

FREEDOM MEANS

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To the wise and powerful women who share in the community of Magdalene for allowing me to be a part of your lives and for being a part of mine.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Consider Tam, a 54-year old graduate of a two-year residential community for women who are recovering from drug addiction and have recently left prostitution: Tam grew up in a home where her alcoholic step-father, a well-regarded psychiatrist, was at once emotionally abusive and revered. Tam started drinking when she was eleven, was addicted to alcohol and using other drugs by the time she was in high school, and was married and divorced three times by the time she was 19. Growing more ill and less financially independent with each divorce, Tam eventually ended up on the streets in Nashville, Tennessee. Tam spent nearly 30 years on the streets, prostituting herself to the men who frequent Nashville's Dickerson Road, and using the money she earned for drugs, alcohol, food and, when available, a place to lay her head at night. Three years ago, with over 100 arrests and more than a dozen felonies, Tam entered the residential community, which provides women with free housing, food, health care, dental care, psychological services, job training, education, and gainful employment. The residential "facility" is comprised of four houses in which the women live, unsupervised, in the practice of a healing community. Paradoxical discourses of healing that comes from brokenness, security gained through vulnerability, and independent selves made possible by commitment to others, mark the ethos of the community. When asked their mission, the staff, residents, and volunteers who belong to the community are quick to tell you: women's freedom.

Though this community is something of a local icon, their views on prostitution and approach to women's freedom do not go uncontested. The topic of prostitution is one that carries a considerable amount of force, and more than its fair share of clichés. Some proclaim that “prostitution is the oldest profession,” and others note “nothing divides feminism like prostitution.” Though both are, perhaps, overstatements, they convey the magnitude of the historical, economic, political, and ideological debates around the practice of trading sex for money. Sex work is a topic that garners considerable attention because it is, well, sexy, but also because it engages multiple other debates that persist as some of the great questions of personhood and society: questions of gender, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity, and how these constructs relate to questions of autonomy and freedom.

Although definitions and concrete understandings of “freedom” remain somewhat illusive to scholars and activists alike, most would agree that the oppression that occurs through hierarchies based on gender, race, class, and sexuality are particularly detrimental to the freedom of individuals and the families and communities that surround them. To the extent that these systems of oppression influence the distribution of material resources (Sen, 1999), access to physical and psychological wellness and security (Nussbaum, 2000), and power and control in personal relationships (Tronto, 1993; Hirschmann, 2003), they restrict individual freedom. This is not to say that individuals that are constrained by these hierarchies are necessarily and totally unfree (indeed, we are all constrained by such systems to some extent, and indeed, we are all complicit in them), but rather that the freedom to pursue the type of life that one might deem “worth living” is restricted (Hirschman, 2003; Nussbaum, 2000, Sen, 1999). It is not difficult to recall

groups of people that have historically experienced great degrees of unfreedom – slaves, prisoners, and people who have been denied basic rights based on certain qualities of their person (such as gender, race, sexuality, religious affiliation, nationality to name a few). While it is popular to say that such people have been excluded or removed from society, upon careful examination, it seems more accurate to say that they are, in fact, integral to society, but suffer unfreedom because of the way they have been integrated (Hirschmann, 2003). Using this approach, it is possible to extend the interrogation of unfreedom to others who occupy a somewhat restricted and precarious social position due to the nature of their life experiences. Such an interrogation serves to uncover the many forces that work to support and/or restrict human freedom, and has the potential to offer an understanding of freedom that is grounded in lived experience rather than immaterial ideals (Mills, 2005). In order to further explore these concepts and their relationships, I conducted a qualitative ethnographic study that examines the experiences of women previously involved in drug addiction and street prostitution, who are now living and working in a recovery community. In this dissertation, I discuss some of the many material, social, and political conditions that influence women's freedom. Furthermore, I explore community members' understandings of the concept of freedom, and the ways in which their freedom is affected by the recovery community of which they are a part.

### Sex, Drugs & Freedom: A Theoretical Perspective

Sex work has been loosely defined to encompass multiple forms of erotic labor ranging from phone sex workers to dancers to street-walking prostitutes to call girls.

O'Neill (2001) cites Nicholson, who offers a typology of prostitution existing in large cities:

...call services, both agency and private individuals; female streetwalkers who work for themselves; female streetwalkers who work for pimps; amateur streetwalkers who hustle part-time for themselves or boyfriends or partners; boy street-hustlers; weekenders working for excitement or enough money to party for the weekend; professional hustlers between the ages of 19 and 22 who have been working for a couple of years and who may be involved in pornography; survivors under the age of 18, boys and girls who have run away or who have simply been 'pushed out,' who lack education, work skills, skills needed for independent living; survivors under the age of 14. (p. 100).

More recent definitions of sex-work have included people who are trafficked in the sex trade, as well as more performance-based varieties of sex work including window dancing, stripping, and escort services (O'Neill, 2001). These definitions have also been expanded to embrace the growing number of men involved in the trade, however, these men still represent a significant minority (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). In general, prostitution involves male clients paying female sex workers in exchange for sexual services. Street prostitution typically involves women working in prostitution who solicit their clients and often administer their services from the street or other public venues.

Street prostitution "employs" thousands of women in the U.S. at any given time<sup>1</sup> (ProCon.org). Despite its illegality, statistics demonstrate that prostitution continues to exist as a pervasive practice in the United States: results of a 2004 TNS poll demonstrated that 15 percent of men have paid for sex, and 30 percent of single men over 30 have paid for sex (Langer, Arnedt & Sussman, 2004). When it comes to incurring punishment for participation in prostitution, women involved in street-based sex work are

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<sup>1</sup> This figure remains elusive, however the National Task Force on Prostitution estimates that 1 million women in the U.S. have been involved in prostitution at some point in their lives, and approximately 82,000 women engage in prostitution annually.

the most subject to arrest (and others forms of abuse as well). From 1994 – 2004, an estimated 73,800 – 100,200 prostitution arrests were made annually<sup>2</sup> (ProCon.org, 2008).

Of particular concern to activists and practitioners working on issues of street prostitution are the sub-standard work environments that sex workers endure as part of their occupation. Multiple studies of sex workers in various locations around the world demonstrate that working conditions make women particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual violence on the job (Sanders & Campbell, 2007). Researchers estimate anywhere from 50% to 100% of street-based sex workers in their samples had experienced violence (Sanders & Campbell, 2007). In addition to physical and sexual abuse, the women also fall victim to what some have termed “economic abuse”: being robbed, not being paid, or being paid less than the previously agreed upon price for services (Sanders & Campbell, 2007). Ward, Day and Webber (1999) found that street-based sex workers in the United Kingdom are over 10 times more likely to die from violence at work than other women their age, and Kinnell (2006) reported that 86 sex workers were murdered in the UK from 1995-2005. According to Goodyear (2007), “standardized mortality rates for sex workers are six times those seen in the general population...the highest for any group of women. Death and violence are but a part of a spectrum of physical and emotional morbidity endured” (p.52). Theorists who believe that violence is inherent to sex work identify the practice of prostitution itself as the cause for such violence. Others point to stigma, poverty, general violence of the streets, and the clandestine nature of street-based sex work as the reasons that women are abused. Research on indoor sex work demonstrates

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is not necessarily a good measure of the total number of women in the U.S. who are involved in sex work. There are many who are never arrested, and many who are arrested multiple times.

that moving sex work indoors and into a regulated environment does make it safer, however, violence persists (Melrose, 2007).

There is considerable debate around the nature of sex work and why women enter. Women often enter sex work (especially street-based prostitution) as a response to environments and situations that leave them few other options. For example, women overwhelmingly report economic pressures as the reason they entered the sex trade (Chapkis, 1997; Mulia, 2002; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Whether they are graduate students dancing at a strip club in order to earn money to supplement their living expenses, or women selling sex on the streets in order to support their families, women see erotic labor as an opportunity to earn fast and much needed cash. Indeed, in some communities, engagement in prostitution is viewed as the most desperate response to dire economic situations, and symbolizes “how bad” things have become (Durr, 2005).

