxist	Post-Structuralist (Gender/Feminist Critique)	Direction of this Research: A Case Study
<u>Domain of Labor Control</u> Class.	<u>Domain of Labor Control</u> Gender.	<u>Domain of Labor Control</u> Gender and Sexuality
<u>Type of Control</u> Physical (control over the body)	<u>Type of Control</u> Emotional, Gendered, Familial (control over emotions and social roles)	<u>Type of Control</u> Two socializing forces: that of family and education. Family is through the use of familial structures, and education through sexuality training.
<u>Work Location</u> Factory, Large Firms	<u>Work Location</u> Service Industry, Factory	<u>Work Location</u> Direct Selling, Living Room
<u>Scholars</u> Marx (1884) Weber (1947) Braverman (1979) Burawoy (1998)	<u>Scholars</u> Hochschild (1983) Leidner (1993) Lee (1998)	

The above figure highlights the current state of the theoretical literature. Though the terrain is contested, many scholars would agree that Marxist literature formalized the

issue of labor control. When the post-structural scholars inserted a gendered lens, they did so by extending the continuum of worker alienation and labor control. For this reason they advance the discourse to include a feminist critique. However, this thesis posits that the interaction *between* gender and sexuality may not exist alongside these traditional frameworks. As these post-structuralist theorists merely insert a lens into the same labor processes, this work seeks to enliven the theoretical discourse not by simply adding a lens but challenging the process as a separate process. Though ostensibly concerned with labor control, this thesis compliments both Marxist and post-structuralist conclusions about the outcomes of the labor control process.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methods and Analysis

#### *Research Overview*

I employed Crotty's (1998) framework for understanding the research process. Crotty argues that methodology and methods must be consistent and are ultimately contingent upon what kind of question the researcher asks and how she perceives the social world. To this end, the research (informed by the research question) must have some logic in relation to its epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. In table 3.1, the left hand column indicates the various levels of investigation where each level builds upon the other. The right-hand column indicates the framework this research employs.

**Table 3.1 Research Framework**

<b>Research Framework (Crotty, 1998)</b>	<b>Research Framework Applied</b>
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective (of the research process)	Symbolic Interactionism
Methodology	Ethnography
Methods	Participant Observation, In-depth Interviews, Document Collection



### **Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective (on the research process)**

Constructionism, the epistemology employed for this thesis, is the theory of knowledge that analyzes “the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others (Patton, 2002, p. 96). In order to capture consultants’ meanings of their identity through the labor control process, Constructionism enabled this analysis twofold: (1) examining how the culture of the company enabled labor control practices, and (2) capturing how consultants made meaning of their identity as a result of the Love Dreams’ management practices. In part, constructionism allowed for the flexibility needed to engage with a direct selling organization. This can be considered because constructionism “is contingent upon human practices” that are constructed “in and out of interaction between human beings and their world” (Crotty, 1998, p.42). Unlike *objectivism*, where the researcher starts off with the assumption that there is a discrete truth waiting to be discovered, constructionism enables consideration of the possibility that what eventually emerges as truth is constructed during the process through the interaction of the subjects with their environment. Furthermore, that truth is continuously constructed and reconstructed by the actors by and on their changing environment.

Since the epistemology is predicated on the assumption that truth and reality emerge through an individuals’ interactions with their social environment, the theoretical perspective to which this epistemology applies is symbolic interactionism. The fundamental emphasis of the symbolic interactionist perspective is on the emergence of social reality through subjects’ interactions with one another. Hence, the culture of the company and the identities of the workers in this case emerge as they interact with the

people, places, and things around them; these interactions both reaffirm and distinguish appropriate identities. The post-modern focus of symbolic interactionism as the “philosophical stance informing the methodology” provides the framework for the overall “logic and criteria” of the study (Crotty, 1998, p.3). This perspective owes a debt to George Herbert Mead, but formalized and coined by Mead’s student Herbert Blumer (Blumer, 1969). Blumer (1969) states that:

Symbolic interactionism rests in the last analysis on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything that the human being may note in his world—physical objects, such as trees or chairs; other human beings, such as a mother or a store clerk; categories of human beings, such as friends or enemies; institutions, as a school or government; guiding ideals, such as individual independence or honesty; activities of others, such as their commands or requests; and such situations as an individual encounters in his daily life. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p. 2).

This theoretical perspective opens the doors for understanding “unseen” or more subtle labor control processes. For women in direct selling, meaning making in regards to their work identity, their sexual identity, and their gendered identity are important areas to consider. Even before the potential female consultant receives her kit, her new identity has begun to emerge. For some this process begins during a party, or at a time when they are being recruited, when the thought “I could do this” enters their mind.<sup>32</sup> Her process of understanding and constructing her work identity thus involves a complex set of interactions, and the process is not the same for all consultants. This usually begins with her attending or hosting her own Love Dreams party. At some point that evening she is

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<sup>32</sup> Throughout every interview I had with consultants each pointed out the moment when they realized that this was something they could do, sell sex toys. Each had an elevated tone when they retold this part of the story indicating that they felt excited and emotional about the decision.

recruited by the consultants doing the party, and from that inception a series of events occurs that enables her to become a consultant. For example, the arrival of the kit<sup>33</sup> may signal a new future and identity. She may be fearful, or excited; or possible she may be intimidated by her newfound responsibilities. She must at this point (if this has not happened already) negotiate how she will present her work identity to her family and friends. Will she tell the parents of her children's friends? Will she tell their teachers? She must negotiate the changing needs of preparing for her parties, selling the products, distributing the products, and updating her clients on new toys that have come in. Eventually she may recruit others and take on the identity of trainer and guide. Her status in her immediate family may alter as she chooses to spend money for expenses related to their family needs. She may feel more empowered as someone contributing financially. She must also build her business and interact with other women in order to book more parties, deal with satisfied and dissatisfied customers. In essence, she undergoes a multitude of social and environmental impacts that work to socially construct her identity. However, these meanings are not made in a vacuum; they exist through the complex human social interactions. The domains of gender and sexuality employ a unique set of symbols and interpretative processes that enable the workers' movement towards professionalization.

## **Methodology**

A methodology is the plan, or strategy used in the research process to link the methods that best answer the research question (Crotty, 1998). Ethnography proved to be

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<sup>33</sup> Many of the following examples of the reaction to the kit are taken from examples from interviews with the consultants, and from field notes.

the best methodology to answer the research question and for considering this population. An ethnographic study offered the needed breadth and flexibility to examine the culture of the women and the company. This was in part due to the women being part-time workers, living in geographic disparate parts of the United States (there are consultants now in almost all of the mainland states), limited formalized education, and the highly decentralized organization of the company. Also the mechanisms that are used to control labor differ from traditional models, and thus the women manage their identities in differing ways. These differences and processes can best be studied using an ethnographic methodology. Ethnography as a methodology has deep roots in the Anthropology field with well known leading researchers such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and Clifford Geertz. In addition to these ethnographers who have studied differing cultures around the world, a large body of urban ethnography arose in the United States since the late 50s, early 60s and continues to this day. As one scholar articulates “ethnography is a form of research that asks questions about the social and cultural practices of groups of people (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p, 187). It aims to note how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, and their social world (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). As Patton notes “ethnographic inquiry takes as its central and guiding assumption that any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture” (p. 81). And other scholars (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) state that ethnographers “answer the principal ethnographic questions: ‘What’s happening in this setting?’ ‘Who is engaging in what kind of activities?’ and ‘Why are they doing what they are doing?’” (p. xv). In addition, this methodology has been of special interest to scholars in organizational studies. At the beginning stages, I was concerned with

understanding how the organization culture was ordered, and how that affected the consultants' behaviors and attitudes through their internal meaning making, especially in regards to their making sense of their identities as sex toy distributors in relation to their social networks. Ethnography then allowed me to capture how some women defined themselves within the culture of Love Dreams, and how they made sense of their identities being redefined by the company policies. Likewise, I was able to note when workers did not adhere to company labor control practices and the ensuing consequences or lack thereof, and how those reactions impacted worker identity.

Their work identities and sexual identities through their work was not static, it was modified through the labor control practices. In addition, the toys and other physical products were now being sold as sexual health enhancement products, rather than just novelty toys. And this process of object (toys) transformation linked with and enforced the labor control practices that impacted worker identity. For the purposes of this thesis, I concentrate on how the consultants made real, resisted, and complied with labor controls, by noting how the multiplicity of meanings involved identity making.

Cross sectional survey data was not used due to the following limitations. The labor control mechanisms used on and employed by the workers is fundamentally a discursive process. For example, the process by which a woman decides to invest more in her business (to grow her business) may not be one solely based on economic interest. She may consider the effect of becoming more involved in Love Dreams on her family and friends as well. In addition, though gender has been considered, the interaction of gender and sexuality has received limited theoretical concern. If scholars agree with the symbolic interactionist approach, that meaning is context and content specific then aptly

capturing those emerging forces and identities is important work that has yet to be sufficiently addressed. In this way, ethnography best illustrates the overall cultural forces of the organization and emergent social identities of the workers. It requires ethnographic inquiry to capture process (Salzinger, 2003).

### **Methods: Empirical Evidence Collection**

Methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). For this ethnographic study, many methods were used including: interviews (both formal planned in-depth interviews as well as informal spur-of-the-moment interviews); participant observation (attending events and taking field notes); collecting artifacts and documents (including printed and online media).

#### *Method 1: In-depth and impromptu interviews*

According to Patton (2003), interviewing is a valuable method that allows the researcher “to enter into the other person’s perspective” because there is an “assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). Empirical evidence was collected from 30 women and one man who work as consultants or have some upper level management position<sup>34</sup> within the company, Love Dreams, or who attended a Love Dreams party from 2005-2008. Interviewing women who had attended the parties revealed interesting data on how women understand and enact their sexuality internally. They often spoke at length about how the parties sparked an internal dialogue of their sexual history, preferences, and activities. Some of these

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<sup>34</sup> The CEO (Linda Patters) and her son, James Piazzollo, the current President of the company were interviewed.

women shared very vivid and detailed accounts of their sex lives, though I never asked them to comment on their sexual behaviors. Women revealed a very conflicted picture of how they understand and interpret their sexuality.

The in-depth interviews were between 1-1.5 hours. The ages of those interviewed ranged from 19-60. Prior to the interviews some of the women revealed strong skepticism to my work. Some of this reticence came from their distrust of social institutions, and as a representative of a major university I was subject to their concerns and irritations. Many expressed concern that their work would be misrepresented to the public. The distribution of sex toys after all is morally controversial. I assured them that their participation was confidential and approved by the corporate offices, but the mistrust was still present at the start. One woman wanted a copy of my interview protocol prior to our meeting (she expressed no concern with any of the questions). Overall the interviews were wonderful. The women were articulate, thoughtful, and eager to talk. However, after about ten interviews with the female workers, I began to hear similar patterns. Sometimes the women used similar phrases such as “we are taking this worldwide” and “how would you like to open your home to someone dressed inappropriately?” This hindered the process of understanding meaning-making and identity construction. When I felt that I had was no longer getting variation in how women were making sense of the labor control process (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Morse, 1995), I turned my attention to participant observation (to be discussed later in this chapter).

Very few women expressed any outrage or disappointment with the company. Only one interview, in fact, delved deeply into the topic. I found this particularly odd. On the contrary, women often discussed their work and Linda as saving their lives, and

opening up incredible opportunities, and for providing them with a vision for their life. As a limitation of this study, there is data on only one woman who left Love Dreams<sup>35</sup>. Though the women spoke about consultants that had left, these names and contact information were not made available to me. So in order to evaluate how women made meaning of the labor control practices (especially dissention and resistance), I had to concentrate on viewing the women during trainings and corporate events.

Most consultants I interviewed and personally met were either married or with a significant other and had at least one child. Due to their various ages, the likelihood that they were married or partnered, and that they most likely had at least one child, I had expected more conversation about the difficulties of navigating their identities in multiple social settings. However, during the interviews there was rarely any mention of conflict or angst with their work identity. I wasn't completely sure I knew why the uber-positiveness was showing up in my data, until it dawned on me that many of these women were attempting to recruit me. And this proved to be a major limitation of the in-depth interviews, as the data gathered may have been given to me with the intent to entice me into the company. My own identity (which is discussed later on this chapter) fit the Love Dreams' profile exactly, and my interactions with the women were sometimes implicitly directing me to view the company as an incredible work opportunity. And finally, a few of the women overtly expressed their desire to recruit me (one during the end of the interview and the others as I met them at various events). I was told this would be a great way to supplement my limited school stipend, and this would be the perfect side job for a mother making her way through school. This realization led me to

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<sup>35</sup> This woman who left Love Dreams did not leave, however, because of the new policy shift. In fact, that policy of dressing and speaking in a more professional manner was something she highly approved of.



concentrate on participant observation. I observed and participated during major training events that lasted anywhere from three hours to three days depending on the nature of the training session. In addition, I looked at hundreds of online materials that offered women suggestions on how to recruit, sell products, manage their health care, prepare their taxes, and so on.

For the first year of this project, I worked with one female consultant informant with whom I spent at least one hour a week for eight months. We had many informal conversations about her work, how she negotiated her identity in different social and work environments, and also in training sessions. Both she and I began working with Love Dreams around the same time. She was recruited approximately 8 months prior to my starting the research project. Therefore she was with Love Dreams for less than a year before the company institute the policy change. Although, she had not been with Love Dreams for long, I was still able to document her reactions to the labor control practices, and how she incorporated the new directions of the company into her social world. However, before reaching her first anniversary with the company my primary informant left Love Dreams. She left with the belief that the amount of time she was putting in to the company was not resulting in sufficient income. In addition, she was never able to resolve the conflict of being a sex toy worker and a middle-class mother/wife/woman, as she commented that she never felt comfortable revealing this aspect of her life to others<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> In an interview with President James Piazollo, he noted that most women who end of leaving Love Dreams do so within the first year. If they make it to their first year anniversary, they usually stay on in some capacity, though not all are top sellers. When asked why this was so, he replied that he did not know. However, clearly the reality of integrating multiple identities cannot be managed by these women. Either they cannot maintain their financial aspect, they cannot recruit women (which means being persistent and articulate about their work enough to convince another women to join the company) or they simply are unable to fully engage the realities of owning their own business. Again, I decided not to pursue why

The second year I spent working closely with my first year's informant's recruiter. I went to her house, attended her trainings and parties. In addition, she invited me to come with her to various gatherings, both work related and not. For example, one evening we spent at a belly dancing class, her main passion outside of working for Love Dreams, ordering an appliance at a major appliance store, and driving around running errands. The entire interview was conducted in her car, and I was able to capture her work performance outside of parties (as she pursued recruits and party leads).

Other interviews were conducted in consultants' homes, in restaurants, cafes, over the phone, and during corporate events. Home interviews provided significant insight into how women managed their identities in their home space. For example, women in the home were by far the most relaxed during the interview. They also took great pride in showing me how they manage space and the potentially large spaces that these products can occupy. A few of the women had home offices/warehouses, where they were able to manage their work and store inventory. In these environments, it was easier to see how the consultant's family impacted her work identity. For example, women had entire rooms filled with sex toys, creams, lotions, lingerie and so on. When asked how their family feels about this, some would say that they closely monitor and lock the door. Their children are not allowed in the room and they had complex systems for negotiating that boundary. However, for other women they viewed these products as opportunities to connect with their families in the home. Women spoke of how their children helped with inventory, and distribution of the products. And how by allowing this openness a more honest and trustworthy relationship was had with their children. Conducting interviews

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women leave Love Dreams, since those questions were less interesting to me than how women managed labor control impositions, not how they didn't.

about sex toys in public was a bit more problematic. Interviews at restaurants and cafes were often more censored, with women leaning in to discuss particular topics (such as how to sell anal products). The feeling guarded, and in addition, the noise level at the location often impeded the more intimate interviews I had with women in their homes. Some women who had agreed to be interviewed lived in locations that were too far to travel to, i.e. California. In these cases, I resorted to phone interviews. By far, this was my least favorite interview method. Yet the data received from phone interviews was no less interesting, nor worthy for analysis than meeting in person, I still felt stilted by the impersonality of speaking over the phone not being able to see the consultant's face, or read her reactions and emotional cues. Finally, I interviewed some women during corporate training events. I authentically made an effort to not interview women during these events as I had been advised by corporate offices that women needed that time to concentrate on themselves, and relax. My desire to speak to them would have to take backseat to their needs to connect with the company. Because of this, I never overtly pursued interviews with women at training sessions, but several times women approached me directly to speak about their lives and experiences selling for Love Dreams.

#### *Sampling for the in-depth interviews*

As mentioned in the introduction, all the female workers had been officially labeled “consultants” even before the policy change. Yet the policy change that aimed to mainstream the company continuously focused on the consultants as an *educator, a sexual health educator*. In order to interview these women, I used a combination of convenience/snowball sampling or respondent-driven sampling. This type of sampling was used because initially the women in Love Dreams were difficult to reach. They were

distrustful of outside researchers, and thus a type of hidden population; as a result I used snowball sampling as it has been shown to be an effective tool to reach such populations (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2003). Random introductions at various training events were also used for convenience. For the women that I met at training events, I would call them to arrange a time outside of Love Dreams trainings to meet. In addition, I also contacted a few women via their MySpace and Facebook accounts.<sup>37</sup> Snowball (or convenience sampling) occurred after I interviewed my primary informant. She introduced me to her mentor/advisor in the company, who then gave me a list of individuals to interview (convenience sampling). I also interviewed women who I met at events such as corporate sponsored trainings. Though there was never any hesitance to discuss sexuality or sexual aid products from the consultants, there was some issue with trust for investigators. In order to save time, then, I resorted to this snowball method, and was referred to women via my second primary informant. These women had incredible trust and respect for the women who referred them, and thus were open and willing to be interviewed. Trust, as discussed in chapter two, not unease about sexuality, was the main obstacle I encountered in scheduling interviews.

At the start of each interview, or prior to phone interviews, I disclosed my status as a doctoral candidate at the University of Michigan. I explained the nature of the study and obtained informed consent. I also mentioned that if the women had any further thoughts concerning my research that they should feel free to contact me. The interviews were used to gain insights into the consultants' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs on

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<sup>37</sup> MySpace and Facebook are online social networking sites. These sites are free and open to anyone. I conducted a search using keyword "Love Dreams" and sent a few messages to various consultants within one hour of my home. I then met them at their homes for interviews.

working as a sex toy distributor and perceptions of the recent labor control policy that had occurred. For consultants, I usually began with questions such as “tell the story about how you came to Love Dreams?” And then later on in the interview I would ask “what do you think about the new policy at Love Dreams affecting dress and language of consultants?” For a full interview protocol see Appendix A. I probed during the interview, to facilitate further depth of the subject matter. I was interested in how the consultants gave meaning to their work, how they became interested in the company, and how they perceived corporate offices.

### *Method 2: Participant Observation*

Observation in ethnography is unique in its ability to “note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed” (Angrosino, 2005). Also, the process of observation provided me with some anonymity. This allowed me to notice when women resisted policies. As mentioned above, acts of resistance were almost impossible to be noted through interviews. The women did not verbally articulate their resistance to me during interviews, for two reasons (1) they were fundamentally concerned with the perception of the company to the world, and (2) they wanted to recruit me to join Love Dreams. By using participant observation, then, I gathered evidence noting the varying reactions to the dictates of CEO Linda Patters and Love Dreams. I made such observations at in-home parties, “market” trainings (quarterly), annual training events, national convention, and smaller home-based training sessions. I observed a total of eight at home toy parties. In addition, I observed training sessions that are “mock parties,” where senior consultants model successful party scripts. The parties are the gathering of the consultant, which take place usually in a hostess’

home or apartment. On average there are 5-20 women in attendance at a party. Parties that are as large as 200 people usually take place in a large conference hotel room.

The presentation portion of the party lasts from 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the size of the group as well as the general atmosphere. Because of the nature of the products women had varying reactions and behaviors during the parties. More often than not, the more women present, the more alcohol consumed, the rowdier the crowd. At one party, the consultant had to use a bullhorn to control the women who had begun having side conversations of loud laughter, grabbing products off the tables, and egging each other to test various lotions. Other parties were significantly more subdued, with few outbursts. The consultants are given tools to deal with each situation, and must manage a competing identity: one that is there to have fun with the women, and one that must remain professional and composed. After the presentation, the consultant goes into a private ordering room which is usually a den in the home, or a spare bedroom. Once in the room, the consultant meets privately with each partygoer. The consultant answers questions about products, sexual behaviors, sexual dysfunctions, and recommends products to address each of the women's needs. The rooms are secluded; the order forms are never divulged to anyone else at the party, unless the women choose to share their decisions with the others. After all of the ordering is complete, the consultant packs up her materials, loads her car up and drives home. If the consultant has the product in her inventory she will give the woman her order that night, if she does not, the consultant goes home and places an online order for the products. When the products are delivered to the consultant, she in turn repackages the items and either sends them through the mail or delivers them personally.

I attended various trainings for the consultants throughout the country, specifically quarterly market trainings in a hotel conference room in Michigan (four times), three-day training events at the corporate offices in August in Ohio (twice), and the four-day annual convention in March in Las Vegas (twice). Market trainings usually occur in rented hotel conference rooms that range in size fitting from 100 up to 500 women. The evening lasts approximately three hours. Women are encouraged to arrive on time, and though prior to the policy shift when they could wear any apparel, after the shift business casual apparel was required. During market trainings, women are given a wide variety of information. They are introduced to new products and provided with ideas for how to sell products. The company announces new contests and incentives, discusses and reviews new policies and holds contests during the meeting to inspire the women. For example, one evening the discussion might concern how to talk about a particular new product, its specifications, how to clean it, and how to market it. During the same evening, there might be a workshop on how to file taxes, and how to sign up for the new group health insurance plan. These gatherings served as spaces for the women to feel connected with each other, to feel supported in their business, and to keep abreast of new directions and policies that the company is taking. Market trainings occur all over the United States, and are localized in several key cities<sup>38</sup>. The company makes an effort to choose locations where there are high concentrations of consultants. However, some women live too far away from these central gatherings, and are not able to meet. This is a result of the geographic isolation, living in areas that are primarily rural. The percentage

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<sup>38</sup> For confidentiality, I don't list the cities, however they are chosen based on the largest number of female consultants in a geographical region, and where there is a qualified senior consultant to lead the training. Sometimes Linda Patters and James Piazzollo make an appearance at these meetings, but most often there are all consultants with no representation from the corporate office.

of women who are geographically isolated is less than those that have access to market trainings, and the company has been making an effort to expand their trainings to these areas. In addition, these women are encouraged to attend online consultation meetings.