Alternatively, many women indicate that sex work is the most interesting and viable employment option available (Petro, 2007), and though it may be far from utopia, it is preferable to other opportunities such as cleaning houses (Chua, 2000) or performing secretarial work (Chapkis, 1997). Still others take the position that sex work is not a desirable occupation, however it is the work that is available to them, and as such, the fact that they are “working” should be respected. While people who report this experience are more likely to endorse their involvement in sex work as economically coerced, they are often resistant to the idea that they are without agency. For these women, sex work is a site of resistance (Chua, 2000; Chapkis, 1997; Kempadoo & Doezma, 1998) and is an active response to marginalizing economic structures.

In addition to the economic pressures that encourage women into sex work, scholars note the overwhelming prevalence of drug abuse and addiction in sex worker populations. A 1997 study of street-walking prostitutes in Atlanta revealed that 92.5% of the women arrested for prostitution tested positive for illegal drugs (National Institute of Justice, 1998). Another study conducted by a New York organization that has provided health services to sex workers for over 20 years revealed similar levels of drug use among the populations that they follow. Of the 144 female sex workers included in their sample, 68.8% reported abusing heroin sometime in their lifetime. Ninety-five percent reported abusing crack cocaine, 84.7% powder cocaine, 94.4% marijuana, 55.9% alcohol, and 40.3% benzodiazepines. Ninety-two percent of the women reported using crack cocaine in the last month (Nuttbrock, 2004). For sex workers who have active addictions, researchers note that the relationship between drugs and sex work is not uncomplicated (Durr, 2005; Nuttbrock, 2004). The need for drug money and the availability of clients among drug-based relationships often means that addiction is the gateway to sex work. Alternately, some women report drug use as a way to numb themselves from the experiences of sex work, and still others report that the environments that support heavy drug use lead them to “drift” into the sex trade (Inciardi & Surratt, 2001). With this in mind, it is important to note that addiction itself is often a marginalizing and isolating experience. Because of the way that illegal drugs are unequally distributed throughout the population (both in type and concentration) (Dunlap, 2002; Singer, 2008), unequal access to effective treatment (Mulia 2002), and the institutional racism that exists in punishment schemes for illicit drug use (Roberts, 2000), addiction is often more costly for people of color and those with lower socio-economic

status. Furthermore, addiction in women is often treated differently, both socially and medically, than addiction in men (Mulia, 2000; Zerai & Banks, 2002).

There is also debate around the claim that most women who enter into the sex trade have been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused at some time prior to their entering. Both because this is a difficult claim to track, and because it seems to promote the idea that participation in sex work is the result of some kind of pathology, pro-sex activists are particularly averse to the promotion of this idea. What we do know is that the younger one enters into sex work, the more likely she is to have been abused prior to entering. For young adults (mostly “transition age”: 18-22 years) who enter into prostitution, rates of abuse are staggering. One study of 361 street-involved youth (mean age 22) in Canada found that 73% had experienced physical abuse, 32.4% had experienced sexual abuse, 86.8% had experienced emotional abuse, and 93% had experienced emotional neglect (Stolz et al, 2007). Sarratt (2004) and Dunlap and colleagues (2002) reported that street-based sex workers experience a cycle of violence involving early experiences with sexual abuse, abuse at work, and abuse in the context of private adult relationships. For men (typically young men) who enter sex work, the rates of childhood abuse are even higher (Dilorio et al., 2002; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001, Zierler et al., 1991). These figures are in agreement with other similar studies of involvement in sex work and childhood abuse (Vaddiparti et al., 2006; West et al., 2000), however they are not conclusive in demonstrating that involvement in sex work is “caused” by previous sexual abuse (Nandon, 1998; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Still, it is important to notice the prevalence of abuse (which is deplorable regardless), and consider that its existence may



influence the regard that people have for their own bodies and healthy avenues for their body's use (Dunlap, 2002).

That the conditions surrounding sex work are often dangerous and abusive is not up for contention. Rather, the cause of these conditions and what should be done about them is. Women who see sex work as exploitation believe that there is no practice of sex work that is not abusive. While improving working conditions for sex work would somewhat improve the situations of women involved in prostitution, it would also sanction a practice that is believed to be abusive, exploitative, and inherently “bad” for women. For others, the conditions of sex work are created by the stigma and illegal nature of the practice, not by the practice itself. From this perspective, the correct approach to prostitution is one that ensures a safe working environment and workers' rights.

In most cases, sex work has multiple meanings and represents a range of experiences (Elias, 2007), and therefore poses considerable dilemmas to how we approach and understand it ethically, economically, and especially, legally. Because our social and legal structures tend to assign sex to the bedroom (and is therefore “private”) and work to the workplace (and is therefore “public”) – divisions that are arbitrary and often inaccurate, but no less socially meaningful – its existence is difficult to accommodate. This difficulty is illustrated in the many approaches that people take to the “problem” of sex work. While the women involved and the communities that surround them often differ as to what the problem is, exactly – as earlier discussed, some identify the existence of prostitution as the problem, whereas others identify the conditions under which it is practiced, and still others identify the social norms and prejudices against such

practice – there seems to be the consensus that women involved in sex work are a particularly marginalized subset of society.

In general, legal structures have been the targets of activism and advocacy for most players in the debate, regardless of their position. The battle over legality is in and of itself interesting. Like many other social issues, access to justice means recognition by the legal system. For the subject of prostitution, this vying for legal status is typically framed in the rhetoric of protection – that when prostitution is legalized and regulated, the women within it will be protected and legitimated. In other words, the law has material implications – people hope that making something legal will make it safer – but also symbolic implications as well – inclusion in the legal system means inclusion in society – exclusion means invisibility and marginality.

Advocates for viewing prostitution as a legitimate form of work claim that efforts to make such work illegal are not only ineffective, they are yet more attempts by governments to regulate women's bodies and sexuality. While those who argue for legal sanctions against prostitution are also concerned about regulation, the blame is placed in different locations – people who argue that prostitution should be illegal generally tend to locate the problem in cultures that promote the use and abuse of women through, among other things, their sexuality. The focus is less on legal structures and more on social, economic, and cultural practices and ideologies. Activists who point out the use of legal structures to regulate women's sexuality echo arguments made by feminist political theorists who demonstrate that such regulation is neither new nor unusual (McClintock, 1995). Additionally, the act of criminalizing prostitution where it is legal draws merited

concern. For women who are employed selling sex, the prospect of losing their job is no less serious than for those involved in any other industry (Chapkis, 1997).

Why sex work is such a contentious issue is not an uninteresting (or inconsequential) question. It is important on one hand because it engages real people and presents real problems. Though this would seem to be reason enough for attention and interest, sex work is also a contentious topic because it engages, challenges, and acts upon deep-seated beliefs about gender, sexuality, and the nature of freedom.

Appropriately nuanced accounts of sex work acknowledge the differences between women involved in sex work, including the experiences of women involved, the reasons for entering, and the opportunities to leave, and the many social forces and personal choices and desires that influence these differences. Similar to theories that highlight the intersectional nature of women's lives – theories that emphasize that women's experiences of being “women” are mediated by class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, just to name a few – this “diversity” perspective on sex work seems to be the most useful in understanding how different women can have radically different experiences with sex work (Nagel, 1997). It seems, then, that the best way to approach the field of sex work, and bring about changes advocated by the women involved, is to act “close to the ground” – to develop strategies that are responsive to the needs and desires of individual women in particular contexts.