The annual training conventions have ranged from 1200-1600 women. They only take place in a major metropolitan city<sup>39</sup> in the United States. This city is located about 30 miles away from the corporate headquarters and the warehouse that contains rows and rows of dildos, creams, toys, and many other sexual aid products as well as various marketing materials. The annual trainings are required for all consultants. And they are able to earn “points” to attend these functions at reduced rates based on their yearly sales. The annual trainings are three day long events. During this time, women receive intense training on new products including: design, function, sexual use, specifications, and sales techniques. There are mock parties held so that women may get a sense of what others do during their parties and how to sell difficult products. There are seminars on how to fill out your taxes, how to sign up for health insurance, and how to recruit new members. Other seminars include how to make money using this method and networking. During the evenings, the women gather to socialize and have fun. At the two events I attended, Bacardi Silver sponsored an evening of fun and entertainment which included a talent show. The women are also invited to attend presentations by motivational speakers who help inspire the women to succeed at their work and relationships and achieve personal goals.

Finally, I was able to attend two annual conventions in Las Vegas, Nevada in March of 2007 and 2008 with an average of 1000-1200 women present. These events are

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<sup>39</sup> For confidentiality I do not name the city, but it is a large metropolitan city in the Midwest.



perceived as the time for the worker/consultants to relax and to celebrate the year's accomplishments. The first annual convention I attended was a few months after the policy enactment and the second annual convention was a year and half after. There is an annual awards banquet ceremony, and a special shopping center where women can convert credits they earned throughout the year into purchases they would otherwise not be able to afford including: jewelry, designer purses, home appliances, certificates to Home Depot, video game consoles (Wii, Playstation), and so on. In recent years, by demand, they have incorporated some training into this weekend, but mostly it is to celebrate the year's successes and to inspire the women to achieve. At this event, many of the women get to meet the CEO, Linda Patters, which to most is an extraordinary honor. Also, in recent years, they have added a "partners" event to the weekend, where they offer the spouses, boyfriends, and significant others of the consultants some special attention. For example, they are all invited to a poker room for an evening of gambling and entertainment with Love Dreams' president James Piazzollo.

The significance of these events for participants is as follows. They are the major gathering points of the workers. They come together in huge numbers to meet. The tone of the event is meticulously prepared. Language, actions, and information are all successfully integrated so that consultant can receive the trainings. She is both observed in these settings by her peer workers, by the corporate office representatives (including at times Linda and James), and by the general public who see the women and note their behavior. It was these events, in fact, and the women's lack of professionalism at them that first inspired Linda Patters to institute the policy change. Participant observation then allows for not only the opportunity to observe whether the change is taking place and

how it is resisted in language, appearance, and behavior but how the women make meaning of those changes. One example is when I was on my way up to my room at the hotel and a group of six female consultants got on the elevator with me joined by two non-related males. One of the women during the short elevator ride to our respective floors began to make sexual overtures to them, by which time another consultant immediately reprimanded her saying “Ladies, let’s remember who and where we are.” These occurrences capture how various consultants both resist and consent to labor control practices, and how are both acted on and act upon various social realities.

### *Method 3: Gathering Artifacts and Documents*

I gathered artifacts and documents including both printed and online material. In addition, I acquired actual Love Dreams products. I read their published magazine which is put out quarterly. This magazine keeps the women aware of recent and upcoming events. Also, it lists every woman in the company who is actively working, and their total earnings to date. There are some advice columns, and inspirational stories included as well. These magazines always have on the cover a picture of Linda Patters (similar to the Oprah Magazine), and an opening letter from her to all the consultants. For a sense of the extent of materials available to the women, see Appendix B. The magazine issues span a time from January 2004 to January 2009. The writing, pictures, and content all reflect a drive to standardize the appearance, language and presentation of the female workers. For example, as will be discussed in the next chapter, there are issues devoted to how to dress and where exactly to shop for those clothes. These are no overt labor control practices, but by using popular media tools of “makeover contests” (popular in daytime talk shows), and attractive layouts noting the latest fashion trends (popular in current fashion

magazines) the company taps into cultural symbols of gender and sexuality to alter the appearance of their workers. Because this publication is produced solely by the corporate offices, there is little opportunity to note worker resistance. However, what can be gleaned are the efforts of the company to transition the workers through this policy change.

From hosting my own Love Dreams' party (in my living room), I gathered printed materials that dealt solely with the party itself. I kept all the printed materials that were sent to me including invitations, party date ideas, how to set up the house, and so on. These sheets were very informal with stickers and stamps decorating the information sheets on how to have a successful party. I remember feeling as though this was almost similar to a child's birthday party. Along the way, I picked up various printed materials including product sheets, party ideas, and so on that were given out at training sessions both annual and local. Individual consultants can advertise differently and provide different printed materials to their potential clients. However, towards the end of 2006 there were some standardized forms that were included in the online materials for the consultants to use if they wished. This is significant as standardization is an indicator of professionalization. The new handouts were all with the new Love Dreams logo on them, in a color scheme that had the feel of a professional corporate event, or perhaps an invitation to a formal event. Gone were stickers, stamps, and smiley faces and replacing them were offset printed materials with pre-printed invitations and suggestions for how to hold a successful party.

## Positionality

In the book Critical Ethnography, Madison points out that it is critical to understand our role as researchers in the ethnographic process (Madison, 2005). Madison questions the place of the researcher in representing the research subjects, and interpreting and presenting their lived realities to the world. Michelle Fine also addresses this issue in her analysis of how “the Other” is treated in research design (Fine, 1998). I wish to address these issues here because my location in this research process plays a significant part in capturing the multiple social realities of the women worker/consultants in this company as it instituted labor control practices.

When I began my initial contacts for this research, the year was 2004; however I was not allowed to attend corporate events (mainly trainings) until the following year. As mentioned, it took months to gain enough trust to access the company. I spoke with corporate secretaries who told me I had to speak with the sexual health department at Love Dreams. The reason I had to gain approval from the sexual health department was because they were already conducting research with the Kinsey Institute and they did not want any conflicting research agendas. I met with a representative of the Kinsey Institute, and we discussed my proposal. I was allowed to continue when it was discovered that I was looking at issues of women and work, and not epidemiological work. I never received money from Kinsey or from Love Dreams for this work, either directly or through the non-profit foundation of Love Dreams.

When I did begin attending trainings, I realized that I was right in the middle of the policy change. Thus, I was able to witness its process and transformative effect, but I

had very little first-hand experience with what the company was like before the policy. I undoubtedly went through a change along with the company. Being a 33 year-old, doctoral student, married with one child, studying sex toys was not the most prestigious work to be done. When I first announced that I was going to look at this marginalized and hidden population of the female labor force, my fellow peers (and many faculty) laughed out loud. It took me about six months to get used to, and develop a somewhat thick skin about, the work I was conducting. During this time I began to research the topic of sex and sexuality and labor, but mostly found the work centered on sexual deviance and pathology such as prostitution. I also read that even historical giants, such as Freud, Kraft-Ebbing, Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson were all to some extent marginalized and ridiculed by the scientific community. The public shared this ambivalence by both voraciously reading their reports and at the same time decrying the private sphere being made public. At any rate, there was little in the formal literature to theoretically understand what was going on with these women. And I struggled for years with what to do with the endless amount of empirical evidence I gathered.<sup>40</sup>

As mentioned, garnering trust was an issue for me, but also for many ethnographers. Trust is invaluable for effective participant observation and ethnography (Agronsino, 2005). For larger events, I was grateful for own demographics. Most of the women selling the products were in their 30s to 50s, and as a woman in her mid-thirties, many of the women present simply believed that I was a consultant as they were. However, if we ever engaged in a conversation I indicated who I was and what I was doing. In effect, during the market trainings, annual trainings, and annual convention I

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<sup>40</sup> Thanks to many of my peers and advisors who helped me to begin my large file cabinet of potential research projects.

simply “fit in.” Nevertheless, some ethical considerations did apply as not all the women knew that I was watching the event at all times. I felt conflicted at times, wondering how much to divulge without being able to capture “what was really going on.” In the end, I resolved the issue by wearing a name tag with my affiliation and disclosing my profession as much as possible. However, it was impossible to inform all the women at all times. And since I had the company’s permission, I rationalized that my work could remain somewhat anonymous. Still, this issue was never fully resolved within me, and I feel today still perplexed by how ethnographers<sup>41</sup> manage their multiple and conflicting identities in their research spaces.

I identify as a Latina, but my ethnicity never excluded me or held me apart. Many of the consultants are of various ages, races, sizes, and backgrounds. The only time when it became an issue was when I attended a home training. At this time, a potential recruit had come from southwest Detroit. She was of Mexican descent and had come with her daughter to see about the product line, as they were interested in starting their own business with Love Dreams. During the course of the evening, I ended up translating for them. And this was the first time I ever translated sexual aid products into Spanish. It was quite an experience! However, this was one meeting that left me evaluating further my place in this research process. After the meeting, the lead consultant successfully recruited her and mentioned that the Spanish-speaking woman had ordered the one thousand dollar kit, which is the priciest kit one can begin with. I was shocked. In addition, the consultant went on to *thank me* for my help and noted that “I’m sure the reason she purchased the thousand dollar kit was because of you.” Frankly, this

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<sup>41</sup> There is quite a significant amount of work on this issue, noting how to manage and negotiate trust while gaining access to relevant evidence.

frightened me. I felt as though I had intervened in the process and in my effort to be helpful (to translate) I turned into an agent for Love Dreams. I knew I would have trouble writing up my findings as I was becoming attached to the women I was studying. And not only attached and willing to help them (with translations or party gigs), but I was also beginning to feel protective of them. This was apparent as I evaluated my feelings in discussing this work with fellow peers, who though were titillated by my subject, were unwilling to see the import of the work. I believe this was in part due to the multiple marginalized statuses of the women<sup>42</sup> I was studying that they were low-wage workers, part-time employees, and engaged in selling sex. I had entered an unknown realm, lightly theorized about, and highly provocative. Clearly my defensiveness for this research and the women I studied came from my own identity, and as such I turned an attentive eye in that direction.

One area of my identity that I had to address early on was my own view on sex and sexuality. As I discussed my research with friends and family, some individuals questioned the importance of studying women who sell sex toys for a living. What could possibly be gained from this? Where were my social work values? What is the use of this? It seemed clear to me that issues of social justice and self worth for women in the workforce have intimately been tied up with their sexuality. And here was a way to examine that identity and behavior through a fostered change within the company. My own views on sex and sexuality then began to emerge, because during conversations with others and in interviews I quickly discovered that there needed to be a level of acceptance established for myself by myself. By “level of acceptance” I mean what is morally

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<sup>42</sup> For further discussion on studying marginalized populations (especially women in non traditional settings) see (Furman, 1997).

acceptable sexual behavior. What did I consider tolerable or acceptable? Is it okay to have sex with a heterosexual partner if you are not married? Is it okay to masturbate using your hands or a toy? Can lesbians and bi-sexuals feel comfortable with these products? Is it okay for women to claim that they need to have one orgasm a day to stay physically healthy? How about using vibrating dildos with masculine names? And what always seemed to be a line divider: what about anal penetration? I found that I had to answer for myself how comfortable I was with discussing a whole range of sexual identities as well as sexual behaviors. I had to resolve these issues for myself prior to analyzing the data, as I wanted to approach the material from a place where I myself had examined my own levels of excitement, disgust, acceptance, and titillation. I do not claim to have figured out my stance on these issues, but rather gave myself a space to answer questions about how I personally regarded the various products and sexual activities. The resolution was not to “feel comfortable” with the notion of all sex acts, just to acknowledge their existence and let those details aerate in my psyche. This move was important for the overall research process in several ways. First, I had to leave myself open to listening to how consultants sold products and individuals that they sold to without moral judgment. Secondly, I realized that I began to politically side with the women, as the language they used about selling in some hostile public eyes resonated with my feminist activist training. This was probably the most dangerous place for me as a researcher to be, and in fact still permeates this thesis. And I have yet to fully resolve my “objective” eye with my “personal beliefs” about the nature of this work and the women who work for it. Was I on the side of the women, seeing all they did as virtuous efforts to expand the rigidity of a repressive and misogynistic culture? Was the company



brutally neglecting the worker's sexual identity by professionalizing them into mainstream middle-class homes? My conclusion was that the picture could not fully be encompassed by the Braverian, Marxist framework, nor the alienation-models espoused by feminist scholars. Truly the work did have wide-spread implications, but also held valuable important benefits for the female labor force.

### **Empirical Evidence Collection and Analysis**

The first year was spent primarily with my informant from 2005-2006. This informant was forty years old, with two children, and a husband who worked full time in an office environment (white collar). We had two formal sit down in-depth interviews, and many hours of casual conversations, emails, phone texts, and car ride talks about the work. She was as interested in my research as much as I was. I believe in some ways, this was an effort on her part to justify the work she was doing, by validating it as worthy. If there was a doctoral student studying this, then there must be something worthwhile about the work. Yet in addition to this, she was a curious woman who thought deeply about her life and the choices that affected her family. In fact, one day she called to inform me that she had run an unscientific study of whether an average consultant could make an independent living. She took into account not only how much she made one evening at a party, but the cost in time to prepare for the party, the costs to mail all the packages out, the mailing, taxes, and so on. She then took one issue of the quarterly magazine where all the earnings are displayed of all active consultants and did a preliminary assessment. She added up all the earnings, took out the high and low numbers, and found a median, which she felt in some ways was not as satisfactory as she would have liked. Her interest in my research opened many doors that otherwise may not

have been available, such as meeting her recruiter, a long time consultant for Love Dreams. Her recruiter gave me access to information about what the company was like prior to the change, prior to using a centralized website, and prior to even James Piazzollo coming aboard as president. These insights were invaluable because coming into the company during the policy change did not give me much first-hand information about the company as it used to be.

### *Interview Analysis*

Unsure of what I data I was gathering, I honed in on the process of labor control through a doctoral course on issue of women and work and particularly the work of Arlie Hochschild, and Robin Leidner. My advisor at the time helped me further identify that I would be looking at the culture of the organization and how the women understood the policy change. I still used interviews to look at the beliefs and attitudes of the consultants. Each interview was either transcribed<sup>43</sup> by myself, an undergraduate research assistant, or a professional transcriber. The empirical evidence was then imported into the data management program MAXqda. Once in the program the data were coded paying attention to patterns and reoccurring themes. Twenty-six main codes emerged from in-vivo coding and using an inductive approach, please refer to Appendix C for the main (re-occurring) codes that emerged and their descriptions. Inductive analysis allowed for

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<sup>43</sup> A short note on reporting of the empirical evidence is offered here. All first and last names of individuals in this thesis have been changed according to the agreement. While the name of the company was changed, the Kinsey Institute was not changed. In writing up the analysis at time the first name of an individual is used, at times the full name, and other times, a formal name (such as using Mr., Mrs., or Dr.) is employed. All of these choices were made to keep consistent with how the individuals themselves refer to each other. A further analysis of the choices that individuals make in naming is offered in the conclusions. As this is a qualitative analysis, direct quotes from individuals are incorporated. Whenever possible, the quotes are directly taken from interviews, field notes, and printed/online materials. For clarity, and because no value was lost in the analysis, the quotes were often written without conversational utterances such as “um,” “you know,” and “like.”

the discovery of “patterns, themes, and categories” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). For example, one reoccurring theme came from the overt passion and deference the women had for Linda Patters. The emotion was devotional, and some described their attachment to her as “love.” I found this remarkable, that an employer even one that you could not know very well or very intimately, could elicit such strong feelings of love and respect. From the symbolic interactionist view, the consultant first acted towards Linda based on the meaning they had for her, which in this case is the strong emotion of love. Secondly, this meaning arose from the consultant’s interactions with Linda, but also the consultant’s interactions with other consultants and her own recruits. And thirdly, this attachment was based purely on the internal meanings she had interpreted for Linda.

As Patton notes (2002) this process called “open coding” is taken from Strauss and Corbin (1998). Codes emerged across the transcriptions and descriptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Though originally the codebook was quite large with many different themes emerging, the final codebook used for this project was highly focused on how the evidence related to the research question which was *how do women make meaning of their work identity through their resistance, acceptance, and negotiation to labor control practice?* I analyzed convergent and divergent moments in the data. That is, the data shows some pattern and relatedness amongst the patterns and then contrast between patterns or *categories* (Bryman, 2006).

### *Participant Observation*

When I was present at training and other Love Dreams functions I made a point to be as inconspicuous as possible. Since these were mostly trainings, it did not seem odd

that I was writing things down. I took close care to monitor my behavior, dress and attitude. I wore outfits that were in line with the policy dictates. This was a bit of a challenge for me as my closet had mostly my graduate style clothing of blue jeans and various cotton t-shirts. But I invested in some black dress pants, plain white tops, and discrete sweaters. I carried myself with attention to appearing as if I belonged to the group. However, this was really not difficult since my age and gender were similar to most of the women. I often had the thought that if I were a male, sitting and walking around with these women, that my identity and purpose would have been questioned constantly. This was because there were virtually *no men* at these events. My identity was made clear to the women, but as some of the groups were large, it was impossible to inform all the women at all times. I did get clearance from the corporate offices however, as was required by the institutional review board. My experience was consistent with the statement that “in the initial stages of an ethnographic study, all ethnographers have a difficult time figuring out *what* to write down, or what to write about” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 13). And it took several months to locate where I would place my attention in this research process. In speaking with the women, it was clear that I had significantly more education and life opportunities than many of them. I had a stable marriage, no history of drug or alcohol or physical abuse, I had attended a major university in the United States, my parents were still married, and my child was not taking any medication for behavioral problems. Yet, I never felt that I could not relate to the women. As an activist for over ten years in the Michigan prison system, I had had a lot of experience training my behavior and attitudes to be opening and respectful. I knew that these women were vibrant, and that their stories were rich and important. And the

experiences they were undergoing with Love Dreams was valuable and worthy of investigation. For their part, the women were always very affectionate and welcoming of me. Though, at times, as I have mentioned elsewhere, I often questioned if this was solely due to their good nature or whether I was being perceived as a potential recruit.

For each participant observation, three levels of observation occurred: descriptive observation, focused observation, and selective observation. According to Angrosino (2005) descriptive observation records the details of the event, or “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). This process of *description* (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) creates “a portrayal of the soul and heart of a group, community, organization, or culture” (p. 17). Focused observation will consider exactly how the training sessions occurred, the culture, events, language, and movements that are employed by the subjects. Finally, my selective observation emphasizes the issue of the policy change and how subjects make meaning of the issue as well as challenges and solutions to various problems. Field notes were written and recorded using a framework of considering audience (who were the participants being studied), style (what is the nature of the location), place (where is the location), and format (what is the nature of the meeting or gathering) (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

I did not transfer all of my ethnographic field notes to MAXqda for coding, though that was one option that I had thought about. Rather, I used Lofland’s structure of activities to identify themes. Still an inductive approach Lofland & Lofland (1984) suggest that rather than looking at specific codes, one should identify “acts” and the activities and settings around these acts. This can then localize patterns of how individuals participate in a setting. In the case of this work, the patterns evolved into

institutional structures that affect the professionalization of the women. These larger structures (stemming from the patterns that evolved) then had meaning for the consultants.

### **The Framework: Emerging Domains**

Early on in the ethnographic study, the issue of labor control was called out as a measure of interest by myself and other advisors. As a direct selling organization that is highly decentralized the control of the workforce is difficult and seemingly impossible. However, the two most powerful domains that emerged from observing and speaking with the women were that of how gender and sexuality were constructed to facilitate the acquiescence of the female labor force. These two domains are not discrete, but provide a powerful consideration for how the female labor force in a highly decentralized working environment will consent to be controlled, or how they resist, and make sense of those actions. They reacted with, to, and on the domains in order to make meaning of their own identities. The layered symbols then interacted within the context of labor control. The two domains that came up again and again were the culture of motherhood (gender) and the medicalization of sexuality (sex) as areas that acted and interacted to control and monitor the women.

The domain of motherhood as a gendered aspect of labor control provides the context of worker consent. This sphere of mutual understanding and meaning has a potential of various possible outcomes on the worker; one of these outcomes which I noticed was how the medicalization of female sexuality and sexual pleasure contributed to the overall control of the labor force. The women then negotiated these boundaries via

their relationship to the company, to their recruiter and their recruits, to their families, to the product itself, and to the general public. These processes of identity making ultimately informs the body of literature on labor control and women in the labor market.

Finally, though Burawoy (1973) calls attention to considering other aspects of coercion, his model of manufactured consent does not adequately address what went on in *Love Dreams*. Only by looking at the culture of the company and how it perpetuated a specific vision of appropriate gender relations and sexual expressions did a more thorough explanation begin to emerge. In order to examine how a company uses the cultural artifacts of employees' lives, I could not adopt Burawoy's concept of manufacturing consent completely, because this organization is not involved in manufacturing and different forms of labor control enabled the management practices. So in order to capture what was going on, I created the concept of cultural shilling.

By cultural artifacts, I mean the aspects of a culture that make up one's identity. These could include large social structures such as education, the law, and so on or they could be more personal structures such as family and friends. Culture in this sense is the overall tools, actions, and behaviors that define a group's identity or put simply "the idea that certain things in groups are shared or held in common" (Schein, 2004) . Shilling is a term that is inspired by philosopher Herbert Marcuse. As Marcuse predicated in 1964, society has been able to engage in "exploiting ever more efficiently the natural and mental resources, and distributing the benefits of this exploitation on an ever-larger scale" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 144). I extend his meaning to include an ominous warning against using broad socially constructed identities to ensure workers compliance. The term shilling then is the natural extension of this prediction. Just as a shill entices the

participation of others for personal gain, cultural shilling refers to using relevant social structures to entice others to comply, in the case of this thesis, with labor control practices. I argue that the cultural shilling going on in Love Dreams is one that uses contemporary social constructions of family (gender) and education (through sexuality) to get workers to consent to labor control edicts. In sum, Love Dreams enacts cultural shilling to manage their decentralized workforce, and the workers themselves manage their identities within that process.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Labor Control and the Gendered Familial Structure**

Though gender remains a significant aspect of understanding workplace constraints, researchers assert that little attention has been given to how women and employers understand the processes of their mutual relationship (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004). Even less studied in the low-wage literature is how the workplace environment structures are understood. I explore the gendered culture of Love Dreams as a function of cultural shilling. This enabled labor control practices of the consultants. In addition, those consultants made meaning of cultural phenomena to adhere or resist labor control practices.

Language, relations, and behaviors are filtered through the culture of the family, however as I will show later on this family is one that appeals to the nature of the workforce. The family is not the traditional two-parent or even the middle class familial structure, but rather it is replaced with a more relevant structure for both the company and the female employees. Still, the family metaphor becomes a living symbol among the consultants unifying the workforce and minimizing resistance, while capitalizing on normative constructions of gendered roles, acts, and internal identity meaning making.

The female consultants are exposed to various gendered techniques that contribute to the Love Dreams culture.

### **The Family**

“I have to tell you, I have to tell you what my life was like before I met these girls. You have no idea. My family, my real family...no they are not my real family, these women are my real family. But my biological family. They hurt me, it was messed up. And then I had a bad relationship with this guy. And I have to tell you. This guy left me low. It hurt. I was messed up and if it hadn't been for Love Dreams, if it hadn't been for these women I don't know what would have happened to me...[hugging the women next to her, and getting emotional] you all saved my life. This whole thing saved my life. Because I'm young, I'm 19, but I have lived a life. And without this...I can't tell you where I would have ended up. My Love Dreams mom has been more nurturing to me than my own mom. These ladies are better than my own family. [Pointing to the woman next to her] You are my real mom.”(Star, Age 19, Love Dreams Consultant)

Meeting Star in the winter of 2006 was unintended. I had planned to sit quietly at the quarterly market training; this was my second quarterly training and I was still new to the culture of Love Dreams. The event started at 6pm and went until 9pm, but because we were in the midst of winter, the sky had already turned dark. I just wanted to observe the women take in all the latest news and product announcements from corporate headquarters. We were in was a hotel conference room where I doubted that the paneling that separated our group from the adjacent room could contain the whooping and hollering that preceded the introduction of a new bright yellow dildo. The women were always excited when a new product was announced, and tonight was no exception. I bent down to pick up my pen, and when I came back up, the women were conducting a networking exercise at the table. I shrugged inwardly. Oh, no, I can't just sit quietly now! The women looked around the table because we all had to introduce ourselves and exchange business cards. The round table, covered with a crisp white tablecloth, held

water glasses for each of us. I grabbed a glass to drink, when the woman next to me asked me my name, I responded, quickly following up with the information that I was a researcher looking into issues of women and work in Love Dreams. The women immediately responded to me. I was relieved, and each of them started in with fervor about how great the company was. I found this interesting as I had not asked them their opinions of the company, nor any question at all. They enthusiastically launched into their personal experiences with this unconventional work. We chatted for a bit longer until we all returned to the primary exercise.

Any woman affiliated with Love Dreams can attend these quarterly meetings but all are encouraged to attend. The range of consultants in terms of their success was broad: women come to these meetings that are highly successful, have had trouble starting their work, are interested in the work but have not booked any parties, or have had average success. There was usually a mix of new recruits, mid-level workers (that had been around for more than five years), and experienced consultants.

At the end of the three-hour evening, I walked to the back of the room where Star and a few of her acquaintances approached me. When Star spoke, she was emotional. Tears welled up in her eyes, her voice cracking a bit as she held onto the arms of her friends. She felt highly motivated to share her story with me. And her words indicated an unwavering belief in and dedication to this company. I myself felt moved by not only her story, but by the urgency with which she wanted to share her experiences. Clearly her attachment to the company and her co-workers was profound, beyond ordinary work loyalty; she felt she was part of a family, of an emotional social network. Part of my astonishment with Star's speech had to do with the inconsistency of the environment and

her intense emotional expression. We were in a hotel conference room, with starched tablecloths and systematic table placements. We were not in her home, or in any other intimate setting. Yet in this interchange several important occurrences helped to illustrate how the familial tone of Love Dreams works to secure labor control. Star's dialogue invents and constructs her identity in several ways. First she highlights the harmful and oppressive relationship she had with her family and her relationship with her boyfriend. In setting up her story this way, she divulges that her sense of self is in contradiction to pathology, to harm and coercive environments, where she suffered greatly. Love Dreams and her subsequent integration into it acted as a surrogate structure to save her from her dysfunctional life. The women who entered Star's world through Love Dreams gave her life purpose and emotional support. Yet the story that she tells is one that is in relation to both the larger structure of Love Dreams' culture, her friends who stood by her as she told the story, and the enactment of telling me, the researcher, about the Love Dreams' salvation. The move is critical, because it tells a story of pain and redemption through the lens of family. Family here being the unifying agent that provides stability and strength to her chaotic life, and not only does she assert this for herself, but she does in the presence of her friends and their own agreement and physical support. Thus, her meaning is given importance both through her ascribed definitions to family as well as the interactive effects that come from her friends during the monologue. Her friends serve as a reification of her meaning making and a referent to their own place in the position of the overall narrative.

Her "family" is these women who now stand beside her despite her remarkable painful and horrific life. This emotional stability via the lens of family supplants Star's

own biological family, as it courses through her dialogue as a defiant (against her old family) and embracing (towards her new family) act of meaning making.

This highlights an important ambiguity for the Love Dreams' goals. The intimacy of female homosocial gatherings that have traditionally been rooted in the home, or around home activities, is combined with the capitalist venture of selling products (sex toys) and, in addition, educating women publicly about their and other women's private sexual behaviors. However, not only are the spaces problematic where such interactions occur, the identities of the women gathered are also interesting intersections of gendered dynamics. Yet the cultural domain that unites these sometimes contradictory forces is the use of the "family" metaphor. And for the women, as it is for Star, self identity of both private and public are integrated through the company's traditions and culture. The process is not static, it is fluid and makes and remakes individual consciousnesses, yet contains these processes within the overall locus of the family metaphor.

The use of family values in direct selling organizations is not new (Biggart, 1989). Nevertheless it is important to note this cultural aspect of the company because it lays the foundation for understanding how women are influenced in the company. By using family, this aspect of labor control meets the definition of an organization engaged in cultural shilling; acting out of emotional attachment and loyalty replaces more overt forms of control and coercion. For the women, this new family in Love Dreams becomes the bedrock of their lives and how they manage their identities. Scholars have agreed that gender constructions are important ways to understand how labor is controlled (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1993; Lee, 2002) and have examined how using social and gendered identity ensures worker compliance with employer regulations, (e.g. the

“natural feminine” abilities of women to perform particular roles in their workplaces). The labor market, even one that primarily functions in the living rooms across the United States is not as “neutral or innocent” (Lee, 2002).

More importantly, using the metaphor of the family is a powerful regulatory tool for organizations that lack formal structural frameworks. Scholars have noted that the metaphor of the family has strong and commanding control mechanisms and “is often used to suggest normative consensus, unity, integration and harmony in social relations... ‘family’ has both symbolic and literal significance” (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003, p. 1463). Family is one of the primary socializing agents of the individual. It is also an important buttress of identity meaning-making, as the self is filtered through generational stories and traditions, as well as contemporary relations and customs. The loyalty to family ensures that the consultants adhere to acceptable family practices.

In *Love Dreams*, the metaphor of the family extends beyond traditional family business literature that has been grounded in functionalist paradigms (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003), moving towards a critical approach to gender issues and interactions between employees and the corporate office heads (Linda Patters and James Piazzollo). In this sense, family is a highly constructed process. Yet, the process is not one-sided. The consultants derive meaning from *Love Dreams*’ family, and contribute meaning to it. In other words, the women do not come to *Love Dreams* *tabla rasa*. They come with their own histories of what family has meant and what they want it mean. For the consultant, such as Star, family is created and enforced through the relationships and actions of the women around her. Star understands that family should be loving, and supportive, not like her biological family of pain and dysfunction. Family in this new supportive way

hooks in a sense of loyalty beyond conventional labor controls. By making meaning of family in opposition to pain and dysfunction, Star transforms the meaning of family into a savior-like process that emotionally controls and ensures her devotion to the family, and especially to Love Dreams. I term this, *asserting meaning through the negation of pathology*. In other words, by defining the positive by what its inverse, an individual does not *deny* the importance of the overall structure (in this case the structure of the family) but is able to use the power of the structure to supplant meaning that is desirable and significant. The bad family of Star's biological reality is exchanged for the good family of Love Dreams; but by incorporating the *same* metaphor of the family, the power of the new family is intensified. By asserting meaning through the negation of pathology, a deeply emotional connection is forged. Many consultants had a similar story to Star's such as this story:

I: Why did you get involved with Love Dreams?

R: (Crying) I had huge debts from an abusive marriage....worked two jobs and never got to see my kids. But then I discovered Love Dreams, and now can I give my kids the things they need and, more importantly, my time ....which I couldn't before. Love Dreams has been so wonderful to me . (Ahmie, 38 year old consultant)

This new relationship, as for Star and as for many others, holds the consultant in a strong bond of compliance and gratitude. Love Dreams is the preferred family, the one that provides help, love and support in response to life's abuses. These stories are what the consultants choose to relate their reason for being in Love Dreams, and many of the narratives reflect this highly emotional experiences.

The primary familial agent in this structure for Love Dreams is not a patriarchal one, rather, decidedly matriarchal with Linda Patters in charge of the growing brood of consultants. Linda uses her own pathological negation script, that of her success story, to influence, inspire, and ensure worker submission. The use of the symbol of motherhood, for example, becomes a useful mechanism for unpacking the complex cultural strands of meaning making for the consultants and how the company manages the labor force.

### **Motherhood**

The matriarchal structure of this company is neither ambiguous nor hidden. This sometimes makes distinguishing Love Dreams the company from Linda the person a difficult task, and at times the two (Linda and the company) are equated in informal conversations. Linda Patters and her son James Piazzollo, both as CEO and President of the company, infuse organizational culture with a special familial deference, loyalty, trust and respect. Linda, a fifty-three year old divorced woman, has a youthful but distinctively motherly energetic vibrancy that permeates her interactions with the consultants. She has four biological children: James Piazzollo, thirty-three years old, is President of Love Dreams; Lucas Piazzollo, thirty-one years old, works in marketing for Love Dreams; Patrick Piazzollo is twenty-six and works in the warehouse; and finally the young Andrea Piazzollo is twenty-five and works as a consultant as well as some office work for Love Dreams. Linda is the progenitor of not only her four biological children (all of whom work for her), but also of this successful multi-million dollar company. Family is vitally important to Linda, and she makes a point to reinforce this throughout her interactions with the women. She refers to her business as a “family business” and strives to instill the values of loyalty, dedication, and emotional attachment for her consultants.



She makes her consultants feel like they are part of a family by using the following techniques: (1) familial language: creating a culture that is infused with family lingo that can then be translated through consultant's identities to the company, external business community, and other social communities; (2) socialization: by teaching them via this family model and thus promoting a culture of a legitimacy for the consultants and potential consultants, and (3) unification: by instituting an image of a stronghold family that is cohesive and non-challenging. Each of these aspects contributes to a work culture that does not tolerate resistance from consultants and ensures consent of labor policy practices. Below I discuss each in turn.

### **Familial Language**

First, in presenting her business to the public, the script of a family business resonates with middle-class values of striving businesses. Companies often use the phrase "family owned and operated" to elicit trust from customers as the expression connotes honesty and loyalty to the customer. One interesting way this is done is through Linda's use of her personal success story. Her story is primarily told through the lens of a striving mother, looking for a little extra out of life. She does not, by contrast, shape the story to be one of a young business woman looking to make a dramatic shift in her life. Her roots as a maternal caregiver are clearly highlighted. This story, like Star's, is infused with the negation of pathology script. The intolerable situation is negated or replaced with the liberatory introduction of the evolution of Love Dreams. In return, the way the consultants make meaning of Linda's script helps strengthen their loyalty to her. Linda's story is widely told on the website, in promotional materials, and often invoked at market trainings.

As mentioned, she began the business as a mother of four, wanting to provide some extra income for her family. However, her husband at that time told her that she would never make anything of herself, she would amount to nothing. The story continues with Linda divorcing her husband, and years later the ex-husband asking Linda for a job; which she smugly and triumphantly gives him. As Linda tells it:

In 1983 I was on maternity leave from my job at a pediatrician's office, home one day with my four kids. I was an average middle class housewife, happy and busy enough. My three boys were outside playing in the backyard, and my new baby daughter was napping inside the house with me when I happened to flip on the TV. Phil Donahue was interviewing a couple of women about their new, sideline careers, which were making such a difference in their lives. They spoke about how empowering it was to sell their products to women and how these items seemed to be boosting women's self esteem and strengthening their relationships.

As I paid more attention, I began to understand that these very normal looking ladies were throwing Tupperware-style parties for their friends, where they would present an array of items for women and men that could be used to enhance sexual pleasure—they were selling lubricants, vibrators and other toys! I couldn't believe my ears. And aside from the provocative subject matter, what really got my attention was how confident and self assured these women sounded. I called the company and ordered a Starter Kit for becoming a sales consultant, just to see what was included.

When my husband came home from work that night, I told him all about the show and how I was going to make lots of money with this new business. He looked at me like I was crazy and said, "No wife of mine is going to do this sort of thing. You must still have the Baby Blues or something. You better cancel that order." I tried to explain that I really wanted to give this a try— not to mention that it was the perfect solution to finding more quality time with my kids and making money. "And besides," I said, "I made a commitment and I'm going to do this."

Despite my husband's lack of support, I was determined to go through with my plan. But once my products arrived, I got nervous all over again. What if no one showed up at the party? How was I going to justify all the money I'd spent? So again, I picked up the phone and called more women I knew in the community. [By the time of the party] the house was packed and everyone had a blast. And I knew I was onto something— something very special indeed.

That was over twenty-five years ago. My husband and I went our separate ways, and like many women today, I am a woman who wears at least three hats—as a mother, business woman, and sex educator. As a mother, I have raised four children to be knowledgeable, confident, and respectful of their sexuality. As a businesswoman, I founded Love Dreams, Inc., creating hundreds of sex-enhancing products that respond to women’s and men’s needs, netting over \$80 million dollars in sales. And finally, as a sex educator, I have spent twenty-five years listening to women and answering their questions about sex. Through my network of party consultants and our dynamic website, I have created a safe, trustworthy place for women of all ages and from all walks of life to air their fears, disclose confusion, and find reliable, accurate information that has the power to transform their lives.

The story elicits from the consultants wonder, laughter, and inspiration. Gone is the 1950’s mythological two-parent home in this narrative; in its place is Linda with her now grown-up son at her side, leading the industry in selling adult sexual aids. Linda’s story is one of a self-made woman who despite a non-supportive husband created a multi-million dollar company for women to feel empowered about their sexuality and their work. Linda’s personal story is one that is told and re-told, and its power seems to radiate through each consultant’s heart. Her perseverance as a divorced mother of four in an industry both dominated by males and tainted by a stigma of moral corruption captivates the consultants. In interviews with the women, many tell of their awe and admiration of how Linda had built the company from nothing, and raised four children while doing so. One consultant responded when asked “How do you feel about Linda”:

“Oh, she’s the cutest little bundle of anything. She is. Her whole story on how she started out divorced, single mother with her four kids. Started this business out of the basement of her home just to make a living. There were days or months or weeks she couldn’t pay the people that were working with her and helping her out. In 15 years, which is incredible, she took this little basement of her home operation and made it a success. She has at least one of her ex-husbands who work for her and she not only has

made a good living, she's reached out to offer this opportunity to other women to help them be financially independent, to feel good about themselves, to be able to provide for their family. And she's now schmoozing with the stars, doing parties for movie stars, being on TV, nationally known, going to the different colleges for sex week to teach them, starting up the Linda Patters Foundation, giving back not just to the consultants but to communities in general. It's absolutely amazing and she is still such a real person." (Megan, 37 year old consultant)

The awe and respect for Linda in the above quote was typical for the women. She begins her response with an affectionate tone and defining Linda as someone who though physically small of stature and "cute" eventually went on to build a successful company. In this way, Megan tells a story of relatedness. She shapes the narrative by showing how Linda struggled and failed. Many of the women I spoke with have struggled to make ends meet, and have failed at times in meeting the demands of their lives so this story of struggle and eking out a living is familiar for the women. But Linda, described as cute in the beginning, now becomes a heroic figure for Megan. She's not only made money and employed so many people including her ex-husband—which provides a unique and powerful role reversal—Linda now socializes with celebrities and teaches at major universities around the country; a decidedly more national view of the potential of this industry. The transformation that Megan paints is one filled with awe and inspiration and carries with it a tone of respect and admiration. She ends by saying that even with the many accomplishments Linda is still "a real person" indicating a bridge and link between herself and Linda. Megan indicates her high esteem for Linda, but at the same time Megan is not distant from Linda and feels close and connected to her. She defines her own identity within the context and in relation to Linda's own personal story, and in this way creates an identity that is overpowered by the primary narrative of Linda's

extraordinary success. However, the reality is that only a small handful of women are truly close to Linda. And an even smaller cadre, her biological family, is allowed to penetrate her inner sphere. This interesting point of identity making for Megan is typical. Megan enters into the discourse of Linda's success story and reveres it, thus both simultaneously linking herself to the story and ensuring her loyalty to Linda. Megan makes meaning of her identity by re-telling the story in a local and global way, attaching meanings not only from the internalized family reworking (and transformation to a matriarchal structure) but also placing her own work and Linda's in the context of a national identity. Thus, she makes sense of her work *to* and *from* the larger social contexts permeating U.S. culture. This is an important distinction in that it extends Megan's relationship with Linda and Love Dreams both at the fundamental emotional level of the family as well as the larger social structures of U.S. culture and ideology. Thus she derives meaning from larger social structures and gives meaning to them within the context of her own professional identity. This move decidedly links her to Love Dreams and aids to ensure her own compliance to Linda's policies and procedures. Megan's story is typical; most women I had a chance to observe or speak with mimicked these same sentiments.

Linda's efforts to utilize her personal story to inspire, connect, and attract workers is not unique to Love Dreams. This process is an important aspect of organizational culture and has been referred to as *myth making* (Boje, Fedor, & Rowland, 1982). In this way, the power of the myth provides the needed structure for Megan and other consultants to be managed by Love Dreams. Scholars point out that

In general, we hold myths to be social attempts to “manage” certain problematic aspects of modern organizations through definitions of truth and rational purpose. This process of “management” results in a composite of standard operating procedures and organizational characteristics” (Boje, Fedor, & Rowland, 1982, p. 18).

The story is one of hardship and overcoming obstacles to “pull oneself up by the bootstraps” and work hard to succeed. The American bootstrap myth is one that is profusely incorporated into the American psyche and legitimizes the presence of unwanted social elements. This has been seen in the immigration literature in the United States, with immigrants adopting the mantra of “hard work pays off and anyone can succeed in America” while the realities of race, class, gender, and immigration status serve to complicate this dominant paradigm. Nevertheless, it is a powerful myth that Linda has used to further legitimize her potentially immoral product, i.e. sex toys. The dominant mother creates the space for a thriving company and by extension successful workers whose own identities are effected and translated via this narrative. By linking her personal trials and tribulations to the success of the company, Linda etches a space in the consciousness of the consultants (and by extention the national culture) of acceptance and legitimization of her product. And for the consultant, the incorporation of multiple levels of meaning making, including here the introduction of the larger U.S. cultural framework solidify the meaning they attribute to their own work and work decisions. The symbol of her as the mother is one that is familiar and easy to access, and carves out the arroyos of national identity making within the internalized professional identity of the worker. Thus, she melts away distinctions of private behavior (the family) and public behavior (consumerism) within the identities of the consultants. The consultants fuse private vs.

public into a new internalized identity that is both validating to their inner sense of who they are, and how they present themselves to the external world.

Within this topic of language, the consultants themselves utilize and re-enforce the matriarchal control structures by employing the use of family language in relating to each other. The downline is a formal process that enables women to come on board to the company, but it also serves as a regulative force. Though officially called recruits, the women refer to each other in this system as mother, daughter, grandmother, and granddaughter; the language is both gendered and filial. So if a consultant recruits another woman, she refers to her as her daughter. Her daughter's recruits then become her grandchildren. Usually the references stop there, but I did hear on occasion a worker/consultant speaking about her "great-grandmother." The importance of *belonging* saturated the consciousness of the worker. By creating an extended family beyond even the typical bounded structure (extending to great-grandmothers and great-grandchildren), the consultant manifests her identity as an extension with and among others, yet she internalizes this paradigm of the family so acutely that all relations become of value, even those that have no direct monetary attachment. That is to say, being someone's daughter or mother has direct implications for how the workers relate to each other as they interdependently construct their identities to each other, but also because they are dependent in some ways on each other's financial success. However, to be someone's great-grandmother or great-granddaughter has no financial significance and is only a tool to link to a larger social network lineage. Movements to create these lineages within the company show the power of the metaphor of the family both as a regulatory system of internal and external realities. This also contributes to the familial control within these

smaller family units, apart from the larger collective of Love Dreams. In this way, the discrete downlines of family units are able to control their decentralized workforce via the family discourse.

Such constructed ‘families’ get together at the bequest of the original mother, at times, as well; the women meet for monthly trainings, get-togethers, celebrations of life events (birthdays, etc), or sometimes just to hang out. In this way, the consultants draw upon both their own meanings of family, in this case of the matriarchal lineage of family to perpetuate and reify the control structures with highly emotional language. They construct a social reality that gives a highly personalized meaning to their work, and thus defines compliance as a matter of the heart, rather than a mechanism of bodily jurisdiction. The process of identity meaning making thus integrates work and family in a complex process of personal, emotional, and labor practices.