With this in mind, the irony of the debate around the legalization of sex work is that people on all sides of the discussion have put an incredible amount of energy and resources into courting the support of national and international legal structures, rather than developing community-based responses that are supportive of local women's

interests, and attentive to their particular situations. The diversity of women involved in sex work tells us that the sweeping nature of legislation is probably inadequate to accommodate the myriad experiences and realities included in this practice. Furthermore, the structures to which activists are appealing are, in general, notoriously gendered, and rarely advocate liberatory environments for women, even when the creation of such environments is the stated goal (O'Neill, 2007; Scoular et al, 2007). This is not to say that challenging existing legal structures that are oppressive to women (or racial, ethnic, sexual or other minorities that have historically been marginalized by these structures) should not be an important aspect of activism and advocacy. Notably, legal structures can support or interfere with community-based work. Rather, it is to say that seeking legitimacy solely through the law may be misguided and ineffective. Research on approaches to sex work indicates a shift in support for sex workers away from community-based organizational responses that provide much needed material support (health care and education, drug counseling, relational networks) and towards international network-based organizing and advocacy (Elias, 2007). Though these strategies may be important in increasing public knowledge about sex work, transforming conventionally held images of sex workers, and gaining employment rights, they also detract attention from material strategies that are equally important. It is essential that approaches to sex work activism and advocacy are diverse enough to account for the multiple perspectives and realities included in the term.

In addition to the material problems of shifting focus from community-based responses around sex work to strategies that rely solely on advocacy, the shift has consequences for representation as well. As activists target large-scale institutions to

provide legal frameworks for dealing with sex work, they often make sweeping claims about the nature of sex work and the experiences of those within it. A sex worker interviewed by Wendy Chapkis (1997) claimed, “Maybe what they (pro-sex work activists) were doing was glamorous. But they acted like their experience spoke for us all. Well, for the people in my group, it was not glamour” (p. 127). The woman went on to say, however, that anti-prostitution activists also used sex workers as a trope to support their activism more than to help women who were being exploited: “There are others who say that prostitution is evil because it contributes to violence against women and they’ll have their ‘Take Back the Night’ marches right through the Red Light district without even dealing with the sex workers as other women... They just turn us into symbols” (p. 127).

In general, activist debates have largely been content to perpetuate ideological impasses rather than to seek common ground and ways to move forward that will offer real changes in the lives of women. While I believe that there are many ways to seek commonality, the most obvious seem to be claims of freedom. Although some women disagree that choice and freedom are fruitful ideals around which to organize debates about sex work, most see freedom and choice as the crux of the argument (Chapkis, 1997). The debates about sex work often turn around the axes of what constitutes freedom for women in the context of sexual relationships, in working arrangements, and in the processes of identity and representation. We would be hard-pressed to find any sane person willing to argue that involvement in sex work under conditions of overt coercion is legitimate. What is less clear, and more frequently disputed, however, are the far more prevalent situations in which coercion is embedded in overarching social,

economic, and political systems that shape the contexts of our lives and influence our formations of selfhood.

### Feminist Accounts of Freedom

In light of the many questions of freedom presented by debates in the field of scholarship that has been produced about prostitution, it seems instructive to explore various theories of freedom in order to better understand its definitions and dimensions. Questions of freedom are important when discussing addiction as well, on both an individual and a policy level. On an individual level, there is the question of addiction as a potentially enslaving experience that interferes with individual ability to make choices that are not in the service of the addictive substance itself (American Psychological Association, 2000). On a policy level, approaches to drug abuse and addiction provide interesting scenarios in which punishment is used as the primary mechanism for controlling a phenomenon whose etiology is typically linked to individual illness (e.g. addiction as a disease) and/or environmental factors (e.g. family or community experiences). Treatment, therefore, is often denied in favor of jail time or monetary fines, which typically leads to continued lack of freedom. In the case of both prostitution and addiction, the corresponding images and experiences are shaped by socially-held notions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class, and have implications for images of freedom and justice. Although there are countless political and philosophical theorists who have written about freedom, I have chosen three approaches that I find most helpful for understanding some of the issues involved in the debates around sex work and addiction.

Traditional political theorists have understood “freedom” as a decidedly individualistic concept requiring individual agents attempting to act and prevent or enable others from acting as well. Rooted in the philosophies of men such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Mill, traditional theories of freedom have proven to be somewhat ineffective for engaging the lived realities of society’s more marginalized peoples. In response, recent freedom theorists have instead understood freedom in a manner more acquainted with contexts and institutions as “agents” that can restrain or support freedom. Likewise, they have paid more attention to the ways in which informal regulations such as norms, beliefs, relationships, and cultural expectations limit available choices and an individual’s ability to make them. For the purposes of this paper, I discuss three theoretical approaches that explore institutions and social contexts and their relationships to freedom: 1) the capabilities approach, based on the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum; 2) an account of freedom drawn from theories of discourse and social construction, based on Nancy Hirschmann; and 3) care ethics, based largely on the work of Joan Tronto and Eva Kittay. I have chosen these three approaches because they represent three different strands of feminism, highlight three different aspects of the often-ignored contexts of freedom, and propose three different understandings of the constitution of the choosing self.

### *Freedom and Capabilities*

In her book *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, Martha Nussbaum (2000) works to create a universal theory of justice based on human capabilities. Focused especially on women, Nussbaum asserts that there are injustices

readily identifiable across cultures and traditions that require universal normative treatment. After working through various critiques of universal norms and values, Nussbaum establishes a list of “central human capabilities” that she argues should serve as the minimum for human quality of life. Differentiating her capabilities from human functioning as well as human preferences, Nussbaum emphasizes the importance of choice in her theory: the role of the central capabilities is not meant to be a prescription for how people should be, but rather a list of choices that all people should be allowed to make and maintain. Illustrating this delineation, she states, “The person with plenty of food may always choose to fast, but there is a great difference between fasting and starving (p.87).” Nussbaum acknowledges that her approach is in need of discussion surrounding the amount of inequality that should be allowed once every person is above the capability threshold, but she offers her capabilities as a fairly convincing floor. At first glance, Nussbaum’s theory could perhaps be interpreted as one dealing specifically with issues of distributive justice as opposed to freedom. However, understanding Nussbaum’s theory in relationship to the work of Amartya Sen, we see that the measure of justice for Nussbaum and Sen is a measure of freedom – a just world exists when the individuals within it live in a context marked by sufficient resources (broadly defined) to support each individual’s choices and freedoms. Similarly, it is impossible for individuals to be free when they are deprived of basic capabilities (Sen, 1999).

Because Nussbaum’s project is one that presents a set of universal values, her first task is to defend the legitimacy of universality itself. She addresses the three most prominent critiques of universal norms and values: the argument from culture, the argument from diversity, and the argument from paternalism. The argument from culture



challenges claims to universality by asserting that moral conceptions and resulting norms can only be understood and evaluated within the tradition from which they come.

Fighting to ward off moral imperialism, the argument from culture is an important one.

Nussbaum refutes this argument by pointing to the many layers in each culture, the different understandings of culture from the people within it, and the obvious historical failings of culture and tradition to provide appropriate moral norms.

The argument from diversity makes similar claims to the argument from culture, but goes a step further claiming that even if we could extend a universal concept of justice that satisfied the nuances of tradition and culture, such an approach would be undesirable because of the resulting loss of diverse perspectives. Nussbaum addresses this critique by saying that though diversity is important, it should not be revered without examining what it offers to further human dignity and other basic values.

Finally, Nussbaum addresses the argument from paternalism by again asserting that though people have a right to determine their own best interests, the structures under which they live often serve as paternalistic oppressors. Additionally, in other parts of the book, Nussbaum defends a position of plurality and liberalism (an attempt, among other things, to escape the pitfalls of paternalism) within her argument for a universal ethic by emphasizing the role of multiple traditions, the valuation of each person as an end, and the central importance of choice in her theory.

Nussbaum argues that it is possible to reach common understandings of “justice” across different peoples and cultures, all the while maintaining essential grounding in those differences. She claims,

We should not underrate the extent to which such differences in options construct differences in thought; neither, however, should we so overrate these differences,

thinking of them as creating an...‘essence’ that is utterly incomprehensible to other imaginations. Certain basic aspirations to human flourishing are recognizable across differences of class and contest, however crucial it remains to understand how context shapes both choice and aspiration. (p. 31)

Nussbaum begins her project of creating universal capabilities by defending the idea that there are identifiable “qualities of life” that are required for life to be fully human. By combining this argument with her principle of each person as an end, Nussbaum asserts that it is possible to prescribe a list of essential human capabilities that should be available to each and every person. This principle of each person’s capability and its resulting list of central capabilities is not, however, a complete theory of justice. Rather, it provides us with the “basis for determining a decent social minimum in a variety of areas” (p.75). Furthermore, “the structure of social and political institutions should be chosen, at least in part, with a view to promoting at least a threshold level of these human capabilities” (p.75).