Linda herself commented on the phenomena of the family language as a tool employed by consultants to feel more comfortable in the business and with others:

Linda: I think some of the girls have just picked up the slang term my mom...and it's really when you get right down to it, it's not really a mom. We don't define that in your training guide as a mom. It's more like "Oh, this is my mom. She brought me on board." I think that's a comfort zone with your recruiter. It's kind of like these are my kids. It's not defined in our training guide. So it's not recognized.

I: Well, that's interesting.

Linda: Kind of something they do.

I: They seem to like that....

Linda: Yeah, they do. They really do. Instead of saying "I'm going to go to my supervisor's meeting or I'm going to go to my recruiter's house" they would say "I'm going to my mom's", you know. This is somebody



who is training them, guiding them through the business. What I have witnessed is people who really have a lot of respect for who has brought them on board and who has guided them through, their girls will pick up that terminology. They will pick up that little term. But it's nowhere written in our training manuals, *mom*.

These comments echo the broad sentiment throughout the company. Respect is inherent in the mother role: you honor and respect your mom. As a biological mother nurtures and raises her children, so do the recruiters nurture and raise their “daughters” along the path of Love Dreams. This informal control mechanism filtered through the very strong image of the mother helps the women to feel bonded with one another and the larger Love Dreams community. This family of sex aid consultants helps to support and nurture the overall organization. Women in this family, then, are more willing to extend their definition of work beyond conventional expectations. They do not ask “how am I being compensated for dealing with my recruits’ emotional upheavals?” Pamela and others are willing to engage in this emotional labor, yet it is driven by their desire to increase their bottom line in terms of money *as well as* the personal fulfillment in helping women to succeed. In this way, the picture here is vastly complicated with the various permutations of meaning-making and how the women make those decisions about which of their recruits to help and which to leave by the wayside. How much of their energy do they offer to their downline versus how much they are receiving in return. The overall state is also not purely altruistic, as we must remember that the consultant receives both monthly percentages of these sales as well as bonus checks from the Love Dreams corporate offices at the end of the year. Yet in other direct selling organizations, traditionally those that are all male, this type of emotional work is not tolerated (Bone, 2006), and as such

this project elucidates the importance of understanding how gender is used as a control mechanism. For the women, invoking the language of “motherhood” thus functions as a powerful control mechanism, one that they are likely to continue to obey.

### **Socialization**

Secondly, this metaphor of motherhood and family helps to socialize the women as workers of Love Dreams through ongoing training programs. As the female figure, the mother who trains and legitimizes, Linda Patters promotes the efforts to define this work as a safe and legitimate job opportunity for the consultants and potential consultants. For Cindy a 43 year old consultant, the ethic of the company was crucial in her choosing Love Dreams “It’s one of the reasons I joined with Love Dreams versus another sex toy company I was thinking about joining. This one seemed more professional to me.” One way that Love Dreams works to legitimize the work, via family structures, is through their training programs. The programs are carefully constructed to re-enforce desired behaviors. Below is a descriptive chart of the various trainings that occur in Love Dreams. “Type of training” refers to where the trainings occur and the scope of the training, such as a local training (market) or a more national event such as a convention. “Occurrence” refers to how often the training occurs, whether once a month or once a year. “Activities accomplished” refers to what information is distributed during this training session. Finally, “aspects of family culture” refers to how the training event uses familial traditions and relations to condition worker compliance by appealing to emotional attachments.

**Table 4.1 Chart of Worker-Training Activities with Aspects of Family Culture**

<b>Type of Training</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Activities Accomplished</b>	<b>Aspects of Family Culture</b>
Home trainings by consultant's recruiters	Once a month (or more or less)	Informal sessions usually held at the home of the recruiter for consultants who live near them. During these sessions, the consultant trains her recruits on various topics such as taxes, new products, and so on. Or it can just be an informal supportive gathering.	Setting is in a home or living room often. Celebrate holidays, birthdays. Women support each other with emotional issues such as problem with children and biological families.
Market Training	Quarterly	Women are trained about new products, new opportunities, policies, hostess coaching, sexual health. Women can learn how to network, new techniques on how to sell products, and find out about corporate plans.	Re-enforcement of family language such as "mother, daughter, granddaughter."
Annual Training	Annually	The major (and required) training event for all consultants. This is a three-day event where consultants attend intensive workshops on how to run your own business, taxes, inspirational techniques, how to sell products, how to sell difficult products, how to recruit, new product announcements and health education projects.	Re-enforcement of family language such as "mother, daughter, granddaughter."  Language of family and model of Linda as matriarch reinforced.  Women spend time informally having fun, and sharing.
Convention	Annually	Although convention is really about celebrating the women's work throughout the years, recently they added a few workshops introducing trends and new products.	Moments where women can join deeper levels of company, rites of passage.  Shopping event similar to Christmas day.

LD University	In Cincinnati and Online Various times	Modules of how to improve business: getting started, how to make money, finding business, hostess coaching, product knowledge, holding party, finding bookings, processing orders.	Rites of passage that enable women to take on more responsibility.
Online trainings	Various times	Online trainings and forums that pick topics relevant to the women's business and gives online support for women with difficult questions (clients, products, sexual dysfunction questions), and so on.	At times, real time conversations/chats keeping in touch with.

This table illustrates that the meetings are infused with a personal and emotional timbre. Most of these trainings are required for the consultants to remain in good standing with the company. Remaining in good standing is important for the consultants to guarantee a positive relationship with Love Dreams, emotionally and monetarily. In addition to attending the trainings, consultants must make a minimum purchase of product for a specific time period to remain in good standing. If either of these is not met, the consultant will revert to the status of “inactive”. Becoming inactive results in the forfeiture of benefits, including buying discounts, free products, use of the website to manage their business and sell products, convention credit allocations, and credit card processing. In addition the women recruited in a worker/consultant's downline will “roll up” to the recruiter. Therefore, a worker/consultant technically loses all their downline to their initial recruiter. If a worker/consultant reactivates, they do not have their downline reinstated. In this way, the sanctions are a significant loss of status and place in the structure of the company. If a consultant decides to come back she must work hard again to create a new downline. Because the sanctions are geared in this way, more towards

losing one's place within the context of other women (i.e. the recruiter of a downline), rather than having to pay fines or other sanctions, the company maintains its informal holds on the women. The loss to the woman is perceived to be too great; her *connection* with other women, and her status in the company would all be jeopardized. Her place in the family of Love Dreams is tantamount to losing rank in a birth line. By forfeiting your metaphorical space in the lineage of the company, you vacate the protective space of the family. Thus, the ties, emotional and financial, are profound; their loss severe. As Darla a 38 puts it, "sometimes I just purchase a product to remain in good standing, even if I haven't done a show in a while. I don't want to lose my line with Love Dreams. I don't want to be forgotten."

These are important issues for the women in this company, and have more strength over regulating behavior than sanctions in more formalized organizations. For example, in another more formal firm, a worker might suffer an infraction of some kind leading to loss of pay, or perhaps a leave of absence, yet these are structural sanctions that cannot have an effect in the direct selling market. Hence, even how the women are formally sanctioned is within the framework of social and intimate ties. The control here, then, is a potentiality of social death, a loss of place in the overall heritage of the Love Dreams familial company.

The trainings themselves are structured in within the framework of a matriarchal familial culture. For example, training events are hosted by "Linda and James." They work as a team and present a united face to the consultants. The fact that they want themselves referred to by their first names demonstrates not only "family" but familiarity and intimacy with the consultants. There is a particular formula enacted by Linda and

James for the consultants during these trainings. For annual and convention events an elaborate stage is set-up. The stage positions the mother and son team center stage, the audience of 1000 to 2000 consultants is sitting in rows facing them directly. Two huge video screens approximately 24 feet tall stand on either side of the stage. They project in larger scale the stage activity. Music is pumped in through the sound system, and there is always an upbeat hip-hop song playing throughout the room. James is often dressed in a sharp dark suit with pink or other brightly colored tie. Linda is equally smartly dressed, in beautiful dresses and suits that compliment her son's appearance. Once they get on stage the women in the audience begin to express their excitement for seeing James and Linda. Both James and Linda have microphones on, and they often begin by complimenting the consultants, and saying how wonderful it is to be here. It often takes a few minutes for the crowd to settle down so they can hear Linda and James begin the presentation. This show for the women is meant to make the consultants feel special, as if they are part of an exceptional group, one of love, loyalty, and even prestige. The feel is kindred to a family reunion, rather than a convention.

During the time they are on stage, the two exchange playful banter back and forth. The language between Linda and James is at times slightly acerbic, but usually only from Linda to her son. Rarely does James address his mother with sarcasm onstage; he most often shows deference to his mother. This is in contrast with their private one-on-one interviews, where each one only speaks with the greatest respect for the other. Therefore, the function of the mother/son presentation on stage is one that draws the women in with warmth, energy, and laughter into the culture of Love Dreams. The message given is that the company is an inviting place to work and that the leaders of Love Dreams hold the

family to be important and vital to success. Although the presentation is similar to a typical convention style set-up, the reaction by the women is more akin to a family reunion. Linda and James refer to women by their first names, they show clips and pictures from past trips with the women, and recent gatherings. The language they use is highly personal and nurturing when they share stories of how the company is progressing and what new events are on the horizon. The public displays show the consultants that *a family is running the company* and that the women get to participate in the family dynamic. In this way, they use privacy and intimacy as tools to make the workers/consultants feel they are part of the company. This attunes the emotional attachment that the women have for James and Linda. The question remains as to whether these are purposefully creating an emotional bond with the female workers to exploit their work or whether James and Linda feel genuine sentiment for the women.

The women participate in these programs with re-enforcements of their own work identity. By participating in the training sessions, they do get important information about products, new directions, and suggestions for how to sell products. However, trainings are not neutral. They are laden with values of meaning and control, and all are permeated with the symbol of the family (see Figure 4.1). In this way, the worker must reconcile the externalities of the trainings with her own internalized sense of self and constant working and re-working of her own identity via these trainings. The family as the primary socializing agent teaches and informs and regulates. These training sessions achieve the same cultural effects of a biological family, though all geared towards worker compliance. The consultant manages these multiple levels of trainings and by attending and participating also begins to be socialized into the new system of belief contained by

Love Dreams. Love Dreams becomes the sphere of cultural enactment and the women in this bounded system therefore negotiate, re-invent and apply these new trainings into their own work and lives. The women in turn apply these new identities to others in their efforts to help train the next group of women coming up. By incorporating and then enacting these trainings languages and cultures the women exist in a multi-faceted process of meaning-making. For example, during one training, a consultant spoke up about what to do when a party is booked but only two or three women show up. Do you spend the time and effort doing your hour presentation for so few women? The responses from other consultants were clear:

This is a family and we take care of each and work to present ourselves to others with the highest decency and respect. Yes it sucks when you don't have a party of at least five women, but you can turn this around and do the party anyway, turn it around. Maybe you won't do all the games you would normally do, but you should be professional and welcoming. (Iris, 39 years old, 2008 training)

The consultant demonstrates that she herself has incorporated the training language into her own identity, and is able to train others. She has been socialized into the Love Dreams family and in turn becomes a socializing force for other women. But the way in which this is done is important. The use of the family symbol as a unifying and regulatory action that characterizes the work as more than just economic, it is a *responsibility*. This emotional work to frame the work both as an internalized professional status and the external movement to present oneself as a respectful individual accomplishes the private identification of self with the public presentation of others. These processes flower from the seeds of Linda and James' trainings, into the identity of the individual as professional, family-orientated, and loyal.



## Unification

Most salient to this thesis is that a family culture provides enough space within the company for individual worker/consultants to be individualistically successful while at the same time adhering to Love Dreams' policies. It is Linda's role as mother that unifies the consultants while enabling them to be independently successful. And this is carefully enacted through Linda's nurturing and supporting. Consultants have understood the cues coming from Linda and her family suggesting that the matriarchal structure is the one that best suits the needs of the company and the needs of the individual consultants:

I: People just used Linda's name as a substitute for....

James: Mom.

I: People love her...

James: It's funny because you are exactly right. They use her as...the authoritative figure...that's why I say, when it's coming from Linda, it's like, "*Okay mom* [emphasis mine]."

For Linda, this familial structure reflects an important culture that she infuses into the company: one of family loyalty, trust, and responsiveness. For example, trust is an invaluable asset in such an organization. One of the main reasons she brought her son into the company business, was because she felt she simply could not trust anyone else to handle the operational aspect of the company. This respect and trust for the family is contagious from the corporate level down through the consultants. Yet constructing the business around the metaphor of the family has some serious hidden consequences. For example, being part of the Love Dreams family creates personal and internal feelings of

loyalty and belonging. This is a powerful regulative control mechanism<sup>44</sup>. Yet as Ainsworth and Cox (2003) point out in their analysis of Kerfoot and Knights' (1993) work on organizational management a family paradigm simulates

typically patriarchal, family-like relations where power is exercised for the “good” of the recipient and where the tensions associated with hierarchical and sexual inequality may be eased. And as consequences, those exercising managerial prerogative may feel more comfortable and employees may be more compliant. (Ainsworth and Cox, 2003, p. 1465).

Thus, in *Love Dreams*, using the model of a family business and then inserting the cultural tendrils throughout the company's policies aims to regulate the behavior of the women, yet it is done in such a way that allows the women employees to feel more connected emotionally to Linda and James, rather than more distant. And it also allows Linda and James to feel as if they are part of a loving group/family rather than acknowledgement their part in potentially exploiting the labor of the consultants. This discourse between employer and employee is complex. They mutually try to control and re-invent each others' identities. The workers hope to feel more connected and “part of” the group and the employers gain greater capacity of their workforces' labor. Yet from both sides, they authentically hope to be a part of each others' “family” and enjoy the emotional benefits of that relationship.

For Linda's part, she recognizes her power over the women. She takes time to personally hug them at trainings, and takes pictures with them when she can, much like their own personal family portraits. When asked about how she feels being the role model for so many women, Linda replied:

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<sup>44</sup> Feelings, or emotions has been addressed by Arlie Hochschild and mentioned elsewhere as a labor control mechanism.

“It is a huge responsibility. Anything that I do, I always think about the people that I could disappoint. That’s why I did three days of extensive training because I would never want to do anything where they [the female consultants] would be disappointed. I respect them as much as they respect me. It works equally. I get just as excited. They are my extended family. When somebody is sick, if there is a problem in one’s family, we’re there. I see to it that I am the matriarch of our family. I see to it if there are problems, you will work through it. These are your siblings. I have a very strong based family. I treat my girls the same way I treat my family. I think that because I respect them, they respect me. People can see fake. They know fake because I can. So, therefore, I just always want to show them respect and love and that I care and want to be there. I think if anything ever happened where I needed them that they would be here just like that. I think they also know that comes right back at them.”

This response indicates an important framing for Linda. There is no mention of the effect of productivity, costs, money, or the like. She openly states that she is the “matriarch of our family” and calls the consultants her “girls.” She is the mother always there for her children, and responsive to their needs.

These examples all show that family ties and emotional bonds are the unifying guide of the company. They are what unite the whole group. The culture that Linda describes is potentially affirming and positive for the consultants; many have found in Linda and Love Dreams a community of caring, loving, dedicated and loyal women. A drawback to her approach can be seen in how women resist policies and programs. This will be further developed below. Yet, the problems of having a family framework imposed on this type of company are apparent. The consultant, whose identity no longer is in line with the Love Dreams model due to her hyper-sexuality, becomes the pariah, or in keeping with the family metaphor, such consultants become the black sheep of the company; outcasts of the family’s wishes and regulatory needs. They are no longer allowed to sell the products or continue their business in the ways that feel most natural

to them, and thus must conform or experience the social death of having to leave the family. These consequences extend beyond normative functionalist studies of organizational control that are concerned primarily with the performance (or function) of the firm. Rather this can be used to see how control constructs identities of the workers to generate meaning.

This responsibility to the family, to the girls, is not simply a wonderful edict that inspires. But it is the model by which Linda hopes other women will emulate and re-enact in their own business. This is best seen with how women understand the extent of their work to other consultants. When I attended the national convention in Las Vegas in 2007, the top recruiter took home an additional \$800 check a month as a bonus for having the largest downline. The downline for these women, however, is not just a way to get more money. It also means more responsibility, caretaking, nurturing, and deciphering of roles. Women who have large numbers of recruits must attend to their needs some of which can extend beyond work. At times, recruiters must deal with highly emotional life issues and provide counseling and support on life areas such as divorce, money, and children. For others, this new responsibility deepens their connection to the work, reifies their connection to Linda, and provides another opportunity for identity meaning making. For Pamela, the work she does as a recruiter is meaningful to her in a purely emotional way:

“I have to think about how I’m going to do this for the girls, and what can I do for the girls today and who can I help today. Instead of waking up each day thinking what about me, what about me, what about me? What am I going to do? How big is my show? And am I going to get the trophy? It’s just more exciting to me now and it really especially apparent this last convention. It was great to get an award but I was just getting goose bumps up and down when one of my daughters would win or one of my granddaughters would achieve... And to see them achieve the Board

of Directors and the Advisory Boards which is an elite group of girls that really work hard at their business...it's just so exciting to see their business blossom.”

Pamela here speaks about her role as a top recruiter and how she views the work. She is fiercely dedicated to the women, much in the same way that is illustrated with Linda's narrative. Her achievements are wonderful for her, but more important are the successes of her “children.” This language is motherly and selfless. By focusing her attention on the needs of her recruits rather than herself, she clearly captures the mother-like quality of caring and nurturing. And the labor she does in effect unifies her entire downline with her vision which is in turn aligned with corporate dictates. But it is pride she feels. She does not mention that these are policies handed down from Linda. Her reaction is personal. She takes pride in the achievements of her “daughters and granddaughters.” And more importantly, she is filled with fulfillment when one of her children matures into an independent success. However, what we see here is a unique departure from conventional work management and recruitment strategies, and one that involves not just mentoring the consultant on how to improve their work and functions as a Love Dreams consultant, but also how to function as a human being. In contradiction to conventional work arrangements where emotional lives are to be kept at home and not enter the workplace, these issues are common currency with the Love Dreams consultants. On one hand, this may be a fulfilling and rewarding aspect of how the consultants engage their identity and make meaning of their work, i.e. the work is more than just about helping women sell sex toys but it is about uplifting a group of women with many structural and emotional

barriers to entering the workforce. And this betterment all works for the one purpose of unifying the decentralized workforce and enabling labor control.

For Pamela, she feels the enrichment of counseling and uplifting women by providing them with resources and opportunities to manage their lives so that they can get to work. On the other hand, Pamela's work may be an exploitation of her work as extending into the "emotional work" that Hochschild warned against. This work is traditionally not compensated with economic gains. The incredible efforts of managing various life problems, economic hardships, and other emotional upheavals of the female consultants is decidedly not in the handbook, but nevertheless the work is implied to not only be important *but necessary* to the functioning of such a business. Even though Pamela never exhibited the alienation of Hochschild's flight attendants and in recounting her life to me it was clear that she had benefitted greatly from the stability of the company, she still must engage in highly gendered caretaking work. The meaning she ascribes to this work is couched in terms of responsibility and pride, all language of familial based effort. The dilemma remains as to understanding the impact of the emotional work that many of the consultants do in order to recruit women.

This nuanced labor control practice is further seen in some of the formal control mechanisms. In response to problematic consultants who overstep their bounds either by not showing up for a party, or showing up drunk, or some other potential unprofessional behavior, Love Dreams has instituted a 1-800 number so that a customer can contact the company. At times this number is used by customers for complaints about a product or a worker/consultant, or if they seek answers to various questions. However, James added that much like a parent, you cannot watch over every worker/consultant at all times:

You can't monitor . . . the only thing you can monitor is – and I don't think it would be monitor – it's *setting the example* like we did with our top consultants and saying "Listen, guys. You got to change up your stuff. You got to change up the way you are talking. You can brush up against that line but I don't want you to cross over that line." Some people can get away with stepping a couple of feet of that line but not really offend anybody. We try to tell our trainers "Listen, whatever you do at your party, that's fine as far as how you deliver it. We're asking you when you train people, you train them our way. This is the way you train them. We want you to follow our guidelines when you are out there doing your party and you follow our guidelines because you don't know what potential people that are going to sign up underneath you or under that or you're going to offend in that time frame." *So, it's not more monitoring. I think it's educating them.* You are not there to be vulgar. You're not there to talk about your own experiences. [emphasis mine]

James reiterates several times that the corporate offices do not hover. First, James gives the image of a *parent* and *setting the example* for the women, thereby legitimating the use of the family metaphor to further labor control practices. And inherent in this structure is the acceptance of managing not only women's work as it directly relates to Love Dreams, but also potentially their emotional lives. Thus the structure of the mechanism of control is mostly through these informal ties with your family, that is, your mother (your recruiter) and your sisters and children. If things get too out of control you may receive a call from either Linda or James, who are both considered by the women to be strict and loving. One consultant mentioned that she had done something that had resulted in Linda calling her personally to reprimand her. Though she did not divulge the act, she did mention that she felt great guilt over having taken time from Linda's busy schedule for a reprimand. She felt ashamed and vowed to change her behavior. There were no formal punishments that resulted in less pay, or some disciplinary action affecting her job, but simply the call of disappointment shored up her practices. Those interactions, filtered through the lens of motherhood, remain a powerful regulatory force. And this force is

mediated through scripts of “being successful” in the company. The extension of the labor control practices reach into the psyches of women who want to succeed in this company. And success is a complex notion: it involves making money, becoming more invested in the company, climbing up the ladder of the various clubs and memberships, and recruiting heavily. But within each of these ways to be more successful, the consultant must negotiate the vagaries of the work, part of which is negotiating multiple emotional states of clients and recruits, and gendered constructions of labor control via the family metaphor point directly to the internalization of the control policies.