Nussbaum identifies the Central Human Capabilities<sup>3</sup> as:

- 1) Life
- 2) Bodily Health
- 3) Bodily Integrity
- 4) Senses, Imagination, and Thought
- 5) Emotions
- 6) Practical Reason
- 7) Affiliation
- 8) Other Species

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<sup>3</sup> According to Nussbaum, human capabilities are equally important and non-hierarchical. In her book, however, she presents them in a numerical list identical to the one that follows. I have presented them according to her format.

9) Play

10) Control over One's Environment (Political and Material)

(pp.78-80)

Nussbaum argues that similar to Rawls's list of primary goods, these capabilities can be used to form the moral basis of constitutional guarantees, and assigns no hierarchical ordering to the capabilities because each are equally important and necessary. Additionally, all items on the list are separate (it is not appropriate to "trade" or increase one at the expense of another), but it is important to also acknowledge that the items are related and can work to influence one another.

Although Nussbaum argues that all human capabilities in the list are equally important to human functioning, she seems to favor some capabilities over others and even states that some are more open to contest. For instance, the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation are said to be of utmost importance because they embody all the other capabilities. Nussbaum invites her readers to critique and discuss the list of capabilities, asserting that some capabilities (literacy) might be more easily and appropriately contested than other capabilities (bodily integrity).

Nussbaum identifies the items on the list as combined capabilities, drawing distinctions between basic capabilities ("the innate equipment of individuals that is the necessary basis for development of more advanced capabilities"), internal capabilities ("developed states of the person herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of requisite functions"), and combined capabilities (p.84). Combined capabilities include both internal capabilities and environmental conditions (referring to one's social, political, economic, and cultural surroundings) that

promote the exercise of such internal capabilities and other functions. Identifying her capabilities as combined capabilities proves important for Nussbaum, both in establishing their importance as the foundation for providing individuals with choice and for discussing the way they inform human rights.

In her third chapter, Nussbaum situates her capabilities approach between two “extreme” types of justice theories: welfarism and platonism. In particular, Nussbaum is interested in distinguishing her theory of capabilities from welfarism in order to demonstrate that capabilities are different than preferences or desires. Welfarism argues for justice based solely on the preferences of those involved. After giving a tour of various characters in the school of welfarist thought, Nussbaum argues that welfarism is insufficient because even the most deeply welfarist theorist acknowledges that culture and experience influence a person’s preferences and can even influence what that person thinks possible for him or herself. More explicitly, Nussbaum argues that welfarist theories are indefensible because: 1) they rely on normative standards (which the welfarist position, in theory, opposes) to develop appropriate procedures for individuals to form and act on their preferences, 2) individual preferences are shaped by adaptation to the individual’s environment, 3) individual preferences are shaped by social and political institutions (rather than the other way around), and 4) deprivation of human capabilities is something that should be addressed as important “whether or not the person minds it or complains about it” (p.145). Nussbaum is not arguing that preferences have no importance in the process of justice, but rather that they are not a good basis for its establishment. Preferences are easily shaped and manipulated, unstable, and therefore not consistently adaptive.

It seems that one could also level the same critiques against the idea of choice (the practice of which forms the “end” of Nussbaum’s theory), so at this point it seems important to examine the role played by “preference” and “choice” in the two theories. In particular, the welfarist approach envisions “preference” as the basis for developing norms and distributing goods. Created in an attempt to respect individual autonomy and local knowledge, the welfarist fails to recognize that preferences can be hard to develop and even more difficult to attain in oppressive environments. Nussbaum wants to create a system in which “choice” (or one might argue “preference”) comes after basic norms have been developed to create an environment in which an individual has the greatest opportunity to make and carry out adaptive choices.

Although Nussbaum does not directly address prostitution in her work on freedom and capabilities, she does discuss it in an earlier work, *Sex and Social Justice* (1999). In this book, Nussbaum discusses the ways in which sex roles and social context work to create situations of justice and injustice for the women who occupy them. Nussbaum draws parallels between sex workers and other women who sell services intimately related to their person professionally – the professor (who receives money for her thoughts), the massage therapist (who receives money for non-sexual bodily services that involve pleasure), and the factory worker (who sells physical labor to create something that is most likely used by someone unknown to her). Nussbaum goes on to state that the central, important difference between prostitution and these other professions is the stigma attached to prostitution. She locates the sources of the stigma in two places: violation of socially-determined “appropriate” sex roles, and gender based domination,

and links the marginalizing role of stigma with the dangerous conditions in which women involved in prostitution work (Nussbaum, 1999).

Interestingly, in her discussion of domination, Nussbaum never addresses the fact that women are grossly over-represented in sex work, more so than any of the other professions. Nussbaum never directly proclaims whether or not she believes that sex work is a situation of injustice, however, she concludes her section on sex work by advocating that we focus our work more on women's cooperatives (which she sees as a symbol of women's empowerment) and less on prostitution. In other words, the reader gathers that she believes sex work to be no more or less exploitative than other professions in which women sell personal services, provided that they are given adequate support to practice their trade in ways that are safe and provide them with some degree of choice and control. From this perspective, it is not impossible to draw conclusions regarding the relationship between Nussbaum's theory of freedom and the practice of sex work.

Nussbaum helps us to see the importance of material and institutions contexts in women's abilities to make choices based on their own beliefs about what constitutes human flourishing. She supports an ethic that requires certain assurances for all people – assurances that she believes enable them to identify the type of life they want to live and take actions to achieve it. Whether or not one actually takes action is less the issue than whether or not a context exists to support said action if one decided to take it.

Nussbaum's theory helps us to gain a deeper understanding of the problem with women who enter prostitution based on economic necessity. For Nussbaum, a woman who enters prostitution (or perhaps any other profession) because she needs the money and

has no other employment options, or has not received the education necessary to choose alternatives, is not free – she has not chosen out of a context that supports her capabilities. Similarly, it is possible that the contexts created by involvement in prostitution results in further lack of freedom for women. For example, to the extent that a woman is unable to request that her client use condoms or receive services in a safe location, her freedom to health and safety is jeopardized because her ability to choose these things is restricted. Conversely, it seems that Nussbaum would support that a woman for whom the capabilities had been met, and who still chose to engage in prostitution was acting freely.

If we follow Nussbaum's theory in a procedural manner, it is interesting to see that exercising one's freedom can land one in a situation in which she is no longer free. For example, a woman may be free to choose prostitution (providing she chose the profession out of a situation of full capability), and then find herself in a situation that no longer supports her capabilities. Furthermore, we can see how institutional commitments that support capabilities in one may in turn undermine them in another. For example, legalization of prostitution would create a situation where women involved in prostitution were ostensibly more "free" – advocates of legalization claim that legalization and regulation of prostitution create safer environments in which sex workers have more control over the clients they see and the money they earn. On the other hand, this type of legalization would require sex workers and sex venues to pay income taxes, meaning that the government would then have an economic interest in the continued practice of prostitution. This is technically true of any industry or profession that is "legal" (scholars have and do make the argument that governments' economic interests in, say, armed

conflict, continually creates the “need” for soldiers who are then required to incur risk to themselves and, potentially, harm to others). However, it seems that we should be particularly concerned about the government interest in a profession that has been shown (at least in some contexts) to be exploitative.

Nussbaum’s theory is built on a secular transcendental notion of the self, meaning that she believes that there is something essential and common to each human that allows us to posit theories of universality and set a minimum to which each person is entitled due to their membership in the human family. This theory allows for a quite individual and unified version of the self, and is, perhaps, the most concordant with dominant western political theory. Her view of the person is one that allows her to distinguish real, tangible minimum conditions that are owed each member of society, and provides a measure against which we can evaluate the contexts in which we live. What is perhaps concerning about Nussbaum’s view of the self is that it seems to preclude a critical look at how our desires are shaped, our values are formed, and internal conflicts are rectified. She provides us with few tools to determine the process by which choices are formed and acted upon, and the ways in which others choices influence our own. For example, if education is available to everyone in my community, but everyone in my community decides that going to school is “selling out,” am I still free to attend school and maintain my standing in my community? Am I still free to participate in relationships that are valuable to me?



## *Freedom and Discourse*

Quite different from Nussbaum, Hirschmann's central question addresses how the choosing self is constituted. For Hirschmann, the self is constructed through language and discourse that in turn affects the individual's beliefs about the world, the material conditions in which the individual lives and interacts, and the meanings ascribed to the self, the world, and relationships. The self is always at once agential and restricted, constructed and constructing. Desires, beliefs, and internal conflicts are always formed in and through the "external" world of material reality and discourse. Likewise, the choosing self acts on material reality and discourse to shape it, which in turn acts back on the self and others.

Hirschmann's notion of freedom is concerned with the ways in which social construction operating through language works to shape and produce the subject of freedom and the context in which the "choosing self" acts. Hirschmann is committed to a theory of freedom that links language and discourse with material realities, social structures and institutions, and the relationships in which women find themselves. By placing the often excluded and invisible aspects of women's experiences at the center of her theory of freedom, Hirschmann allows the reader to see the ways in which contexts often taken as "natural" create situations of unfreedom for their inhabitants. Because her task is to create a feminist theory of freedom, Hirschmann's special interest are the ways in which patriarchy works to create situations of unfreedom for women.

Hirschmann (2003) begins her award-winning book, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom*, by outlining various debates about the nature of positive versus negative freedom. Although some recent political theorists have challenged the

utility of these two concepts, they remain central to most understandings of freedom. Drawing on Isaiah Berlin's 1971 article, freedom theorists generally ascribe to a type of freedom that is either concerned with barriers (negative freedom<sup>4</sup>) or capabilities (positive freedom<sup>5</sup>). In addition to the difficulties that arise from attempting to parse freedom in such a manner, Hirschmann claims that separating these two concepts ignores the important relationship between external and internal barriers to choice, and takes for granted the choosing subject as an independent agent. In response to this dilemma, Hirschmann proposes a definition of freedom that integrates the two:

Freedom...is centrally about choice, a claim with which many mainstream freedom theories would agree. But choice is constituted by a complex relationship between "internal" factors of will and desire – impacting on the preferences and desires one has and how one makes choices – and factors "outside" the self that may inhibit or enhance one's ability to pursue one's preferences, including the kind and number of choices available, the obstacles to making the preferred choice, and the variable power that different people have to make choices (p.vix).

In order to develop a theory that is more attentive to the relationship between the internal and the external components of freedom, Hirschmann's work draws attention to the relationship between context and the self, particularly as they are both created by and through discourse. Central to her project is an appropriately complex understanding of social construction.

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<sup>4</sup> Negative liberty can be defined as an absence of external restraints that come from outside the self and are alien to the self. Negative freedom involves things such as not being interfered with by others, and is defined in opposition to concepts such as obligation and authority. (Berlin, 1971; Hirschmann, 2003)

<sup>5</sup> According to Hirschmann, positive liberty is distinct from negative liberty in at least three ways: 1) it is concerned with the conditions requisite to exercise individual choice, 2) it involves a more contextual and communal notion of the self, and 3) it takes into account "internal barriers" such as uncertainties, fears, addictions, and compulsions that might interfere with the subject's "true desires."

According to Hirschmann, social construction happens on three levels, all of which interact and rely upon each other. The first level, which Hirschmann calls “the ideological representation of reality,” is reminiscent of Marx, and points to the ways in which language works to create a version of reality that is distorted or incongruent with what is actually occurring. To illustrate this level, Hirschmann provides a litany of “caricatures” that are often used to represent women (the virgin, the whore, the asexual mother, the sexual temptress) and notes that the problem with these images is that they “fail to recognize women’s humanity, their membership in society, their differences from each other, and not just from men, their individuality and their commonality” (p. 78). At the second level of social construction, which Hirschmann calls “materialization,” the ideological representation of reality goes beyond distortion and begins to shape the world according to its images. Reality is actually produced by language.<sup>6</sup> At this level, Hirschmann says, “. . .the construction of social behaviors and rules take on a life of its own, and becomes constitutive not only of what women are allowed to do, but of what they are allowed to be” (p. 79). Environments that constrain and limit women more so than men are created by the ideological beliefs that women should be more constrained for reasons of desert, protection, or inability. At the third level of social construction, meaning takes its root in language where it “establishes the parameters for understanding, defining, and communicating about reality, about who women are, what we are doing, what we desire” (p. 80). Important to Hirschmann’s theory is her idea that everyone (men as well as women) are always already constructed by systems of patriarchy. She

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<sup>6</sup> This idea is also borrowed from Marx who describes how capitalist ideology produces relationships of alienation between workers and other workers, workers and themselves, and workers and their labor.

rejects the idea of an essential self, and proposes that each of us are continually forming and being formed by the discourses that construct our reality. Unlike many theorists who rely heavily on discourse, however, Hirschmann's argument does not preclude the ability to consider material conditions or the physical body in her account of freedom.

Clarifying her position on such, she states, "That we are socially constructed does not mean that what is constructed is not real" (p. 210). Rather, the interaction between Hirschmann's three levels of social construction allows her to marry the work of post-modern discourse theorists (such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler) and more materialist theorists (such as Catherine MacKinnon), who are otherwise quite at odds with one another (Hekman, 2006). Hirschman instructs that both material realities and discursive construction are essential to women's freedom. In the middle chapters of her book, Hirschmann applies her theories to three specific issues: veiling, domestic violence, and women and welfare. Using these empirical case studies, Hirschmann demonstrates the ways in which her theory helps us to better understand the complexities of women's lives and their exercise and limitations of freedom. While Hirschmann does not specifically address prostitution, we can imagine that her theory would help us to see how beliefs about women and their sexuality could create a world in which prostitution is simultaneously widespread and marginalized.

Hirschmann helps us to understand, in part, the tenacity and intensity of the debate within feminist circles about the nature of sex work. One might wonder why it would not be possible for women who are pro sex-work to advocate for their personal position and carry on about their business without regard for the identity of sex work as a profession. Similarly, women who are anti-prostitution could go about their work preventing women

from entering prostitution or helping them leave once they have arrived there. The reality, however, is that the actions that are involved in both of these scenarios have important implications for the freedom of the other group – as actions, they draw their meaning from language, and this language, in turn, shapes the way that women and sex work are socially constructed. The results of these processes are cyclical – as activists work to make prostitution less acceptable as a form of work and more visible as a form of exploitation, the industry itself becomes identified (for better or for worse) as a marginal and undesirable institution (Kinnell, 2006). Similarly, as women who are pro-sex work advocate for the legitimacy of prostitution as a career choice, women who have not chosen prostitution suddenly find themselves included among those who have “chosen” to do a job that is often closely associated with abuse and other oppressive situations (Brison, 2006). To some degree, sex work scholars touch on the role of language and discourse in the creation of the prostitute as a subject. Discourses that describe sex workers as victims are particularly problematic for some because they believe that this view casts women once again as helpless and passive, and denies their agency as survivors, as entrepreneurs, as service providers, as human. While some draw on the language of victimization in order to emphasize the often-deplorable conditions that lead to women engaging in sex work, and to combat discourses that place blame with the prostitute herself, others see it as yet another form of oppression and marginalization – one which works to make women engaged in sex work yet another caricature of unfortunate, passive, asexual women in need of protection and regulation.

In summary, Hirschmann’s theory seems to suggest that, when it comes to the case of prostitution, women who are engaged in sex work (regardless of their belief about it),

people who work with sex workers, men who frequent sex workers, and politicians who form and enforce policies about sex work are all influencing and influenced by social constructions of women, sexuality, work, and relationships, as well as claims of agency and freedom. The construction of these concepts takes place at three levels – first of all at the ideological level, secondly at the material level (at which ideas and approaches reproduce themselves), and thirdly at the level of language itself. In addition to the material conditions that influence freedom, and the language and discourse that shape these conditions and the choosing subject herself, care theorists point to the role of relationships in supporting and restricting “individual” choices.