For example, in speaking with the James about the policy change affecting language and dress, he summed up the rationale as follows:

I think it was twofold. Linda always wanted to transform this industry and take it from the CD bookstore and the back of the magazine type of feel to this, you know, kind of more upscale, more “Hey, I’m going to answer your questions”, I was you, I also want to help women with financial freedom. That was always the kind of norm with our company. As the company really went through an explosion of growth from 2000 to 2004, we really started seeing we lost some consistency with how Linda’s message was understood...She wanted to keep it educational and entertaining but not entertaining by four letter words and not entertaining by derogatory comments. Nothing like that. Her biggest thing was education and entertainment but entertainment on a very quality level, almost a PG-13 type of environment even though you’re sitting there . . . most people go “How do you have PG-13 with this product category?” But Linda could go all the way up to that line but not cross it and that’s the same thing she was looking for from the consultants.

Interestingly, James uses the term “PG-13” to describe how a consultant should consider presenting their sex toy party scripts. The Motion Picture Association of America film rating of PG-13 was propelled into existence by angry parents over unsuitable material for their family. This rating warns parents that “theme, violence, nudity, sensuality,



language, and adult activities<sup>45</sup>” may be inappropriate for children under the age of thirteen. What James asserts seems almost impossible, that is to walk the line of material that is appropriate for the sensibility of (at least) a fourteen year old in demonstrating vibrators, dildos, and other seemingly X-rated products. Paradoxically, though sex is used by many vendors to sell their products, Love Dreams cannot use overt sexual descriptions to sell sex toys. However, despite the success of this approach, what is significant here is the *effort* to achieve this boundary. James, as president, suggests in some way the infantilization and de-sexualizing of the product, in order for a more mainstream middle-class morality. This important move to adhere to middle-class morality is touted by James as *the way* for women to gain access to an underserved population and thus the worker/consultants will be able to make more profits (in turn Love Dreams will make more money). Just as movie producers and directors edit their products to reach a wider audience, Love Dreams as well attempts to sanitize sex for a PG-13 rating, and acquiring a larger share of the buying public.

The growth of the Love Dreams and its increasing profits drive James to extend this model. James continues:

The dress code...we were growing and opening new markets, we were getting women that might have had more of an hourly job where they were *waitresses, bar tender service, that type of industry. Where they could wear whatever they wanted.* They weren't really used to running and owning and operating their own business. So what happened was they were wearing what they thought was proper attire to go do a party. They were wearing what they would consider they would go out and work in. Linda was like “Listen, you are a business owner. You own and operate your own business. You are in front of people. *You are not only a business owner but an educator at the same time.* You are an educator, business owner and entertainer all in that one night. Think about when you see

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<sup>45</sup> [www.mpa.org](http://www.mpa.org)

people perform or you see people educate. Are you going to want to be educated by someone that is wearing *blue jeans and a cut-off shirt?*”

Before it wasn't mandatory. She just assumed people would wear what they were supposed to wear. Be smart enough to wear business attire. It says it in the Love Dreams' handbook. It says it in all the different training tools that we give but it was never “enforced”. *Well, Linda enforced it like real quick.* [Emphases mine]

This section of his story perfectly demonstrates how he and Linda were willing to help the women learn how to dress, talk, and behave. He notes that the women resonated with the language of entrepreneurship. And the image James creates of the consultants moves from comparing her to a waitress to an independent business owner. This in effect is the exact move that Love Dreams wishes for the worker/consultants to take. His tone is one of almost a loving father, lecturing his adolescent child on how to succeed during the transition to independence. In the retelling of Linda's approach to controlling her work force, the style of a loving yet stern parent continues:

Linda got on the phone with all her top consultants, her board of directors...all the top consultants that were actually training. Got them all on the phone and had about 200, 300 women on that phone call that day and said “Listen, ladies. Things are changing. Here's what's going to happen. You own and operate your business. The people underneath you own and operate their business. I want them to act like business women. They're going to start dressing like business women. They're going to start talking like business women. At the end of the day I'm not into quantity. I'm into quality. If you want to be in this, you're going to be a quality consultant for me.” So from that time it flipped the script on everybody. Our next meeting was 1 month after that phone call and you would have thought . . . everybody showed up and they had their best stuff. They were looking good. I mean women were going out to Dress Barn, Fashion Bug to wherever. We deal with a lot of rural areas that don't have a Nordstrom, a Macy. Or they might have a small little outlet like not even a JC Penney. That's how small the markets in these places are. They were going to local places to make sure when Linda came into town or whatever we enforced it and if you're not dressed up we politely ask you to leave the meeting. People kind of got the message at that point that she was going to do it. So we really enforced it not only through

Linda's top consultants driving it, making sure everybody knew, through her series of e-mails, through her series of conference calls because Linda not only did a big conference call to the company that she wanted things to change. It was more of a peer pressure change and that's kind of how she really . . . that's how we did it. We don't have stores so it's very tough to enforce these types of policies.

As James mentions above, most of the enforcement of this policy was done through "peer pressure" which is shaped by the milieu of motherhood. The mother educates the child. Yet in this case the structure of this education is interesting. Linda operates and disseminates information through two hundred to three hundred (out of over ten thousand) of the top female consultants in Love Dreams. As such, this type of control does not comply with conventional labor practices. The top down control filters then from Linda to the top women and then along down through the various levels of worker/consultants. The information and policy change began first to be enforced at the market trainings, where small groups of women gathered quarterly to hear the latest information from Love Dreams. It was in these smaller meetings that dissent was dealt with, not with Linda herself nor with the corporate offices. Resistance to the policy is subsumed at the lower levels and therefore Linda's edict never has to be challenged by Linda herself. She operates through the top 200-300 women who are already highly invested in the company, and have put in countless hours, money, and resources into building their businesses. But, not only this, but they are all emotionally connected to her via the culture of family and motherhood. These intersections of functionalism (i.e. the notion that this business and its labor practices are designed only to maximize profits) coincide with a feminist critique that demands attention to the nuances of how gender operates. This is not just a story of a totalitarian leader arbitrarily dictating her policies

and dehumanizing and oppressing a workforce, it is a complex interweaving of identities, associations, and meaning making that ultimately creates and re-creates a new professionalized class of women workers.

### **Dissent and Resistance in the Culture of Motherhood**

Often in family run businesses, the metaphor of the family is used to legitimize the organization and unify the workers (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003). Yet the use of unifying the organization using this cultural hegemonic tool is problematic. In *Love Dreams*, women were not given the option of not adopting this new policy. The edict to professionalize the women was given down through the process listed above, and filtered through a small cadre of top women in the company. When the word finally spread throughout the ranks of the worker/consultants there was little room for dissent and resistance. As pointed out by scholars:

Family-business research has not diverged from its functionalist and managerialist origins to explore the potential contribution of other research perspectives and paradigms...the current lack of diversity is reflected in research on culture ...[the research] focusing on cultural unity and integration has left family-business research largely unable to ‘see’ employees, let alone include their perspectives, responses and resistance to organization control or their role in enacting culture” (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003, p. 1480).

In looking at how workers resisted the labor control practices, we can better understand how the worker/consultants make meaning of their work identity and their abilities to rationalize acquiescence or how they enact resistance. Resistance is an important concept to illustrate as its presence indicates the nature of the labor control practices and how the workers make sense of those labor control practices (Smith, 2002).

I argue that looking at resistance from a gendered perspective, rather than only a functionalist perspective,<sup>46</sup> provides new insights into how women working in direct selling organizations understand the worker/employer relationship and how they make meaning of their own identity within that dialectic.

In an interesting move, James Piazollo remarks that the women who exhibited resistance were ones that were only concerned with their own welfare and could not see the larger picture that he and Linda Patters were attempting to create. He states:

I think most of the resistance came from, not the top consultants, not the bottom consultants; it was more the mid level consultants that have been here for awhile. "I don't understand why we're doing this now all of a sudden. We've been running our business for a couple of years now and everything is fine." The kind of stuff that I thought would end up happening. But, they adopted the change. They did. It was not easy though. Nobody likes change. Everybody wants to continually stay in the same thing and Linda was not afraid of shaking it up at the time. She's like "Listen, I don't care. If they want to leave, there are multiple companies out there they can go sell for. I want people who are going to adopt the change and say 'You know what I understand it's for the betterment of the company.'" The people that didn't want to change was a "me, me, me" syndrome. "You're hurting me. You're hurting my business. Why are you doing this to me? Me, me, me." It wasn't thinking about the good of the company, about the people that are getting ready to come on, the down lines, your team...So, that was the biggest backlash.

This quote is particularly interesting. He frames the dissenters as childlike, using words such as "me, me, me" which is reminiscent of the developmental stage of a toddler. In this way, he infantilizes their concerns and their identities. This is a powerful framing of resistance, at once acknowledging and dismissing its import. In this one quote, he delineates the boundaries of acceptable behavior that involves being part of the Love

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<sup>46</sup> Labor control has a *function* to ensure higher profitability, it is rational.

Dreams family. He considers “the good of the company” but fails to recognize the independent value and worth of the women who had built the company using their own model of business and sexuality, even though *that is exactly the spirit* of entrepreneurship Love Dreams wants to instill in its worker/consultants. In the end, this argument squares soundly with the functionalist critique that such labor control practices exist to ensure the economic success of the company and the growth of business for each of the individual consultants.

Yet the women who had used the techniques of “non-professionalism,” or the ones being regarded as hyper-sexualized, were not just working using an uninformed “natural” sexuality. These women were indeed also professional, and considered their work to have the marks of professionalism as well. That is, their work was informed, practiced, replicated, and enacted in order to procure successful purchases from their clients. They fully took on the name *consultant* and integrated their sexuality into the selling of the products. These women did resist the policy change. I was able to see this at the first market training I attended in 2005, in a small hotel right off of a major highway in southeast Michigan. There were approximately seventy women in the room that evening, and we all gathered in a small conference room. I had been told by my key informant to dress appropriately and so I put on a pair of black slacks, a white top, and black dress shoes. This was quite a departure from my usual dress of blue jeans and sweaters with sneakers. The trainers (who were part of the top 200-300 sellers in Love Dreams) were discussing and formalizing the process by which women would appear as representatives of the company. One woman who sat in the second row in the aisle seat stood up and was quite angry with the new policy. She maintained that this new policy

was going to kill her business. Part of the reason she had seen such success in this company was because her dress and language were sexually provocative and she could use the words “cunt” and “dick” whenever she pleased. She believed that this display of sexuality (what the company referred to as hyper-sexuality) during the party was the key to her business. She claimed that she used her sexuality, her experiences, her successes and failures, to engender trust with her clients. Her voice boomed, and the emotional intensity of her words shot through the room. Clearly her identity was the externalization of her internal sexualized identity, and she had no qualms about using her private identity to infiltrate her public selling. In this way, this worker transcended the boundaries issued by Love Dreams and formulated a fluid identity of sexuality, work, and economic gain.

Upon hearing the frustration from the consultant, a few women seated near the first woman all agreed and began a small uproar. Women started to get up out of their seats, and the intensity of outbursts in the room rose. The younger recruits, who were mostly sitting near me (all new people were sitting together as a result of a previous exercise), sat in silence. Finally the older consultants, the two trainers, spoke. They reiterated that this was a non-negotiable policy issued from the corporate level. They explained that this was part of a larger plan to help the company grow, and each individual consultant’s business as well. These words did nothing to calm the fervor from the dissenters. In order to gain control, and bring everyone back to the same page, a long-time consultant asserted that these were Linda’s decisions, and that “if we all didn’t like it, then we could get out.”

There was a shocking silence in the room at this point, and it was clear that even amongst the hegemonic familial feel of the company, authoritarian dictate ultimately

could be enacted to control the labor force. The type of resistance, referred to “overt resistance” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) exhibited in the above example clearly met with little discussion or consideration of the dynamic and diverse definitions of professionalism and how to best sell the product. The rhetoric was compelling, this was done in order to improve profits for the company and for the women, to extend their presence in the public eye, to legitimize their work into more main-stream women’s living rooms (and in their psyches), and to extend Linda’s vision of improving women’s sexual health lives. Her vision narrowly focused then on this particular manifestation of professionalism, and there was no room for open disagreement. The women could accept this, or they could leave the company. And though I had heard that some women did leave the company, there was certainly no discernable exodus that affected the overall financial solvency of the company. For these women, the importance of invoking Linda’s name declares a solid act of internalized power structure, and the ability to act in this way assumes the power and authoritarian strength of Linda’s dictates. The control is highly personal, but externalized forcefully.

The obvious externalizations are a particular form of resistance that illustrates how workers understand compliance and opposition. Most literature that considers resistance is limited in its understanding of how workers make sense of their consent to labor practice dictates. By looking more deeply into Love Dreams, I argue that the lens of gender (in this case a familial gendered structure) illuminates important considerations of worker identity meaning-making. My findings suggest that resistance is not limited to outward, externalized acts of displeasure. But at times, resistance is a subtle reworking and redefining of an internalized labor control practice.



Women have shown resistance to Love Dreams policies in various ways other than simply arguing against them (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Although some of their displays are not directly about the professionalization policy, they do indicate that women express resistance. One way in which the women showed resistance was not by protesting a policy, but by continuously questioning it from different angles. I saw this several times throughout the larger training sessions. This tactic was used by the women to express their disapproval of particular edicts. When these events occurred they were met by the trainer (or if it was James or Linda) with frustration. At first, the question was answered, but then after it was repeated, they would re-state the answer. This would go on sometimes for 10 minutes, until James would say “you just don’t agree with this, but this is the way it is.” This type of resistance, referred to as “target defined resistance” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) is where the actor resists but may or may not be consciously aware of their resistance, yet the act is recognized as resistance by the target, in this case James Piazzollo.

Women also resisted new policies by holding up meetings or trainings with their “negativity.” For example, at the end of a long training day, one worker consultant asked Linda Patters about the policy to not incorporate women of advanced age on the brochures and other marketing materials. The worker/consultant went on to explain her displeasure of not seeing Love Dreams as an all inclusive organization that marketed to women “of all ages, races, and sizes.” Her clients, like herself, were older women, and might be offended by the lack of representation in the marketing materials. In response to this, the woman was perceived by Linda to be “negative” and Linda then stated out loud to the entire 1200 women gathered “Are we going to have to go through this all again?”

In this way, Linda infantilized and silenced the women using her matriarchal tone to convey disgust and frustration with the consultant. The consultant sat down quickly, and never asked another question again for the entire three-day training session.

Finally, women also crossed the line of what Linda and James would consider acceptable dress and behavior. In discussing acceptable dress and behavior with the worker/consultants themselves a clear picture emerged. Women would refer to this in the following ways: women calling other consultants who exhibited high resistance “trailer trash,” including women who “wore Hustler t-shirts,” exposed tattoos on their breasts or lower back, or who spoke about the products and the human body with crass and colloquial language. Yet some of these “trailer trash” consultants still conducted parties. During one party I attended, I noticed the female consultant dress in a revealing top (see-through) and also share with the women gathered some of her personal sexual stories in order to illustrate the power of the particular product she was holding up. The outfit was not obscene, there were no large amounts of cleavage showing, nor “Hustler” printed on her clothes, but she clearly was not dressed in slacks and a nice top as described by Love Dreams. However, she looked like nice. More dressed to go out to an evening at the club or a party, rather than business professional. I asked her about this later and she admitted that at times “Linda might not approve of all the outfits I have...but don’t tell her!” So the women do find ways to insert their individuality and resist the policies. “Covert resistance” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) as illustrated here allows for the consultant to resist without the target (here Linda) knowing.

What is notable with these examples though, is that the resistance is not directly arguing with Linda Patters or James Piazollo. They are passive-aggressive techniques that

are in some ways the only mechanisms by which the worker can resist. These are important considerations in understanding how the worker makes meaning of their identity. They all refer to themselves as consultants, and they advertise themselves as such, even to the extent of calling themselves “sexual aid enhancement consultants” and not “sex toy sellers.” In this way, the women are able to maintain their status and sense of belonging in the family of Love Dreams while realizing that direct confrontation with Linda and James will result in failure, they can enact their identities within their own circumstances and work processes.

### **Summary**

Motherhood is a compelling and powerful living metaphor for these women. Not only does it control behavior, but from its cultural package the sanctity of sexuality of the mother is also an easily identifiable image. A mother can teach you about sex, but a good mother would never appear sluttish or un-motherly. By referring to Linda as mother, and your recruiter as your mother, the word and symbol combine to affirm within the consultant the structure of compliance and social desirability. Sex toys can be okay. You can be okay selling them as a respectable woman, not involved in un-family behavior. The reification of middle-class ideology and family ideals is never confronted, but augmented by the new presentation of sexuality. What is lost is the professional identity of the female worker who values the primal sexuality, and her agency is negated and repulsed; not only her own sense of identity, but a larger community of older women (not present in the room but present in the social sphere) who are neglected and silenced. There is little room for variance of sexual identity in this model. I argued that the reasons for this are functionalist: they enact these labor practices to ensure the financial success

of the company. However, there are other more nuanced explanations that are not simply defined by functionalism: Adding a gendered critique extends the literature and theoretical base to consider how new identities are constructed, resisted, and agreed to.

By employing both formal and informal cultural cues of behavior that mimic the family structure the women easily fold into the company's structure. Outward aggressive resistance is quickly squelched in this model, though the women find other ways to assert their displeasure with the policies. In the next chapter, I turn attention to how labor control is managed less from a structural point of view as with the cultural institution of family and motherhood, but from the medicalization of female pleasure.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Labor Control and Medicalizing Sexuality**

In Chapter 4, I showed how a hegemonic culture of motherhood buttressed labor control policies. Institutional culture reflected family roles for the female consultants, which gave them a familiar comfortable structure to begin their work at Love Dreams. Women understood the language of family, respect, love and devotion as both an internalized identity process by which they enacted external behaviors. This demeanor suffused the structure of Love Dreams both in informal language practices and in formalized celebrations. The family of Love Dreams socialized consultants. Resistance was managed strictly as a top-down approach, and though some women tried to express their dissent in a direct manner, women also used other means to maintain their independence from Love Dreams. Still, the highly regulated use of gender alone does not account for the women's consent to labor control practices.

It is important to note that though a family can be a key socializing force in the life of an individual, another important social structure is that of education. The structure of how an individual learns can teach important lessons in how to think, behave, and believe (Kozol, 1990). Students in educational settings are taught what is acceptable to learn. They learn how to treat other individuals: they learn to respect some and disparage

others. They can also learn to privilege one form of knowledge over others, and is another example of cultural shilling. Love Dreams also uses the socializing agent of education through the mechanism of teaching about sexuality in order to control their labor force.

Love Dreams is a company that is explicitly interested in selling sexual aid products. In wanting to address the need for a different, “more classy<sup>47</sup>” approach to sexuality they chose to endorse a highly constructed definition of sexuality and sexual practices. Thus it is useful to explore how constructions of female sexuality furthered labor control practices. For Love Dreams, the choice was made in 2004-2005 to formalize a working relationship with the renowned Alfred Kinsey Institute from the University of Indiana. As seen in chapter one, the Institute has a distinguished and somewhat controversial history in its approach to studying sexuality in the United States. By becoming involved with the Kinsey Institute, Love Dreams linked their business identity with a large scientific research entity. In this effort, Love Dreams aimed to place sex and sexuality firmly within a public health biomedical model. The company touts this relationship as a benefit for consultants who receive training by the leading experts and researchers in the field of sexuality.

Yet the relationship between Kinsey and Love Dreams points to some problematic concerns for the consultants who must negotiate their own work identity as a result of the infusion of information from Kinsey’s research. The insertion of knowledge generated through Kinsey (which has been aiming to increase sexual health via a public

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<sup>47</sup> This was a term that was used by almost every consultant that I had a chance to speak with. What they did was “classy” versus how other sexual products were sold, which was “in the backalleyways.”

health model) leaves no room for the consultants to use their personal experiences and sexuality to enliven their business. At the same time, however, this relationship can become a powerful tool that empowers the workforce by improving their own knowledge with quality research. Moreover, the relationship with Kinsey provides new tools for Love Dreams to ensure worker compliance. Examining this relationship and its effect on the consultants provides an added dimension of labor control theory.

As Love Dreams made a fundamental move to validate their work as a health issue, they began to funnel funds to Kinsey. With money given to the Kinsey Institute, the fledging Center for Sexual Health Promotion (a group subset within the Kinsey Institute and hereafter used interchangeably with Kinsey Institute) congealed into a stronger center with staff, students, and faculty. In order to continue their relationship with the Kinsey Institute, and more specifically the Center for Sexual Health Promotion, Love Dreams had to be careful about how funds were managed and distributed so that the research coming from Kinsey would not appear to be biased. Both Love Dreams and Kinsey wanted to have research results that were rigorous, valid, and unbiased, not mired with special interest money. In response, Love Dreams created a non-for-profit foundation called the Linda Patters Foundation. This foundation functions financially independent from Love Dreams. According to Love Dreams' sexual health on-staff educator (who herself graduated with an affiliation to the Kinsey Institute):

“the focus of the foundation is to fund accurate and good research which is why they partnered with Kinsey, but then from that research to develop educational tools to educate women and their healthcare providers on how to improve sexuality, treatment for sexual issues, awareness of things like pain, vaginal pain, that type of stuff so it's really a unique foundation. There's nothing like it.”

By creating the Linda Patters Foundation, Love Dreams disentangled them directly from funding mechanisms for Kinsey's Center for Sexual Health Promotion. Yet even though "The Linda Patters Foundation" receives no *official* funding stream from Love Dreams, all consultants are encouraged to make their charitable contributions to its philanthropic mission. There are no formal edicts telling the women they have to contribute, but the informal mechanism ensures that women comply. For example, the Foundation has begun to distribute especially designed jewelry for women who donate to the cause. The women wear these pieces of jewelry both as proponents of sexual health, but also the women impose and are imposed upon by these small material objects. The top sellers in the company, for example, all don these items, and that is not lost upon the women. Having a necklace or bracelet also indicates your status as "part of the group" that aligns with Linda and her wishes. This symbolic unity (Goetzmann, 2001) creates interesting regulatory actions for Love Dreams, as it unites the workforce in compliance under a *symbol* of a cause, and also it validates their identity as an individual who is linked with a major research institution and the seriousness of a public health issue.