### *Freedom and Relationships of Care*

By constructing a political ethic that emphasizes interdependency and relationship, care theorists challenge us to construct a concept of freedom in which relationship and the existence of others allows and supports freedom, even as it restricts it. According to care theorists, freedom requires relationship and grows out of personal obligation. Discussions about care and relationships of responsibility entered political theory discourse through discussions about moral theory. While care ethics are often positioned in relationship to theories of justice, the concepts of care ethics are important to a fully-formed notion of freedom because they help us to see the role of relationships in supporting and enabling freedom. Furthermore, care theory also shows us how the very same relationships that make freedom possible for ourselves and others often restrict freedom even as they enable it. Lastly, care theory upholds the value of care and relationships while at the same time noting that responsibilities for care and the

restrictions that come with those responsibilities are not distributed equally. Like other burdens, the burden of care is distributed unequally along the lines of gender, race, and class, often leading to less freedom for those who are assigned roles of care-giving.

Care theory in the United States was anticipated by early feminists such as Jane Addams, Lucia Ames Mead, and Marietta Keis (Rogers, 2004), and the origins of contemporary care theory are most often attributed to Carol Gilligan and her response to Lawrence Kohlberg's work on moral development. In her book, *A Different Voice* (1982), Gilligan challenges Kohlberg's theory of moral development by demonstrating its reliance on justice as the sole measure of morality. Additionally, Gilligan critiques Kohlberg for developing his theory through research using a sample of all male, upper-middle class participants, and posing hypothetical moral dilemmas. For this reason, Gilligan and the theorists who compose the field of care ethics are often described as developing "a women's ethic," however, most of these women note that care and responsibility to others are not values naturally inherent to women's being, but rather values that grow out of socialization and need. In differentiating an ethic of care from an ethic based solely on justice, Gilligan (1982) states,

...the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships... (p. 19)

Gilligan's emphasis on responsibility and relationships as grounds for moral, and therefore political, theory went on to influence a large body of work, appropriately named "care ethics." Care ethicists such as Joan Tronto and Eva Kittay furthered Gilligan's ideas by offering definitions of care, and helping us to think about how public policy and

social arrangements might be different if we took the work of relationship and responsibility seriously.

Tronto (1993) begins her work on care by giving a thorough description and analysis of Gilligan's account of care. While she sees Gilligan's account as landmark in the field of ethics, she finds her theory wanting. In particular, Tronto argues that though Gilligan makes a case for a theory of morality that claims the equal import of both care and justice orientations, she does so by arguing that care has the same value as justice, rather than challenging the larger political structure that assigns such value. This move never de-centers justice as the quintessential mark of morality, nor does it challenge justice-alone as the standard against which all forms of morality are measured. In other words, Tronto believes that Gilligan's argument is inadequately radical to change the paradigm that has so long contained and marginalized care as a political concept. With this in mind, Tronto sets out to challenge the (gendered) political and moral systems that contain care, and to construct a theory of care that will "transform our values" (p.97).

Along with Bernice Fischer, Tronto defines care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible (p. 103)." Tronto goes on to say that our world includes "our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (p.103). Important to this definition is the idea that "care" can go beyond human interaction with others to include objects, animals, and the environment. Furthermore, care is not conceived of in a way that is exclusively dyadic or individualistic, but rather embraces the social and political functions of care in any



environment. Care is likewise largely culturally defined and ongoing. Tronto describes care as existing in four main forms:

- 1) Caring about, which involves recognizing human (or other) need and the necessity of care;
- 2) Taking care of, which involves assuming some kind of responsibility for the recognized need;
- 3) Care-giving, which involves the direct provision of care for recognized need; and
- 4) Care-receiving, which recognizes the response of the care-recipient.

These dimensions of care allow us to recognize that the majority of life activities are activities of care, however, care remains marginalized as a practice, and its role in sustaining systems of power and privilege remains largely invisible. Tronto is clear that she does not think that people who enjoy positions of relative power and privilege are somehow conspiratorially working to marginalize practices of care. Rather, she explains,

The connection between fragmented views of care and the distribution of power is better explained through a complex series of ideas about individualism, autonomy, and the ‘self-made man.’ These ‘self-made’ figures would not only find it difficult to admit the degree to which care has made their lives possible, but such an admission would undermine the legitimacy of the inequitable distribution of power, resources, and privilege of which they are beneficiaries (p. 111).

In addition to being made invisible as described above, Tronto notes that care is also contained as an essential and valuable activity by being cast as “natural” to certain members of society – members who often fall near the bottom of raced, classed, and gendered hierarchies. Tronto calls this ideological strategy “care as disposition” (as opposed to “care as practice”). Other ideological strategies include relegating care to the

realm of “private” activity<sup>7</sup>, and disdain for care receivers. The later strategy involves denial of or embarrassment about individual experiences of need, experiences that challenge our ideas (and ideals) about individuality, autonomy, and independence. In order to re-center moral politics, Tronto recommends starting from the assumption that humans are interdependent. This move, she proposes, challenges the myth of the independent individual, and makes care more visible and more valuable. In a move that is familiar to the work of many feminists, she also recommends challenging distinctions between public and private life in order to expose the ways that practices associated with women (like care) are removed from the public realm and therefore divorced from conversations about politics and power. Lastly, Tronto advocates challenging the dichotomy between care and justice. This recommendation goes beyond that claim that they are both valuable to demonstrate that they are both constitutive of and necessary to each other.

The work of Eva Kittay illustrates what it might look like to put Tronto’s challenges into practice through her writings on disability, care-giving, and women and welfare. In her 1998 article “Welfare, Dependency, and a Public Ethics of Care,” Kittay uses welfare reform to demonstrate the ways in which both liberal and conservative approaches to public policy rely on a masculine idea of the independent self, and conceal the care-giving activities of (mostly) women. While Kittay does not see care as an inherently female activity, she does operate out of the understanding that duties of care fall mostly to women. In her critique, she points out that welfare policy assumes a

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<sup>7</sup> To illustrate this, Tronto notes: “Care is supposed to be provided in the household. Only when the household fails to provide care in some way does public or market life enter...the idea that daycare should be private is a major resistance to the establishment of a more formal daycare policy in the U.S.”(p. 199)

masculine (and mythical) image of a wage-earner that is independent of other responsibilities and commitments, such as caring for children or adult parents. This assumption therefore leads to policies that fail to provide the monetary resources, community and/or institutional support, and extra time that would allow women to maintain their duties of care, therefore administering a double burden of a world of care that does not stop at the bounds of employment, and a world of employment that fails to recognize the duties of care. In addition to failing to acknowledge duties of care beyond the workplace, the independent wage-earner myth also fails to recognize the support and care received by the wage-earner himself in order to make his professional life productive and possible. About these omissions she says, “Neither questions the conception of social cooperation that presumes, but does not credit, women’s unpaid labor as caretaker” (p. 124).

It is difficult to imagine a conceptualization of freedom that is complete without exploration of the role of relationships of care and their effects on the understandings and practices of freedom. This seems particularly true when thinking about freedom in the context of sex work, and perhaps in more ways than one might initially identify. On the most basic level, we might think of care-giving in the context of a sex worker-client relationship. Although many women view the relationship between themselves and their clients as one of solely economic exchange, others view their relationship as one of offering care and pleasure. In these cases we might ask why it is (almost) always women offering care, and (almost) always men receiving it, but this does not separate sex work from many other professions. On another level, we might think of the ways in which the burden of care (for example, mothers caring for their children) falls more heavily on

women, and how this burden works to place women at a higher risk of participating in sex work out of economic necessity. Many women cite the need to support their families as a reason for participating in sex work, and the hours and flexibility provided by sex work as an incentive for staying in the profession. On yet a third level, we might consider the ways in which caregiving professions (largely dominated by women) are marginalized economically (in part because it is often considered “women’s work”), and how this economic marginalization makes women more susceptible to multiple types of exploitation, within the field of sex work and with out. For these reasons, it is imperative to explore political theories of care and their bearings on freedom. Theories that emphasize the importance of relationships and the responsibilities of care-giving while also demonstrating the inequalities and non-freedoms implicit in the practice are important lenses to develop when examining sex work.