The engagement with the Kinsey Institute is not an ambivalent one for Love Dreams. They have embraced whole-heartedly the research, science, and credibility of Kinsey's resources and reputation. One of Kinsey's directives is to research and report on public health sexuality. One direction they have explored for sexual health intervention are the non-traditional health care sites, such as adult retail stores (Herbenick & Reece, 2007). In such locations, such as the parties of Love Dreams, individuals (potential consumers) come with questions about their sexual needs and Kinsey views these as



opportunities to meet individuals' needs with quality research. For this and sexual health interventions, Kinsey has a clear intention of working with Love Dreams to improve the sexual health practices of the consumers of Love Dreams' products. By improving the quality of sexual aid products that Love Dreams can provide and the service of a knowledgeable consultant workforce, Kinsey hopes to make the parties a site for sexual health intervention. Yet unforeseen consequences arise by viewing female sexuality within the template of a biomedical model (Tiefer L. , 2000). These implications will further discussed in this chapter.

The Kinsey Institute and Love Dreams have worked together to actively create a new industry identity. They both have a desire to transform sex and sexuality into an openly public health issue, but one that focuses on the sexual health of individuals. The aim is not only to educate the consultants, but by educating them to extend their national identity and presence. In this way, the identity of the individual consultant is inexorably linked to a national public consciousness. For Love Dreams, by addressing some of the real issues and problems that women face such as an inability to achieve orgasm or painful vaginal intercourse, they hope to be the leader in providing solutions for women's intimate needs. For the Kinsey Institute, the novelty of interjecting sexual health education in the parties that women attend is an exciting and potentially important intervention site. In some ways their project is a political one, and not simply the personal one that they espouse in their documents; they wish to alter the landscape of female sexuality into a more socially acceptable and integrated part of American life. Still, their "new" vision of female sexuality necessarily creates boundaries of "old" visions of sexuality, and thereby will exclude and include various definitions according to their own

wishes. Moreover this contentious re-invention is primarily played out within the worker identity of the consultant. The consultant's ability to make real the external Kinsey research into her own internal work identity and then reproduce it to another external audience (other recruits, potential clients, family and friends and so on) becomes the work of the consultant to manage.

The possibilities of the Love Dreams/Kinsey collaboration are innovative and problematic. Innovative in that the Kinsey Institute is able to gather information about female sexual health and dysfunction in an unprecedented way. Tens of thousands of women attend Love Dreams parties every year, and the ability to gather data from these women is invaluable. These data attend to the more sophisticated and accurate detailing of sexual practices and behaviors of women. However, though Kinsey offers an invaluable tool for researchers of sexual health, and more specifically female sexual health, the potential for pathologizing female sexuality also increases. By addressing sexual health problems as their locus of intervention, sex may be unintentionally interpreted as a biological issue, and therefore they can train the consultants to address the sexual issues of the clients with "just the right lubricant" or "just the right sexual heightener." This creates an ambivalence that for the most part is ignored between the two institutions; and that omission contributes to the powerful regulatory forces upon the consultants. The silence ensures the women of the "correct" way to do sex, or to speak about sexual activity. Omission and lack of open debate among the consultants tacitly implies that the public health model is incontrovertible. Power in this sense from Love Dreams corporate offices to the consultants and from the Kinsey Institute to the consultants is not equal. Dissent then becomes the potential threat to continued inclusion

with Love Dreams and access to Kinsey's information. These openly unstated power structures leave little room for negotiation of sexual identities within the corporate model. These processes are managed and negotiated through the consultants via four mechanisms: (1) the language of deference; (2) Training and Education; (3) Dominating and Negotiating Space, and (4) Re-framing Pleasure: Boundary making in Female Sexuality.

### **The Language of Deference**

CEO Linda Patters and President James Piazzollo speak very highly of their relationship with key research faculty at Kinsey Institute. Their affection is reciprocated as well from the Institute faculty. They each have professional goals that this relationship meets; however, there also appears to be an authentic appreciation for each other's goals and work. The alliance from a functionalist standpoint makes sense, Love Dreams can benefit from the legitimizing force of a connection with Kinsey, and Kinsey can partner with Love Dreams to conduct current research on issues of sexual health.

At all of the large training sessions including national conventions in Las Vegas, Nevada (2007 and 2008) and annual trainings in Cincinnati, Ohio (2006 and 2007) I attended, a faculty member from the Kinsey Institute was on hand to help describe and decipher the various new products for the female consultants. At one annual training event, when Linda introduced Dr. Smithson to the stage the entire audience of 1200 women erupted in loud applause. Women were enthusiastic, respectful, and grateful for the presence of a scientifically backed Kinsey representative. Even when the event ended, Dr. Smithson was swarmed by consultants seeking answers to various questions both

they and their clients had. This overwhelming deference was unequivocal and unchallenged. This was in part due to the fact that most of the women in Love Dreams had little or no formal education beyond high school, and viewed Kinsey with a respect that was uncompromising. The women believed that their association with the Kinsey Institute would uplift them and their work; but their discourses lacked a greater capacity to understand the various implications of who was to be left out of this new partnership.

One consultant put it clearly when she noted that:

Even just the name, the Kinsey Institute, it's the leading research facility in sexual health. They lead the way. Ms. Smithson, she's been to so many of our annual trainings and stuff and talking and teaching us and telling us some of the research they're doing and how these toys work and so we can pass this information onto them [customers]. It carries a validity to it. When you just say "Well, this is what this toy is. This is how you use it and this is what you do with it" ...it's not as powerful as when you say "We have researchers from the Kinsey Institute. Here's a proper way to use the toy and here is the goal of this particular toy." This adds validity to your business. Especially in this industry being able to have upstanding names to put behind your products and proper usage and cleaning and caring. It adds a bit more professionalism to it. Things like where Linda has been on television. The fact that we have radio advertisements, TV commercials out there where it's getting to be . . . it's not "shhhh." Our work is a little bit more legitimate with people that can back us. That we've got these names. You've heard of these names. They are common names. People are like "Oh, yeah. Okay." It's not *Debbie does Dallas* or *whatever .com* or something disgusting like that. (Megan, 37 year old consultant).

This quote is useful in noting that the consultants view the Kinsey Institute as a legitimizing factor, and invoking their name during work links their identity with notoriety. Her identity is placed within the context of Kinsey's identity and thus they now possess a shared mutuality of intent. In addition, Megan links Kinsey's efforts and her own to Linda's attempts to publicize the company through the larger market (radio,

television and so on). This process of how an individual places their identity and meaning-making within a larger context has been understood as their *world-view* (Young, 2004). Women here are limited by their lack of opportunities and education and thus quickly adopt the world-view that individuals from a highly acclaimed research institute know the best way to talk about sex and sexuality. Although this can certainly be beneficial, and clearly important information is imparted to the consumers via the consultants, the information is pointedly monolithic in its interpretation of sex, i.e. privileging the medicalized model (Tiefer, 2000). Yet, the world view here is mediated through a complex exchange of multiple players. And in each instance she adopts a new level of intermixed meanings, first from the Kinsey Institute, then as a seller of products, and finally as a part of Linda's overall plan to validate the work to a nationwide audience. In the end, Megan uses each of these narratives to promote her own sense of self, and to differentiate herself from more salacious industries such as the porn (her reference to *Debbie Does Dallas*) and online smut. Thus she accepts and rejects multiple levels of externalized factors to contribute to her internal meaning-making and legitimizing self referential cause.

In addition, the language and appeal of the biomedical privileged model was reinforced throughout the presentation of new sex toys at various events. Most workshops began with Linda and Dr. Smithson introducing the products. This presentation was very humorous. Linda would draw the women in the audience into an excited frenzy, teasing them with the possibilities of what the new products could bring. She would create a feeling of suspense and awe. For example, Linda would peak underneath a cloth covering a large table of new products, saying "Ohhhhhh! Oh my goodness Ladies, You are gonna

LOOOVE this!!” And when the new brightly colored dildo with rotating headers appeared, she would yell in a loud voice announcing the name of the product as if someone had just scored a goal in a soccer match “IT’S RIDIN’ DIRTY!!!!”. The camera would then zoom in on the marooned anal product and project the product onto the large overhead projection screen to the right of the stage. Depending on the event, anywhere from six to ten new products were introduced from stripper poles, to new flavors for lubricants, to new dildos with bright colors for a new spring line. However, after all the women quieted down (somewhat), then Dr. Smithson would speak about the product. At this point, Dr. Smithson would first comment on the product’s appeal to her sexual taste. “Ladies, I love, *absolutely love*, this product.” And the women again would hoot and holler. Again some important contradictions occur here. First, when Linda comes out, she is introduced by her first name, “Linda” not “Mrs. Patters.” Many of the women call her by her first name, or (as we have seen in Chapter 4), “mom.” But when Dr. Smithson appears, she is introduced as “Dr. Smithson” always first. And though at times, some individuals do refer to her by her first name, she is primarily referred to with this respectful title. The admiration is clear:

I have nothing but the most respect for the Kinsey Institute and Dr. Smithson. I mean, she gives us all this information, and its stuff that is important. They do research on this. It’s amazing what they are giving us, yes I respect her. (Clare, 46 year old consultant).

And this is modeled by both Linda Patters (in formal settings) and by her son James Piazzollo who also reveres Dr. Smithson’s expertise.

Yet, as seen above, Dr. Smithson always makes an effort to inform the women of her personal experience with the products. I found this to be very odd for a few reasons.

First, this was clearly an effort on her part to relate to the women. Her role in presenting the products was to inform the women on the health benefits of the toys, not on her sexual practices. Secondly, she is a Ph.D. at a major university and her education, her speech, and her knowledge are present to serve a function, but this personal telling indicated some lack of boundaries on her part. Thirdly, the women of Love Dreams are expressly told never to divulge personal sexual experiences in selling the products, that this is seen as tacky, and more importantly unprofessional. Her speech and her mannerisms are clearly different from Linda's. Her education and life experiences set her widely apart, yet her attempts at bridging that gap read more like an individual entering Bakhtin's carnival world of legitimating transgressions as a form of forming alliances with the oppressed (Langman, 2008; Bakhtin, 1968). That is, the double standard apparent serves a unique function. The women are not allowed to disclose their personal experiences with products, but the highly educated Dr. Smithson can. Smithson, thus, has within her boundaries the ability to transgress because *she belongs* to the world that Love Dreams wants to penetrate. The message to the consultants serves as a regulation of their internal and external behavior. They cannot be part of the world, but they can enter it. To be part of the world, one would need the ability to transgress it without consequences as Dr. Smithson does. The women must negotiate these various transgressions with astute aplomb, and many must integrate the various levels of meanings attributed to the products via their potential clients, friends and family, and their recruits to name few. When Dr. Smithson enters their domain, they must once again attempt to renegotiate their internal strata of behavior with this new information. The work the consultants do to manage their internalized and externalized realities is not minimal, and is often

confronted by various perplexing figures such as Dr. Smithson. The women must rely upon the formalized culture of motherhood to filter the mechanisms of external impressions, so that they adhere to Linda Patters' policies. They can listen to Dr. Smithson and learn from her, but they cannot use her presentation as a guide to their own work identity. The women must then continuously formulate differing externalities based on their particular audiences at the time.

A powerful social regulating mediator, the presentation script, is combined with the encyclopedic information that Dr. Smithson shares with the worker/consultants. She launches into the product's ingredients, potential use, and proper care. For each of the lotions, heighteners or lubricants Dr. Smithson would describe what the ingredients in each of the products had accomplished. For example, alum (which is the same product used to dill cucumbers into pickles and often makes one's mouth pucker when you eat it) is used in a product lightly inserted into the vagina. This product then tightens the vaginal walls and assures women that the sex they experience will resemble virginity. "It's like having sex for the first time again." Table 5.1 illustrates some of the range of the products that are sold through Love Dreams and explained by the Kinsey Institute. For each of these products, then, the Kinsey Institute has included their own sheets that describe what the product is made of, how to use the product, and proper storage. For example, some dildos are made with a silicone based plastic covering. This particular sexual device cannot be stored with other silicone-based toys, or used with a silicone-based lubricant as it will erode the original toy. If placed together the two objects will melt each other. My primary informant in the first year of her business mistakenly stored two silicone vibrating dildos in the same bag and by morning they were both destroyed; she had to re-



order both. Included in every product then, is the information on how to use it, which type of lubricant you should use when purchasing those toys, and also how to store and clean the toy so that bacteria will not grow and thus cause infections for the woman using it. The women are told to study these facts assiduously, and they do with flash cards, hand-out sheets, on-line tutorials. The breadth and depth of the language of communication fills the women with a considerable base of knowledge. Still, the knowledge they receive is fundamentally produced and disseminated through one epistemological framework: the public health model. Sexuality is presented as a series of potential solutions to apparent problems or dysfunctions. This is not to say that women do not suffer tremendously from various sexual difficulties, however, the overwhelming emphasis on this model limits the multi-faceted and ultimately mysterious realm of female sexuality.

The women respond eagerly to this dialectic. The women are excited and titillated by Linda's excitement and fun-filled giddiness with each new product and the information that helps them to better understand the products, how they work, how they should not work, and what to recommend to the potential customers. The women are voracious for the information and their hands shoot into the air. They ask product questions:

“Will the rotating sterling balls in the product come out during sex?”

“How do you clean a set of anal beads once they come out of the rectum?”

“Once I use a dildo will I be dependent on it for orgasm?”

“How do you use this product in the shower?”

They also ask sexual health questions:

“What if the customer complains of vaginal irritation?”

“Can this particular oil improve (eradicate) psoriasis?”

“I have a lady who is in her 80s and never had an orgasm, what product should I recommend?”

And Dr. Smithson continues to explain as much as she can in the time that is given for her part in the presentation. She tells women that yes this product can have some beneficial effects for women who are unable to reach orgasm, or perhaps they should begin foreplay with this candied powder that is powdered all over their partner’s body with a little pink feather. “But,” Dr. Smithson warns. “Be careful if the women are allergic to sugar, or are susceptible to vaginal yeast infections as this product, if inserted vaginally, may irritate some women.

These final admonitions also pepper conversations with the women. They are important and serve the function of regulation the women’s behavior. Dr. Smithson’s use of the knowledge mimics the urgency of the public health model here. By *warning* the women in this way (and this is done often) the women begin to adopt this language of urgency and fear. Which in turn keeps them eager for the latest sexual knowledge that they can then take to their consumers; and though this seems for the most part to be an amazing contribution to female sexual health, it potentially inserts the world of fear and paranoia. And fear of transgression (Foucault, 1978) is a masterful regulating force.

**Table 5.1: Overview of sample of products (Product Description with Product name)**

Foreplay	Beauty	Bath	Massage	Lubricants	Arousal Creams	Performance Enhancers	Vaginal health	Vibrators	Other
Edible flavored powder (Dust Me Pink) \$12.50	Pheromone cologne (Basic Instinct) \$26	Shaving Conditioner (Coochy) \$10.50	Massage Oil with KuKui Nut (Aura) \$12	Water based (Just Like Me) \$14.50	Lip and Nipple Balm (Bosom Buddy) \$12	Relaxant for the gag reflex (Great Head) \$15	Vaginal and bladder muscle tightener (Ben Wa Balls) \$15	Clitoral (7 <sup>th</sup> Heaven, Pump It Up, Sealed with a Kiss, Vibro Pod, Nector Connector, Platinum Pleaser, Body Rocket) \$12-\$39.50	C-Rings (Bulls-Eye, Double Trouble Ring, Family Jewels, Jelly Tool Belt, Lightsaber) \$10-\$49.50
Stripper Pole \$179	Body Mist with pheromones (Kiss) \$18	Bubble Bath (Romance Bubbles) \$12	Heart Shaped Heat Pack (Heart Massager) \$14	Silicone based (Pure Pleasure) \$12	Clitoral Stimulator cream (Ex-T-Cee) \$12	Vaginal wall tightener, alum-based (Like a Virgin) \$16.50	Vaginal Moisturizer relief from dryness (Fresh Start) \$20	Vaginal (Thunder Vibe, Humdinger, Dark Night, Velvet Touch) \$10-\$29.50	Anal (Booty Ease, Ridin' Dirty, Little Gem, Joy Stick) \$9.50-\$19.50
Tickle Whip \$14	Body Shimmer w/pheromones (Glow) \$16	Bath Ball (Pulse Bath Ball) \$14	Hot Wax (Massage Oil Candle) \$34.50	Temperature Changing when rubbed (Sensations) \$12	Clitoral Stimulator (Nym-pho Niagra) \$18	Long-lasting penile erection cream (Time in a Bottle) \$10	Vaginal Dilator Set (same name) \$75	G-Spot (G-Money, H2Oproof Chubby G, Buzz, G-Wiz) \$21-\$49.50	Male Stimulators (BJ Betty, Super Stretch Vagina Lips) \$24-\$26
Sheet Spray (Between the Sheets) \$12	Lotion, various scents w/pheromones (Touch) \$16		Creamy Massage (Roman-tica) \$12	Moisturizing with shea butter (Whipped) \$12.50	Powerful unisex heightener (X-Scream) \$18			Dual Action (BOB., Ice Ice Baby, SmrLovin', Daddy From the 'Nati) \$40-\$149	Apparel, Novelty, Books, Games, Bondage

## **Training and Education**

The training and support from the Kinsey Institute is rigorous, and the University has a clear objective in mind: to train and educate the women so that they may better serve the sexual health needs of women all over the country and the world. The information is impressive and the dissemination even more so. During one interview with the health coordinator, Julie, at Love Dreams (who also received her master's in Public Health at the Kinsey Institute), I asked about the quality and quantity of the training that the women receive.

I: And how do the women receive these materials?

Julie: We do trainings almost every month in some capacity through Love Dreams whether it's what we call Love Dreams University for new consultants that happens every couple of months and we have our market training that happens every couple of months and they stagger. We have convention every year. We have annual training every year. We're launching a training website where it's like all pod cast and that type of information and then materials on line so they have access to it. Daily they have access to group meetings. They have access to on-line training so we work at almost every capacity to get that information out to them.

I: Are the women receptive? Do they want this information?

Julie: They are hungry for it.

I: They are?

Julie: Uh huh. And that's one of the things I know Dr. Smithson has found in her recent information is that women who, she calls them askable, women are consultants who with their customers feel they can ask questions and get answers from. You know, I'm having dryness, those types of things. They're more likely to sell more product and more likely to recruit more because then women who aren't as she calls them askable. So we're even finding information about the more educated these women are on the products, how they work, a woman's body, the better they are at being consultants.

I: So can you say a little bit more. What makes a woman askable? What's that?

Julie: This is relatively new her explaining it to me so you might want to touch base with her as well to get a very good . . .

I: Is this from Dr. Smithson?

Julie: Yeah. But, from what she briefly told me is that women that as a consultant I go to a party, I do my presentation and you as a customer feel like you can ask me anything and that if I don't know the answer I'll find it for you or I'll help you work through it but you feel comfortable enough asking me those kind of challenging questions. So that makes me askable.

I: Do you know what makes a woman feel askable with another woman? Like what is it about them that makes them . . . ?

Julie: The knowledge. I feel knowledgeable enough to answer that question.

I: "This does this and this and don't do this with this. This you don't want to use with this product." That's what you mean?

Julie: Yes. Perfect. Exactly. Then as they go through it someone raises their hand and "I used that and it did this to me." "Well, maybe you should try this. We can talk about this later in the ordering room." Someone else says "I really have a problem with vaginal dryness." Sometimes you get those conversations but then just explaining that information, feels like I know what I'm talking about and then in the ordering room being able to answer those questions or say "Hey, I don't know that, but I know how to get that answer for you."

I: Is it like necessary that they get this training or is it more they always want it?

Julie: It's a little of both. I think it stems from Linda. She believes in it so much. She talks how it will help them build their business. All types of training. Training on not only how to present yourself, speaking skills, being organized, being presentable but as well as knowing what you're selling. That's her philosophy so a lot of the women they know they need it and it's a requirement. By having these trainings you can get xyz. You can be on boards. You can do all these other things. If you don't do them, you're not going to be kicked out of the business. You are just not going to be as successful and that's kind of the . . . I think women want to do it because they want to be as successful as they see Linda is and the top women of our company and those women got there by following this model. (Julie, 36 year old consultant and Health Education Coordinator)

This particular quote is richly interesting for the multiple claims that are going on. First, we see that the training is vigorous and widespread. They are incorporating podcasts, new trainings called “Universities,<sup>48</sup>” workshops, reading materials, phone chats, and so on. These multiple avenues for training and education help to indicate to the female consultant that they are becoming professionalized. The women receive certifications and rewards for the trainings they attend, including credits they can use at the annual convention. So the women believe themselves to be gaining qualified certifications. Yet there are some deep internal practices that the consultants must agree to during this process. To be “certified” is a direct reflection of how the consultant makes sense of herself via the eyes of an external being, such as a potential client. She accepts the legitimizing training as a contribution to her identity as an expert. This knowledge or expertise becomes incorporated into her psyche and creates the possibility to reflect that new identity to others.

Secondly, the example that she gives is put in terms of sexual pathology. In this particular segment, she refers again and again to “vaginal dryness.” This is a condition that sounds horrible: irritation, the lack of sexual pleasure, physical pain. It is poignant that Julie uses this particular term to present the case for training the women to fit the new model of selling the sexual aid toys. Vaginal dryness, after all, occurs in usually two points during a woman’s life: (1) she is reaching or has reached menopause, in other words her body is aging and/or (2) she is undergoing chemotherapy, some cancer treatment, or other illness that is impairing the natural state of her body. In either of these

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<sup>48</sup> Even the use of the word “University” here is important as it links women with the notion of being highly educated, and that would put them on par with Dr. Smithson. Also, for many of these women, going to college was not an option, or a limited one (didn’t finish), and this additional education thus takes advantage of that vulnerability.

two examples, however, these are specific cases of pathology. By using this example, the case is made that the toys and products exist in some ways to alleviate the sexual health problems of women. In other words, *there is a problem that needs to be fixed*. Sexuality becomes confined to the walls of medicine. The consultant then becomes the *answer* to the pathology, the relief of the symptom. Her knowledge not only enhances pleasure, but it solves a medical problem, a physical suffering. Thus, the consultant assumes the characteristic of a health care provider, a distinctly more socially prestigious position than sex toy seller. The women then incorporate this new identity and revolt against in some ways a fundamental aspect of their product, pleasure. The product itself in this mode becomes a panacea and the consultants its certified distributor. The product is now in the elevated position of healing, and the consultant can wield the healing nature with her extensive knowledge of the product. Thus the consultant derives meaning via the domain of healthcare, and the product itself. She draws attention and substance to make sense of her own place in the business while contributing her expertise to shape the domain itself. The product and the consultant become mutually engaged in a representation of pathologized sexuality that simultaneously controls and alters the notion of female sexual pleasure, and the work identity of the consultant.