As we seek to use each of these theorists to help us explore freedom in the context of sex work, it is useful to note some of their similarities and differences. While we could explore their relationships to one another along a number of different vectors within the concept of freedom, I shall explore each based on their ideas about the conditions and obligations of freedom.

### *Conditions of Freedom*

According to Nussbaum, the conditions of freedom are those in which governments provide their citizens with the capabilities contained in her list. This is quite different from Hirschmann, who posits that freedom is realized in a context in which people have the tools and the language to deconstruct the “self-evident” or “natural” claims of modern

hierarchies such as those based on race, class, and gender. Each person would live in a world where external impediments and internal impediments are diminished, but the definition of external impediments would be greatly expanded to include material and non-material conditions, and the definition of internal impediments would be expanded to incorporate considerations for how internal impediments are externally generated, culturally mediated, and constructed. Freedom does not stop with deconstruction, however. Hirschman does not believe that we are powerless over discourse or social construction. Rather, she says, the very systems that limit our freedom also provide mechanisms for challenging them. If something is constructed, it means that it can be reconstructed.

For care theorists, contexts that support freedom are contexts that acknowledge our interdependencies and the role of care in maintaining human life and the environments in which they take place. In contexts in which care relationships are valued, care-receiving is not denigrated, care-giving responsibilities are equally distributed (or at least distributed by desire as opposed to “nature” or “responsibility” based on gender, race and class) and we have ways to support and protect those who offer care.

### *Obligations of Freedom*

For Nussbaum, the provision of capabilities is the responsibility of governments and institutions. Nussbaum believes that individuals are free once they experience the provision of requisite capabilities, whether or not they act to take advantage of them. While it seems, at some level, that we are responsible for each other’s capabilities, this is not spelled out in Nussbaum’s theory.

For Hirschmann, the obligations of freedom seem to be women's participation in reshaping the discourse that constrains them. Hirschmann (1996) claims,

The fact that the dominant discourse has room, no matter how small, for feminists to be able to claim that women are less free than men within the terms of positive and negative liberty discourses provides the possibility of moving outside those discourses and hence of transforming and transcending the context that yielded them (p. 61).

In one of her earlier works, Hirschmann (1996) signals the importance of relationships for women to participate in the deconstruction of oppressive discourses. Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins, she notes that working across regimes of domination (for example, race and gender) can allow women to see gaps, contradictions, and loopholes. By entering into relationships with others who are unlike us, it allows us to see ways the world could be better or worse, and it gives us the tools to imagine it differently. It seems, then, for Hirschmann, one of the obligations of freedom is to actively participate in human relationships, and to seek out relationships with people whose experiences are different than our own. More than that, it requires that we recognize, accept and use differences as opposed to ignoring them, rejecting them, or allowing them to disconnect us.

The obligations of freedom for the care theorists seem to be less a proscription that we must participate in our own and each other's freedom so much as it is a call to recognize that we already participate in each others freedom and unfreedom through a system of obligations, and that these obligations are often ignored, disregarded, and unequally distributed. Recognizing the importance of these relationships is required before the people to whom such obligations fall can be supported, both institutionally and relationally.

## Conclusion

Despite their differences, all three of the theorists use their theories to seek to reconcile individual women's experiences with broader, universal notions of freedom. All of the theorists developed their feminist theories of freedom by grounding them in women's experiences, and offering practical (though perhaps difficult to attain) solutions to the problems of restricted freedom that are created by patriarchy. Lastly, all three of the theorists demonstrate that freedom is intricately related to power and hierarchy. Though Hirschman is the only theorist who explicitly gives an account of power and its workings in the creation of freedom, all three accounts emphasize that patriarchy, as well as hierarchies that depend on race, class, and sexuality, influence freedom. These hierarchies influence the resources (both material and institutional) that people have available to them, the ways in which the self is constructed (including internal desires and beliefs, as well as the contexts that shape those desires and beliefs), and the relationships of obligation in which women find themselves. Where these hierarchies intersect, we find particularly complex dilemmas of freedom, both because the intersections are often more than a sum of their parts (Crenshaw, 1991), and because hierarchies themselves are multiple and dynamic (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2005).

With this in mind, it is important to recognize that debates about freedom that rely on ideal notions of free and unfree are not particularly useful because no one is ever truly and totally unrestrained, internally or externally. Indeed, multiple forms of oppression and domination are operating at all times and in multiple ways on the basis of race, class, and gender, on men as well as women, and on some women more than others. The more

important questions, then, seem to be about what contexts allow people to be more or less free? What are the conditions of freedom?

While these questions could be asked and explored for any number of populations, they seem to be particularly good tools for interrogating the experiences of sex work, drug use, and recovery among women who have been marginalized and restricted by the very society that is responsible for their freedom and inclusion. In the following chapters, I explore understandings of freedom and the practices that support them in a community of women who are recovering from addiction and have histories of prostitution.



## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

Exploring the contexts that allow people to be more or less free requires research that is committed to foregrounding community-based responses and to privileging women's accounts of their experiences in such a way that they are represented with adequate complexity: agential *and* constrained, solitary *and* in relationship, as people in process...in a word, as *human*. In order to best capture the experiences of a particular group of women who were once involved in street-based prostitution and the communal nature of their recovery process, I undertook a qualitative ethnographic study of a residential community for women with histories of drug abuse and prostitution.

According to Maxwell (1996), qualitative research excels at providing understanding of the meanings of events, situations, and actions in which participants are involved; the particular contexts in which participants act; and the processes by which events take place. Furthermore, qualitative research is particularly adept at capturing the complexities and multiplicities of human experience. Because the questions of freedom are questions that engage assessments of what qualifies as choice towards a life worth living (Hirschmann, 2003; Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999), as well as the factors that make such a life possible, it was also necessary to develop a methodology that acknowledged and allowed for ethical as well as sociological theorizing. For both of these tasks, I was able to draw upon feminist scholars who theorize women's freedom by emphasizing the importance of using lived experiences as the basis for theoretical development.

In order to capture the lived experiences of women in the Magdalene community, I employed three data collection techniques: semi-structured individual qualitative interviews, group interviews, and participant observation. These techniques were aimed at exploring four main research questions:

- 1) How do the women in the community understand “freedom”?
- 2) How does the community mediate the material conditions that support and/or inhibit the women’s freedom?
- 3) How does the community generate and mediate narratives that support and/or inhibit the women’s freedom?
- 4) How does the community influence relationships that support and/or inhibit the women’s freedom?

### Context of the Study

This study was carried out at Magdalene House, a two-year recovery community in Nashville, Tennessee, that exists to serve women with histories of prostitution and addiction. Like most communities, the Magdalene community has a core membership and many other people who are tangential, yet still important, to the community. At any given time, there are 22 women living in four Magdalene recovery houses, and three women living in a transitional home. Approximately 20 residents and graduates work at Thistle Farms, the cooperative bath and body company run by the women at Magdalene. In addition, there are about 10 staff members, and hundreds of volunteers, whose service ranges from once or twice a year to nearly full-time positions.

Most of the women who live at Magdalene have spent time on the streets, all have worked in prostitution, and all are in recovery from addiction. The time spent involved in prostitution ranges from 6 months to more than 30 years. Additionally, 70-75% of the residents have diagnosed psychological disorders in addition to addiction. The most prevalent of these disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, and posttraumatic stress syndrome; however there are members with more severe disorders such as schizophrenia and other personality disorders. Approximately 40% of the women suffer from hepatitis C, and 30% are HIV positive. Most of them report being abused either physically or sexually in their childhood, most of them began using drugs and alcohol at an early age, and all of them suffered abuse and violence while they were living on the streets. Currently, the ages of the women range from 22 to 54 (but could vary depending on the residents at the time). Typically, a small majority of the women are African American, with the remainder of the population being Caucasian and Latina.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the statistical profile, the women who live at Magdalene are also women committed to living free and powerful lives. They believe that their recovery and their community demonstrate the possibility of healing, triumph, and change, both for themselves and the world around them. As I began to explore the community of Magdalene, I found it important to capture the “strengths” *and* the “weaknesses” of the women in the community, the community as a whole, and myself as a researcher. In some sense, this was important because the strengths and weaknesses I encountered were often two sides of the same coin. In another sense, the focus on both allowed me to see both the limits and the possibilities in myself and the world around me.