Thirdly, what is being developed was an attempt to train women to be more “askable.” This term referred to the skill that some of the top consultants have developed in building their business. Their demeanor, their character, and their presentation make them approachable to women at the parties. The participants at these parties then feel that they can approach or ask the consultant any variety of personal or non-personal questions about their sexual activities. This concept, developed by Dr. Smithson, is clearly geared

to training women to be public health educators. Yet, the concept is vague. James claims that

“There’s one last component of women that is really successful. Those 3 things are really big – dress, language, how you end up holding yourself. But, the 4<sup>th</sup> is your self confidence and how do you feel about what people think about what you do and how do you feel about what you do....If you come up to somebody and go, you’re dressed right, you speak well, you’re educated but you walk up and go . . . and you ask me what I do and I say “Um, I work for a company that sells lotions, lingerie, bedroom toy type things.” Guess what? You might have the appearance and all that stuff but you lack the self confidence. You lack the self reassurance that what you do is okay. You’re out there educating people. If I came up to you and you asked me, I’d say “Yeah, I work for Love Dreams. It provides women a safe platform to experience their own body....” I’d go into my 30 second commercial but your reaction would be “Wow. She knows what she’s talking about.” If you have a thing where you have a family behind you that supports everything you do because you’ve educated them on what you do, we call that being askable. Being askable is the 4<sup>th</sup> biggest quality.

I: And how do you become askable?

R: Askable is being educated on your products, being engaging, being knowledgeable, the way you dress, self confident about yourself and self confident about what you’re selling and self confident about how other people look at you. That’s being an askable type of person.

James articulates this concept through the language of success at your career.

James mentions “self confidence,” the inner assuredness, the internal transformation of a consultant from a worker to a full-fledged success. When asked how many women are “askable,” James is only able to list less than a dozen women, even though this is the 4<sup>th</sup> biggest quality that assures a success in the company. But it is ultimately allusive; there is no definition about how to transform the inner self so that you feel “confident [about] how other people look at you.” Also, this indicates a problematic negotiation of identity that the women must reconcile. They must be dressed a certain way, act a certain way,



exude a particular confidence, and also be “askable.” The terms feel awkwardly gendered, as if they are particular feminine traits, yet the elusive “askability” keeps the women’s labor controlled via the medium of education and training. If this is, as James claims, a vital key of success in Love Dreams, then the women must be tied to the educational scheme provided by the Kinsey Institute. There can be little to no room for other non-traditional definitions and experiences of sex and sexuality. Therefore the women then make meaning through the interactions with and towards the Kinsey Institute’s trainings and educational efforts. More important to be “askable” is to be ultimately an externalizing agent for the private sphere of female sexuality. The consultant must be at once completely knowledgeable, reflecting the myriad of products and proper usage, while underscoring the health benefits and ultimately making public the private behaviors of her clients. This constant flux of process within the psyche of the consultant is rare, James notes. And this is no wonder. What they ask is the total re-invention of the internalized reality of the consultant into a marketable externality that involves the re-imagining of both product and worker as an integrated entity. The result also ensures a rather complex but powerful labor control practice that is validated by the gendered control of the familial culture, but propelled forward by the inclusion of the medicalization aspect<sup>49</sup>.

On the other hand, the consultants did feel altered by the training they received. Women expressed more open disgust for the limited and short-sighted sex education that exists in other programs and places. This can be seen with the following quote where

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<sup>49</sup> Though it could be argued that these are two separated concepts, they in fact interact in an integrated script for the women. They understand that the family of Love Dreams is one that values education, and seeks to have their consultants be *educators* not just sexual aid sellers.

Kristy mentions her own feelings about her work and concludes with a story exposing the shortsightedness of a physician.

Kristy: Oh yea, I, I mean when I had come back from my certification [this is a training in which women are trained to sell the products to cancer survivors and is highly geared in a medicalized fashion] I was so proud of myself, and so excited that I could help women in a different, in a different way. One of the first parties I had done afterwards was a very, very large group of middle aged women and I had mentioned how you'll notice how I have my Love Dreams pink ribbon, that I wear to my shows, and, I explained to them how I had just come back from getting certified and I can be able to answer questions, and also I'm available to work with any organizations or support groups that someone might be involved with and we can do special parties for donations, that type of thing...one lady had come into the ordering room, young, you know, she was, she was younger, she was probably, in her young 30s and she said I am so impressed with Love Dreams... that they have done a program like this. I am a cancer survivor.

Yea, and she said, you know, what you had said really touched me because I have to tell you a story. And she went on to tell me that she had a mastectomy and she was experiencing a lot of vaginal dryness, a lack of libido she had like no desire whatsoever and when she did, it, it just, the sensation was like virtually gone. And so she was asking me what can you do to help me, are there products? So we talked a little bit more about some more specific things so I could guide her towards the right products, and she, really she broke down and started crying 'cause she's like, "thank you so much. I, you have no idea how much you've helped me, because, I-" she did ask her doctor about what she could do about some of these things, about not feeling in the mood or anything like that. And do you know what her doctor told her to do?

I: What?

Kristy: Her doctor told her to rent a porno.

Kristy illustrates several key meanings in the presentation of herself. First, the training and certification was very important for her and she highlighted this fact throughout the interview. As this quote reflects, she claims that the knowledge of the certification and

presenting herself as someone who has the *authority* to address female sexuality is a fundamental shift from a woman selling sex toys because she is good at sex, or simply a good saleswoman. Then she continues her story by illustrating the powerful effects her training has on other women's lives, specifically the cancer survivors in this instance. This is truly poignant. She provides a real service to a cancer survivor in meeting her sexual health needs. In this regard, as a certified sexual health care educator, she ends the vignette by positioning herself above a medical doctor. She notes that her client had thanked her, in a highly emotional state, and claimed that this much needed attention was being ignored by her doctor. Rather than address her *physical* needs, he suggests she watch a pornographic movie. This creates an interesting internal development for the consultant Kristy. The mental organization of her thoughts reflects that she believes herself to be on par with another professionalized class, that of physicians. And moreover, she elevates herself above physicians by suggesting she is of more value to her clients in addressing these specific sexual health issues. Ironically, it is the physician here who is promoting a mental exercise of visual stimulation by watching pornography; and the sex toy consultant is offering a medicalized vision for her client. Their roles have been utterly switched in a strange unconventional twist. However, Kristy does not leave the paradigm of the biomedical health model. And in this way, though she is challenging the structures, she remains fixed within its boundaries.

Is Love Dreams in the business of becoming the new distributors of a “female Viagra?” The training and expertise spreading across the country through the consultants may not be the “quick fix” that Viagra gives, but opens the door to being the premier distributor of products meeting the multifaceted and complex sexual needs of women.

Certainly training and education lay at the heart of this company's efforts and interactions with its consultants. And this education is both intellectually and philosophically driven by the considerable influence of the Kinsey Institute. Love Dreams is tireless in offering to their workers seminars, CDs, online training, market trainings, podcasts, annual trainings, selected monthly meetings, and phone support. The partnership between Love Dreams and the Kinsey Institute delivers the latest sexual health information to the women through these various channels and expects women to avail themselves of the information. Consultants are openly encouraged to learn and become "sexual health educators" and some like Kristy, take on this role with a hearty vehemence. The women then are both being acted upon and enacting the biomedical model upon others (re: Kristy re-telling of the physician who recommended watching porn). But the interaction of and with the biomedical model is also one that extends beyond the internalized functions to the externalized world, as the consultant must negotiate the public sphere of meaning making. These processes have the unique result of securing worker compliance, as well as shoring up the complex and multifaceted components of how they negotiate their identities.

### **Dominating and Negotiating Space**

Armed with this training the women enter the homes and living rooms of potential purchasers. The parties are conducted usually in the living room, transforming the space into a unique mix of commerce, public health education, and private behaviors. Ehrenreich (2004) calls attention to the problematic issues that arise in viewing the home as a work site. As mentioned earlier, she notes that the home is now a site for capitalism to reenact its alienating and discriminatory practices. Love Dreams' parties challenge

Ehrenreich's warning. One would expect the worker (the consultant) to feel "less worthy" or that they were being "controlled," or perhaps that their work in some way alienated them, however consultants rarely express this. Because of the influence of the training from the corporate office spurred by Kinsey, the women are rather more empowered and in command of the living space. Consultants then are trained to enter the homes of women and transform the home space into an area to explore and consider a new relationship to sexuality and sexual desire. As a traditional middle-class symbol of the home, the living room strengthens the resolve of the consultant to adhere to regulative policies passed down from corporate offices.

After the main party, the women are encouraged to order their products in a private ordering room, which is usually a spare bedroom, office, den, or other secluded area in the house that is away from the main party. The private ordering room is an important site for more intimate sexual health education. In some ways, the room can be paralleled to the visit of a doctor's office, when the physician enters and the patient can have some private consultation. This is the space that Kinsey believes being "askable" will result in not only greater sexual information but also benefit the consultant with higher sales. But the home is also the site of complex and sometimes contradictory meanings. For this reason, the women who work for Love Dreams negotiate each living room by exposing their own identity and self-awareness to the variety of possibilities inherent at each party. They exist in a multitude of meaning that is completely kinetic and changing, never static.

Many of the women I spoke to felt that this space was one key experience when they felt they were truly helping women. Their identity as a professionalized sexual

health educator is solidified in the perception of other women's respect and awe of their knowledge. Their identities were thus given meaning by the education from Kinsey/Love Dreams and that meaning was furthered solidified by the reactions from clients, and then when speaking about this with other women (or with me during an interview) they are modified through their own interpretive process. For some of these women, this is the first opportunity of their lives to assume a role that engenders respect, esteem, and deference. At one recent party where the participants were highly educated professional women, including one medical doctor, the women got together to challenge the consultant on a particular sexual function and the female response to sexual stimulation of the clitoris versus vaginal pleasure. The consultant heard their comments, responded to their concerns, but then she silenced them with her book-like memory of how female sexual organs become aroused and reach climax. Her "lesson" lasted a few minutes during which time she corrected several misconceptions about the effects of dildos, and their addictive and possibly physical altering powers on the vaginal walls. The results were amusing as this group of highly educated women were silenced and impressed with her knowledge and response. Later when speaking with the consultant about that incident, she laughed and commented, "I know my stuff." But what was really going on in this interaction? First, the worker/consultant entered the intimate space of her hostess's living room and challenged a group of highly educated women on the mechanics of their own identities. The worker/consultant, in her social interaction with the women, derived meaning about her own abilities via her book-like recitation of sexual health, and then in her suggestion to me that she "knows her stuff" she modifies her identity again as she interacts with me. The phrase she uses is especially potent, when she says "I know my

stuff” she uses slang to position her identity on par (or perhaps above?) the female professionals at the party. Her aplomb is notable. But the consequences of this model are equally remarkable. By adopting this model and successfully negotiating the living room of professionals, she solidifies her identity in the company and therefore she must now be dependent upon the company for her continued success. This novel professionalized identity and its myriad of trainings can only be received in that context. Thus, this limitation secures her compliance and ensures the strength of the Love Dreams labor control mechanisms.

### **Re-framing Pleasure: Boundary making in Female Sexuality**

Another way to examine the extent of the labor control practices is seen with how the women construct and present their work identities to others. The meaning they derive of their work and their identity arises out of this interaction with others (Blumer, 1969). When asked to tell a story about a particularly poignant story in their time with Love Dreams, almost every worker/consultant relayed a narrative about how they helped solve a physical sexual ailment. They employed this technique for various reasons First, by adopting the public health model they needed to highlight a narrative that showed some sort of sexual health *problem*. The women enact their expertise on a difficulty, employ the knowledge from Kinsey, and provide solutions or potential solutions to the client. Secondly, this framing is consistent with the meta-narrative of the company espoused by Linda Patters, one that aims to improve female sexual health, regardless of pecuniary interest. The goal, it is said, is to improve the sexual lives of women, and “quality” not “quantity” is the value of the company. Therefore, when the women convey that they are more interested in *helping* than making money, they consent to the gendered control

mechanisms of the company, and such language carefully controls dissent and discord. Finally, by reframing their work identity as helpers to others (friends, families, and interviewers) they make meaning of their work identity as a process and modification of self that extends beyond the self into the collective consciousness.

Yet, another important and unusual incident occurs: the consultants act upon the social construction of sexuality with the consumer to discipline and contain female sexuality. By medicalizing female sexuality, acknowledging a pathology based in the biomedical model, the consultants are transformed and transform pleasure. The following quote, from a seasoned worker/consultant, illustrates this strange phenomenon:

And there was a woman who had a hysterectomy about 15 years ago and within all of those 15 years she had never felt any sensitivity. And she had tried everything and nothing had worked. And I recommended something to her and said that it could be 50/50 because everyone is different and you never know what is going to work. So I told her to try it and that it wasn't going to cost her a fortune. I was like "I'm going to call you within a few days to see how this works because I want to find something that is going to work for you." So I sent her *x-scream*, it's a little bit of a stronger clitoral heightener, so I sent it to her and I told her that "if it doesn't work then I'm going to give you another one free of charge because I really want to find something that is going to work for you." That was a Friday night and that Saturday morning at 11 o'clock I got a call from a man that said "Can I speak to Jan?", he's like "my wife was at your party last night and she purchased a product from you..." And I was like "Yeah I remember her, is everything ok?". And he's like "you know she really enjoyed the product and last night was the first time in a long time that she actually enjoyed our time together and I want to get another bottle of this for back up just in case." And I said "well you know that jar will last you about a year." And he's said "well I want to have it just in case." And he bought two more jars of it. (Jan, 40 year old consultant)

Jan begins by framing the issue as patient history, detailing the condition of the woman. But what is most interesting is how the entire story re-frames sexuality as a surmountable medical mystery that with the correct product can completely alter your life and the life



of your partner. By revealing that she will work with her client and “give another one free of charge” she indicates that the importance is on solving the medical mystery, not on making money. And ending with the phone call from the satisfied husband legitimizes and regulates sexuality and sexual expectations by purchasing the right product. Jan interprets her own identity as meaningful through the Love Dreams narrative of “helping women” as seen with Linda Patters founding story<sup>50</sup>. And as a consultant who is not concerned with making money, but helping people, she employs the tools of a medicalized sexuality by prescribing the correct antidote to her clients ailment, and then given status (as gratitude) in the eyes of her client’s *husband*, and in the retelling of the story to me as the interviewer modifies her identity as a professional health care worker. The transformation, for Jan, is thus complete: she can claim she is a professional sexual health care worker. Yet in the process, the sexuality becomes bounded by the biomedical model, the worker is consumed with a new identity, and various permutations of sexuality are lost in the use of one simple cream.

Another example of this is with Kristy, who lost her sister to breast cancer in the previous ten years since our interview:

I had a sister that passed away from breast cancer. She was only 35 years old, I was 29. When we had to go through her private belongings we came across things, that at that time I was like, “Oh my God”. You know, I didn’t realize that, I mean we were like best friends, not just sisters. When I went through the [the Love Dreams sexuality training] program I literally broke down crying during the certification, I broke down and cried. If I would have known then what I know now, I could have helped her through a lot of things.

I: Like what?

Kristy: We found vibrators, we found what, what we called dilators for women that are dealing, going through chemotherapy and radiation treatments. The vaginal tissues, so you know, for some women it’s an extreme where something the size of a pinky inserted in the vagina is very

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 4.

painful. You use dilators in different sizes just to basically, and not in any way sexually, lubricate the area and put it inside the vaginal cavity and just basically lay there for an hour just to help to stretch the tissue. I had no clue that without this, women would be very, very dry and the vagina would be very, very small, so sexual intercourse would be basically out of the question for anyone that was experiencing that type of thing. And then it's going to cause more friction between the couple. Me and my family had no idea about those types of things. I do now, so, you know, I could have helped her. And our "body dew" product, the skin oil, she could have used when she went through her radiation it burned her skin so badly, and this is something that I could have given to her to help. I just wasn't a consultant. You know, I didn't know about it. And so that, that definitely, I can take that knowledge and help women now that are experiencing the same thing, and make their lives a little bit easier, a little bit better, more comfortable while they are experiencing something like that. So that's what I mean by taking it to a whole new level, you know, that's a whole new level of education to your customers. The response has been great and I think that it really shows that Love Dreams is not that stereotypical sex toy salesperson, you know, we really are out there to educate women, to give them alternatives, to give them different views on the different products. We've got huge lines of products that cover anything from very, very conservative to any one that's on the wild side.

Again as with Jan's narrative, Kristy begins with a very personally touching story, this one about her own sister, and the severe medical condition that she was in. She uses this story to demonstrate several important aspects of her identity. First she is an emotional being that is doing this work as an expression of her desire to "help" and meet the needs of women in pain. Yet she also reveals that she has particular knowledge as a "trained professional" that knows how various part of the female sexual anatomy are affected by the ravages of cancer and its treatments. Finally, she assuages her guilt of not being able to have helped her sister by stating that now she can help women, and this help takes the form of very specific products in her arsenal of inventory. The implication is that female sexuality is somewhat dependent on the *act* of intercourse, and that Love Dreams, and by extension the consultants, are in the right place to ensure that act be possible. Though not

directly stated, the absence of other non-biologically driven form of sexual expression is often left out of these stories and the narratives that the consultants re-tell. The omission is noteworthy. The process of integrating a new professionalized identity that is suffused with the language, acts, and information from the Kinsey Institute does indeed empower the women, they are definitely more knowledgeable and trained. However, the spaces lost in this exchange are vast, and the unintended consequences of binding female sexuality in this normative construction are worrisome. As Tiefer (2000) points out, without regard to the social structures that may be impeding and/or affecting these women, these medical fixes may only be temporary solutions to larger social issues including sexual behaviors and attitudes shaped by oppressive constructions of female identity: i.e. sex having to be intercourse, sexual acts based on biological functioning, and so on.

### **Dissent and Resistance to the Medicalized Model of Sexuality**

In my interviews with consultants, not one woman disagreed with the use of the Kinsey Institute and its agenda of educating women via the public health model. Rather the opposite was true: women were respectful, grateful, and supportive of the Love Dreams/Kinsey Institute. However, resistance to the medicalized model of sexuality did occur in some rather unusual strategies. First, less strange, and already examined extensively in the previous chapter is the outward resistance that occurred during the 2005-2006 initiation of the policy change. That external resistance, the yelling and arguments, clearly showed that consultants were not all in line with Linda's vision for the company. This was simple to capture because the women who were displeased with the new policy were not shy about revealing their unhappiness with this policy. However, in

the participant observation I conducted, another type of resistance appeared and this was less direct, more passive aggressive.

In adopting the biomedical model, the minds of the consultants are in some ways trained to (1) perceive a problem, (2) diagnose the problem, and (3) suggest a treatment to the problem. This was seen in both Jan's and Kristy's examples, and in many of the interviews I conducted. And this is a direct result of being trained within a particular public health model that emphasizes pathology, treatment, and verifiable results. As a result, the new arroyos in the consciousness of the women predispose them to engage in *diagnosis*, even when there is no scientific base for that diagnosis. The primary example of this is when the women market a product as having a medical quality that it has not been proven to address. I argue that when the women begin to extend the definitions of diagnosis to include personal experiences, they directly resist the labor control practices of Love Dreams. This picture is somewhat complicated because the contradiction is somewhat passive aggressive and vague. It is a different type of resistance, one that has been examined in gendered constructions of responsibility for child rearing (Walzer, 1998), but has not been seen in the literature on labor control.

For example, one of the products that Love Dreams sells is a scented body oil spray. It contains pheromones, unique oils and other ingredients that work as a simple moisturizer for the skin. This product is usually applied to the skin at the end of the shower and is supposed to not only leave your skin feeling very soft, but acts as an attractant to men. The product is one of the most popular that Love Dreams sells. During a party I attended, I noticed that the consultant brought out the product and demonstrated its scent by spraying some in a napkin to pass around. As she was telling us about the

ingredients she mentioned that one of its uses is that it greatly improves and sometimes cures psoriasis. Psoriasis is a “chronic disease of the immune system that appears on the skin, usually in the form of thick, red, scaly patches” (www.psoriasis.org). Upon hearing her speak, I asked her about it later wondering if indeed this product was a cure for the skin disease. Her reply was very interesting (and she asked that her name be anonymous:

Oh...I'm not supposed to say that, we aren't supposed to say that, did I say that? What I meant to say is that this product has cured psoriasis in some people, but this may not be the case for everyone, but it has been shown to have amazing results with people who might have skin issues.

Yet, upon seeing her at another show, she repeated the same claim. This is interesting because clearly she had been told by Love Dreams does not want its consultants making false claims, yet this consultant had. In fact, I learned that this product had been touted by many consultants as a relief to psoriasis, and that corporate had to remind the women not to promise more than the product could deliver. However, for this consultant, her resistance to the policy was notable. It was a resistance *within* the framework of the medicalization framework, and not independent from it. This “unwitting resistance” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) indicates that the consultant may present her slip as an unintended act, but both Love Dreams and she are aware this is this an act in direct contradiction to the policy, and therefore resisting it. Another example of this, occurred at a last marketing training session that I attended in the Fall of 2008. The room was filled with over 200 consultants, and a new product was being introduced that had several speeds of clitoral stimulation. The tables were lined in horizontal rows, with the trainer at the head of the room. She spoke using a microphone. While introducing the new product, I noted that her style mimicked that of national trainings. She first introduced the product

(like Linda), then she went into its health benefits (like Dr. Smithson). Usually the presentation of new toys ended with this, but this consultant went on further. She began:

Now Ladies, here is the way to tell your customers how to have the longest orgasm they have ever had. This [toy] will get them right to point of climax and then, and this is very important, you need to tell them to completely relax their body and deeply exhale into their orgasm with a long “ooooooooo” sound. Like this “ooooooooo”. They will have the longest most intense experience of their lives.

The women in the audience all responded by feverishly taking down notes, and taking for granted completely what this consultant was saying. Shockingly, the trainer *educated* the women using the model that Love Dreams uses (and thus is recognizable to all the consultants), but then extended the model to include this “fact” about how to deepen the experience of an orgasm, which may in fact be very true for the consultant (as she claimed it was), but may be exactly the wrong advice for another woman. In this way, she undermines the mission of the company by employing its methodology but without substantive foundational knowledge. The “target defined resistance” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) suggests that the consultant neither intends nor understands these actions to be in contradiction to the Love Dreams policies, however, clearly such behavior would be unacceptable to Love Dreams as they are indications of using unverifiable claims to sell products. Such conduct points to how the consultants’ resistance, though within the framework of the medicalized model of sexuality, actually harkens back to pre-policy days where the consultant’s personal experiences are allowed to be interjected into the presentation and selling of the products.

It must be noted that this resistance does not accomplish the same goals as the normative uses of resistance to labor control, such as when workers resisted in order to

improve wages or services. Using a functionalist or more traditional lens might have led to ignoring these forms of resistance. Rather by examining women's behaviors and omissions of behaviors, and engaging a more gendered and critical view of the empirical evidence, this additional lens contributes to the body of labor control theory.

### **Summary**

A popular motto began to emerge during annual trainings where thousands of women gathered. The motto, "one a day!," was chanted over and over again to the delight of many. The phrase which likens itself to the adage "and an apple a day keeps the doctor away" and also the popular multivitamin "One-A Day" refers here to the sexual needs of women. "One a day" for Love Dreams consultants refers to having one orgasm a day. All women should enjoy, as a matter of health, at least one orgasm per day. (Although a few women further suggested that perhaps one a day was insufficient, by stating "one a day...is that all!?" ) There is an emphasis on being able to help women with their sexual problems and to offer new avenues for a happy healthy sex life with themselves and/or their partners. Linking this language with the familiar phrase of eating the apple a day and/or the multivitamin is clever, but it is more than creating just a catchy phrase, it creates and reproduces normative models of behavior and attitudes that have long reaching tendrils into the field of sexuality.

Wood et al. caution against a "culture in which women's sexual lives are labeled "normal" or "dysfunctional" (p. 242). And that "women's own conceptions of sexual desire and sexual problems should supplant those purported by the strictly biomedical model" (ibid). Yet, the biomedical model remains a compelling force in the company

legitimizing the work of the consultants in the homes they visit and in the parties they conduct. Consultants have helped transform the dialogue of female sexuality into one that addresses both dysfunction and health maintenance. By using “B.O.B” the “Battery Operated Boyfriend” (which is one of the top sellers) women can enjoy a healthy life that should include at least one orgasm a day. The women become in essence “sexual health educators” and internalize the professional status that the title invokes. This internalization makes them stronger salespersons, but also does a unique job of re-enforcing the adherence to policy dictates from corporate headquarters.

Many of the women feel utterly indebted to the opportunity they have had to transform their lives, and to be change agents for other women’s lives and sexualities. They state that having other women view them as “saviors” of their marriages, or “healers” to their sexual problems makes them feel respectable and skillful in an industry that has been marred by salaciousness. They are proficient in this area, and have a unique and needed expertise that even professional medical doctors are clueless about. And they are getting this knowledge and continue to get this knowledge through the training sessions put on by Love Dreams, and research driven by the Kinsey Institute. In this way, though their sense of themselves is altered and amplified, they feel inexorably linked to the stream of newer empirically based information. This powerful source keeps the women coming back for more. And Kinsey never disappoints.

Just like the field of sexology historically “leaned more and more towards biology and medicine in an attempt to legitimate the field as a science” (Roberts, 2006) Love Dreams agreed to the relationship with the Kinsey Institute in an attempt to legitimate their own field, their business practices, and future growth. Love Dreams is a pioneering



organization aiming to improve the lives of their consultants and their clients. Yet taking on the title of sexual health promoters is a serious move that may have unintended consequences of reifying normative constructions of female sexuality. Whether based on a biomedical model that privileges youthful, biologically driven sexual experiences or not, the potential to alienate the variety of sexual identities is a concern of great importance. The women are indeed sex health workers but they also have been raised and nurtured in the Love Dreams' familial environment. The medicalization of female sexuality inherent in the Love Dreams/Kinsey Institute relationship has a unique effect of unifying the work of the Love Dreams' consultants. The more education they receive through new legitimizing avenues, such as the Love Dreams University and other various training opportunities, links them inexorably to the company and thus ensures worker compliance and loyalty. Being certified through Love Dreams is indeed a remarkable achievement, but the degrees are not transferable and only apply within this organization. One cannot take the degree they earned at Love Dreams and be certified to work, for example, as a sexual health care worker in a more clinical setting. This education, though revolutionary in its purpose, serves as merely another mechanism by which consultant labor is managed.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Conclusion**

The processes observed at Love Dreams are not adequately described by the current literature on labor control. In part, this is due to the structure of the Love Dreams organization and the composition of its workforce. It is a decentralized work environment. Party plan direct selling takes place in a home rather than a central location (such as a factory or store) where the workers' physical efforts can be supervised by an overseer. In addition to the structure of the organization, the composition of the workforce is significant. All of the employees are women who experience various social marginalized realities including: little formal education beyond high school, limited employment opportunities in the traditional labor market, and familial constraints.

Findings in this thesis show that Love Dreams exerted control over its workforce through the practice of cultural shilling to increase employee compliance. As mentioned earlier, the term cultural shilling describes a social process that uses familiar social identities (such as motherhood) to manage a workforce. I argue that the cultural shilling in Love Dreams uses contemporary social constructions of family (gender) and education (through sexuality) to ensure worker obedience. These practices differ from conventional labor control mechanisms described in the literature but rather capitalize on cultural aspects that resonate with the women's lives. In particular, the story of Linda Patters as a single mom and self-made success both inspires the women and helps them aspire to

conformity. The family culture created loyalty and the educational culture created experts (albeit experts dependent on Love Dreams for their current and future knowledge base).

Using culturally valued identities based on education and motherhood as the basis for controlling labor may be important in explaining work structures in non-traditional environments. Organizational studies have argued similar processes:

When one brings culture to the level of the organization and even down to groups within the organization, one can see clearly how culture is created, embedded, evolved and ultimately manipulated, and, at the same time, how culture constrains, stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to the group members (Schein, 2004, p.1).

As noted above, cultural cues can shape the structure and meaning of a workforce.

Cultural shilling is then the method of that maneuvering. In the case of Love Dreams that process consisted of two components. First, the company's culture of motherhood is both comfortable and attractive for the women because it gives them a feeling of belonging and thus ensures loyalty to the company. Women respected Linda Patters and deferred to her wishes. Family aspects of the company such as gendered language, celebratory functions, and other traditions help draw women into the company. This familiar domain of the family welcomes and comforts the women into this unusual new business venture, but also provides them with a recognizable power structure. This is especially important since all of the women work with little to no direct oversight over their business activities. The family culture uses a top-down approach of controlling the labor force and silences opposition with the application of emotional loyalty to Linda Patters. Women are also organized in "sub-families" creating complex kinships. Thus, a small select group filters information down through the company networks.

Second, the company offers continuous education, in conjunction with the Kinsey Institute, on sexual behaviors and products thereby medicalizing sexuality and empowering women by making them experts on sexuality in general, and on the company's products, in particular. The company culture promotes an entrepreneurial spirit enhanced by continuous educational improvement. The Kinsey Institute provides information on sexuality and sexual practices to the consultants through the corporate office. The office then disperses the information to the consultants through trainings, the website, and printed material. This new sexuality, based in science, is a departure from the raunchy sexual persona. Love Dreams forces the women to assume a middle-class sexuality. For example, body parts are called by their medical names rather than using slang language. Consultants' personal sexual experiences are no longer shared with potential customers. Anecdotal stories are prohibited. In the larger scheme these changes did make sense; they existed to counter the stigma of the sex toy industry. In this way, the company helps empower a group of women with few opportunities in the traditional workforce.

### **Success, Oppression, and Resistance**

Were the labor control mechanisms successful? The answer is uncertain. Education, dress, work, sexuality appeared to be altered and the differences are reflected in the pictures of the consultants from early newsletter issues to later publications. Pictures change from consultants in t-shirts and shorts to business casual dress wear. In addition, during my visits to annual conventions and annual trainings I noted that women began to adopt the new dress code. By the last market training I attended in 2008, there was a stronger uniformity in the mannerisms, language, and self-presentation of the

women. In the matter of three years, the workforce presented itself as a professional class.

Still the consequences of these labor control practices suggest some worrisome trends. These work arrangements based in socially constructed identities are politically laden. In some ways, this new professional sex toy worker merely reproduces traditional concepts of sexuality. In order to reap the benefits of entering middle-class market one must adopt a sanitized version of sexuality often based in biological functioning. This version may be too limited and monolithic and may not allow for variation in sexual expressions. Such constructions may propagate ignorance, deny the variations of sexual expression, and in turn, may generate idealized and virtually unattainable symbols of female sexuality. Constructing sexuality based on middle-class norms have contributed to oppressive constructions of sexuality (Ehrenreich & English, 1973; McGann, 2006).

Finally, the women do resist these policies both in overt and passive aggressive ways. The outward opposition to the professionalization however is a somewhat futile path as seen in chapter four. Rather, in order to resist some of these practices, the female consultants reenact the culture of the company yet insert their own sexual identities and preferences and knowledge while touting them as part of a scientific model.

#### **A note on epistemology: empowerment or oppression for the worker**

One of the struggles of writing within a social constructionist lens, and more specifically a symbolic interactionist perspective is the close attention one must pay to the subjects' actions. Questions arise such as: how subjects act towards things? How do they make meaning for those things? How do they understand the meaning already

present prior to acts? How are meanings understood, altered, entrenched, and made real? The processes are complex and perhaps best suited to ethnographic methods. The answers to these questions appear to be fluid. This fluidity allows for a richer understanding of the interplay between individuals, social structures, work expectations, and so on. Traditional epistemologies undergirding labor control literature assume that the employer enacts control over the laborer and within that relationship—the “contested terrain” (Braverman, 1974)—actors are locked in battle of contradictory intentions. Yet a new body of literature challenges this:

The mainstream tradition...has been dominated by functionalist paradigms that assume managerialist or performative interests and has largely concentrated on cultural unity, integration, leadership, and the contribution of organizational culture to *business performance* [emphasis mine]...[rather than] adopting more diverse approaches (for example, critical and interpretive) (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003, p. 1480).

The functionalist paradigm is predicated on an assumption that business performance is at the root of the employer/employee relationship. That is, the employer enacts labor control practices because they want their company to experience growth and economic gain (England, 2005). And even though this is a goal of Love Dreams, and without a doubt a vital aspect of keeping a family business afloat, applying a non-functionalist lens opens up the research site to “issues of identity, power, control, and resistance” (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003), and in the case of Love Dreams, issues of cultural meaning making for the consultant.

This leads to questions about exploitation and alienation. Though I have shown that there is a type of authoritarian regime enacted by Love Dreams, it is understood by

the consultants to be other than exploitive. So, if they are being duped, as it were, then we should expect to see some evidence of their alienation of their identity and self. For example, when Hochschild (1983) wrote about the effects of performing emotional labor, the female flight attendants expressed their dismay and weariness of having to “put on a smile” despite any circumstance, this emotional labor was exhausting. For Love Dreams, the women do engage in highly emotional work that appears to be uncompensated. But the compensation for the women takes a different form from money. For some of these women, who come from remarkably difficult backgrounds, Love Dreams is the only family that has been supportive. The feelings of being part of a family *are* compensation. Moreover, studies show that labor involving exploitative emotional work has no effect on mental health or job satisfaction (Wharton, 1993). The rewards may not lead to job dissatisfaction if, as in the case of Love Dreams, the workers have a high degree of control and autonomy in their work (England, 2005). Research has been conducted in other fields challenging these functionalist frameworks as well (Smith, 2002; Zelizer, 2002a). As England (2005) points out, researchers have come to challenge “the claim that only profits and self-interest rule in the market” (p. 393). This is the antithesis to the rational world of corporations and firms, and rigid constructions of the labor control process. It may be that these differing forms of compensation can be linked to gendered constructions of compensation; for the women in Love Dreams, feeling like they are part of a family was just as important as making money.

Still the danger of this model is clear. These women, due to their multiple marginalized identities, are in effect some of the most vulnerable within the traditional labor market. They have few skills, little higher education, or training. They are at a high

risk of being manipulated and used for the purposes of Love Dreams merely to sell products and exploit their work. The move to transform the company into a professionalized workforce sadly eliminated any consultant who used her full raunchy sexuality to sell products and replaced it with a somewhat more sanitized version. Love Dreams had a larger plan in mind, to expand its customer base to include mainstream American women. And the consequences may have limited, alienated and pathologized some women's sexual identities.

### **Sociological Implications**

One of the remarkable aspects of this company is that it advertises an alternative opportunity for women in the workplace. Women who struggle with the responsibilities of family and motherhood, who have little formal education past high school, and who find themselves trapped in job paths that are leading nowhere have few opportunities that provide them with the self-esteem, sense of empowerment, and economic prospects that Love Dreams promises. The company does feel like a family, and when one enters the market trainings, or the annual conventions, women are proud to be affiliated with this organization. They are pleased with their work, and often speak about it in terms of helping. Not only has the business contributed to consultants' own sense of self-worth, but it has helped their female customers and their partners. The women learn from the many videos, online resources, and printed materials that the Kinsey Institute supplies. They understand sex, a topic mysterious to many women. Love Dreams advertises as



knowing all about women's sexual health needs. And there is little doubt that this organization has, in effect, helped the female consultants and their clients.

Despite these many positive attributes, the company still must manage its workforce and at times exert control over actions and behaviors. For this reason, this research may offer some new ways to consider how we understand labor control when looking at a population of women who occupy the low-wage labor market. I argue that a cultural shilling within Love Dreams creates a workspace which the women enter and potentially thrive. Women do not just work for Love Dreams; they *live* it. In other words, their relationship with Love Dreams extends beyond employer and employee; the women feel a part of an emotionally strong support group. In a labor market that still is marked with gender inequities, Love Dreams offers a new vision for how to employ, manage, and recruit female laborers. And the Love Dreams' model of labor management which uses the cultural framework and cues of its workers to control them, did in fact change the workforce from one in tight jeans, cut off shorts, and hyper sexual behavior into a middle-class professionalized business.

Current sociological theories could expand to better explain labor control processes between employer and workers. Specifically, traditional frameworks could open the doors for broadly understanding the notion of cultural shilling, and how cultural frameworks can be used to instill worker compliance. How are current labor markets meeting the cultural needs of the new generations with their own worldviews and expectations? How can researchers better understand the "contested terrain" (as Braverman asserted) of the employer and employee? How can scholars understand the future of labor studies in this rapidly expanding field?

In addition, the labor control process and the labor market are suffused with meaning (Lee 2000), and in the case of this thesis those meanings are culturally laden. Cultural processes of creating motherhood and providing education help to manage the workforce. Choosing ethnography as the methodology for this allows for looking at the nuanced nature of social structures in labor market process and provides context. As Lee (2000) elucidates:

“Taking seriously women’s standpoints means that analyses should start with women’s experiences, to render visible women’s lives and turn them into resources for reconceptualizing social realities. Yet to attain the goal of feminist sociological theorizing is also to go beyond women’s experiences that lie beyond the scope of everyday practices and subjective consciousness” (Lee, 2000, p. 166).”

For this work, by looking at how women understand and are affected by their cultural cues in the company is a useful lens in understanding how women in a large decentralized work environment were able to have their work managed and controlled.

### **Social Work Implications**

At a recent conference of the Social Work Researchers, a special panel devoted to women and work was held<sup>51</sup>. This panel of leading experts discussed how social work researchers can help women in the low-wage labor market. One scholar, Julia Henly, asserted that helping improve and understand the employer/employee relationship is important for the labor experience for workers. Speaking to other researchers she noted that this new line of inquiry improves the field:

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<sup>51</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research, Washington, D.C., January 19, 2008.

[such research can] increase our chances of making real improvements in the quality of jobs, especially for workers at the low-end of the labor market. But ... business practices are not necessarily rational, and even with good strong evidence, business as usual continues in many firms. Here is why I think it is very dangerous to leave it up to employers to reform the quality of jobs on their own. It is critical that government play an active role, through strengthening worker protections, building fairness into public benefit access, and shoring up social policies targeted at low-level workers. It is also critical that the profession of social work play a serious role in advocating on behalf of workers and their families, not only in the arenas where we tend to be quite comfortable, but also in the employment sector itself (Henly 2008).

Social workers have a duty to improve and advocate for workers who are vulnerable to unfair labor practices. And in order to meet those needs, more research is needed to understand the relationships between employers and employees. In addition, it is important to note how employees understand their own place in the labor market structure. Social work with its emphasis on social justice is well suited to push the boundaries of how research is conducted and how results are understood.

As Henly notes, there is a possibility to consider “a new and intriguing way to think about the problems that low-income workers face (Henly 2008).” Social work research then can lead to discussions about how and why particular relationships between employers and employees occur and the implications for policy change within the workplace. These areas would provide an opportunity for researchers to add to existing research on women in the low-wage labor market.

In conclusion, this thesis offers some possible new suggestions for how to approach non-traditional work environments and workforces. Even workforces that occupy socially liminal places in our society are worthy of investigation and can point to new ways of thinking about issues in the labor process. By exploring workspaces that are

outside of the centralized workforce may help to rethink larger theoretical examinations of the labor control process. In this thesis, gender and education were seen as important cultural aspects of labor control, but this is not an exhaustive lens. Rather, more studies attending to differing social arrangements and personal identities may expand our repertoire of understanding the work relations and human experiences within new work environments.

Appendix A, Timeline of Events at Love Dreams

<b>Year</b>	<b>Activity</b>
1983	Linda Patters signs up as a distributor for a sex toy company
1993	Patters begins her own sex toy company out of her home
1995	This company makes 1.2 million in retail sales
1996	Patters moves company from her basement into a 2600 square foot warehouse
2000	Love Dreams moves to 10,000 square foot warehouse and build corporate offices
2004	New Policy is introduced requiring new standards of behavior selling products, dress, conduct and so on.
2004	New name for company “Love Dreams” is introduced, launch national college tour, generates \$35 million in retail sales
2005	I enter the field to study Love Dreams.
2005	Policy in full swing; Love Dreams holds parties for celebrities; moves to 47,000 square foot corporate offices and warehouse, \$50 million in retail sales; 10,000 <sup>th</sup> consultant is recruited; Son James Piazollo takes over as president; Formalized relationship with Kinsey Institute
2006	New product packaging introduced, “new sleek design”; start non-profit for female sexual health;
2007	Love Dreams recognized by Deloitte and Touche as “rising star”; wins accolades from business organizations
2008	I exited field. (early 2008)

Appendix B, Sample of Online Resources

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Number of</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Documents and Manuals	14	Planner, Code of Conduct, Open House information, Recruit Leads, Sales Tax Flier.
Forms	2	Leave of Absence, Warranty
Games	4 (more added)	Pop My Cherry, Bust or Booty Game
Health Insurance	5	Description of Benefits, Enrollment Form, Plan Comparison
Hostess Incentives	6	Various Flyers
Magazine (pdf version)	12	Various quarterly publications
Ordering Tools	3	Excel Spreadsheet
Party Tools (pre-party)	20	Book and Re-Book, Book a Party Script, Hostess Incentives, Hosting Coaching
Party Tools (during party)	2	Proper Care, Games to Boost Parties
Product Information Tools	11	Going Waterproof, Product compatibility, Sexual Health Q & A
Recruiting Tools	10	Business Debut Parties, Consultant Agreement, Handling Recruiting
Reports	14	Back Orders, Order Details, Downline Productivity
Pre-Approved Ads	10	Bridal Ad, Bachelorette Ad, Half Page, Full Page
Health Education Monthly	6	Increasing Arousal, How to Reach Orgasm, Which lubricant to use, Anal Play and Keeping it Safe
SSS Newsletter (Sensuality, Sexuality, Survival)	9	Skin Cancer, Prostate Cancer and effect on Men's Sexuality, Leukemia and effect on sexual health
Business management	8	Business Cards, Partnerships, Sales Tax, Building your Business

Appendix C, Code Book (a section indicating main codes)

	<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
1.	Sexuality Used During Work	Self sexual identity or sexuality explicitly used during work
2.	Sexual Identity of Self	They speak about their own sexual identity changing.
	Marriage	How the work affects marriage.
3.	Children	How the work affects the rearing of children.
4.	Status in the company	How they view their and others status in the company, especially in regards to mobility and other consultants.
5.	Motivating Success	How they understand their own success and what motivates them.
6.	Reactions from family/friends.	How their family and friends react to the work they do selling sex toy products.
7.	Organizing Business	How do they organize the buying of the product, storing, getting business, taxes, and so on.
8.	Sleazy-ness	How they speak about concepts such as slut, sleazy, lascivious.
9.	Disclosing to Family	How they initially disclosed their occupation to their family and friend.
10.	Parenting and Work	The nature of work and children (not necessarily that these are sexual products)
11.	Party Description	Describing a typical party they do.
12.	Helping Others	How they talk about their work as an aid to women.
13.	Build Relationships	Relationships with other women, and the special nature of these.
14.	Skills Needed	What skills the women think are needed for this work.
15.	Class and Professionalism	How they feel about the company changes and their position in that change.
16.	Linda Patters	How they view their CEO
17.	Recruiting	Their beliefs and attitudes about recruiting, why they do it, how they approach it.
18.	Empowering work	(In-vivo code). They feel empowered by the work, description of how they feel so.
19.	Race/Ethnicity	Any mention of race or ethnic discussion during the parties, in relation to the product, and in recruitment.
20.	Homosexuality	Views on alternative sexualities.
21.	Performing at parties	What their view is of their work during parties, what is their role?

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