## Entering the Field

My initial introduction to the Magdalene community was not as a researcher, but as a volunteer. Beginning in the summer of 2007, I joined the community as the “intern coordinator.” My job was to coordinate the many student interns that cycle through Magdalene over the course of a year, and work with them to ensure that their internships were productive and beneficial for them as well as for Magdalene. This work included meeting with interns, learning about their interests, and linking them with people within the organization with whom they fit. It also included helping them develop projects to fulfill internship requirements, and “checking in” to monitor the progress of their projects. One of my goals as the intern coordinator was to assist the interns in making broader connections between the women they encountered at Magdalene, and larger social, economic, and cultural phenomena. Unsurprisingly to any one who has done work of this sort, my efforts to help the interns make connections led me to become more reflective about my role as a member of the community. At the end of the summer of 2007 (and my first “class” of interns), I approached members of the community about writing my dissertation about Magdalene. The response was overwhelmingly positive and welcoming (something that I came to know is typical of the community), so I began the process of reading, researching, being “in place” and being in relationship in order to determine the most epistemologically and ethically appropriate way to capture the story of Magdalene.

Over the past two years, and throughout my dissertation research, I continued to volunteer at Magdalene as the intern coordinator. I also became a regular volunteer at Thistle Farms, the community’s cooperative work place. I spent time there each Monday

and Wednesday, from 9am to 2pm, and undertook projects ranging from communicating with customers to grant writing to helping women complete their paperwork to qualify for food stamps. During this time, I came to consider myself a member of the community, and therefore approached my research as something of an insider. I believe that the lens of inquiry allowed me some critical distance, however, I do not believe that this research - or any other research for that matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gebhart, 2005) – is purely objective. I believe that my deep involvement within the community was my greatest methodological tool, but also a methodological limitation, which shall be discussed later.

### Research and Representation

As I began my exploration into the nature of this community and questions of freedom, I was painstakingly aware of the many types and experiences of unfreedom created by research itself. In addition to well-known abuses of research, feminist and postcolonial scholars in particular have demonstrated the dangers of representation (or misrepresentation) in the knowledge creation process, even by scholars who are well meaning and attentive to issues of place and power (Foster-Fishman, 2003; Parpart, 2002). For these theorists, research participants or subjects of study who have been marginalized due to various socio-cultural phenomena (such as colonization or race and class hierarchies) are especially vulnerable to misrepresentation in scholarly pursuits. Indeed, some would argue that accurate representation and understanding of these groups is impossible (Spivak, 1988) while others would argue that is possible, but requires a great deal of care, reflection, and accountability (Alcoff, 1991).

In addition to these general critiques of scholarship and representation, research conducted with women involved in sex work provides a more specific demonstration of the implications for research and representation. For example, according to pro-sex work activists, street prostitution is over-studied precisely because it fulfills our expectations of “prostitution.” In other words, say these activists, when people think of women involved in prostitution, they want to believe that all women experience the horrors of the streets, as opposed to believing that there are women in the world who exchange sex for money in safe, comfortable environments, and do it out of choice rather than desperation. While the argument that street prostitution is over-studied, or that the image of street prostitution is the prevailing image of women involved in sex-work, is contested, there is growing consensus that the research conducted with women involved in street prostitution has worked to cast them as images rather than as humans (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001).

Mulia (2000) describes how research and programmatic emphasis on health concerns (particularly HIV) of drug-abusing women involved in prostitution has resulted in essentializing these women as disease vectors and/or “dangerous women.” These misrepresentations are important for practical as well as ideological reasons: they influence the type of care (or punishment) the women incur, but also perpetuate deep-seated beliefs about the appropriate bounds of female sexuality and stand as justification for regulating it (Ringdal, 1997). Beliefs about prostitutes as carriers of disease is not a new one, nor is the practice of developing regulatory guidelines based on gendered notions of sexuality and disease. History tells us that the concerns voiced by Mulia and others like her are not unfounded: in Great Britain during the 1800s, it was believed that

only women could carry or transmit venereal diseases. As a result, women involved in prostitution could be picked up by law enforcement officials, forced to undergo medical examination, and institutionalized in the event that they were diagnosed. No such process existed for men who visited prostitutes (Pateman, 1988; Ringdal, 1997). While we now know that venereal disease can be and is carried and transmitted by men as well as women, mechanisms for preventing and controlling it continue to assign different expectations and responsibilities in terms of sexual practices (Pateman, 1988).

Concerns over representation were exacerbated by other questions of ethics and methodology that have followed me throughout my research career: Is research important? Is it valuable to anyone other than the researcher whose career it is supporting? And if it is important and valuable, how is it practiced in a liberatory fashion? How does it work to not only make visible, but also to act against centuries' worth of oppression and domination? Who am I to ask 25 women questions about their personal lives? Who are they to tell me? Who am I to listen? These are, of course, mostly questions of voice and power, and I am not the first to ask them. Methodologists from a number of different traditions, among them feminist research, post-colonial studies, critical theory and participatory research have asked these questions, and come up with quite different answers. As I approached the subject of research, I sought these scholars as careful guides, but also took solace in the realization that the women with whom I was working were powerful – powerful in their abilities to decide what they did and did not want, powerful in their abilities to speak out when they didn't agree, and powerful in their abilities to represent themselves and tell their own stories. Henry (2007) alerts us to this in her article on authenticity in the research process: She warns against assuming the

“power of the researcher” as a given, and rather calls for an approach to research that recognizes that the systems of relationships of power in any fieldwork situation are multiple and complex.

I entered my research process with attention to potential abuses of power and representation, but also aware that the participants in my study were (and are) powerful as well. These beliefs led me to seek a collaborative process during which research participants were able to shape research questions, participate in analysis, and provide their feedback on my work. I sought a knowledge production process that was democratic and participatory, though perhaps somewhat different than classic participatory research paradigms. In his article on citizenship and democracy, Boyte (2003) invokes John Dewey by proposing a view of knowledge production “as a democratic power resource that suggest(s) a democracy of abundance, not of scarcity, different than zero-sum distributive power or the competitive, consumer culture” (p.1). This view assumes knowledge creation processes that rely on an epistemological commitment to the social nature of knowledge and the value of people’s experiences as they engage the world around them. According to this view, all people are the experts of their own lives and experiences and are therefore entitled to participation in the production of knowledge, and essential to its process.

This view is echoed in many participatory and feminist research paradigms that view participant involvement in the research process as an issue of justice as well as epistemology. Though participatory research has its roots in a multitude of academic disciplines and traditions (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003), and each model of participatory research is somewhat different from the next (Cornall &



Jewkes, 1995; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003; Williams & Brydon-Miller, 2004), the essential component of participatory research is a commitment to collaborative participant and researcher governance of the research process. Furthermore, knowledge production is regarded as an iterative and reflexive process in which the researcher-participant relationships allow for mutual learning (Williams & Lykes, 2003).

For the purposes of this project, collaboration took on two somewhat different forms. First, I had several formal and informal conversations with members of the community about their perspectives on the nature of the community, questions that they would like answered, and whom they thought I should ask. I allowed these questions to guide me in the direction of the theories I used to form the framework for my work, and allowed these questions to guide the questions I asked during my qualitative interviews and focus groups. Secondly, I was aware of the strong value system of the community and chose to honor the norms and struggles of importance to those within the community (Nagar, 2002). I sought to turn the ethical commitments that informed the way that community was practiced into methodological tools to uncover collective knowledge about the community itself. I set out to develop a methodology that recognized, drew upon, and embraced the strengths and commitments of the women that comprise the Magdalene community. I was able to determine these commitments during a year's worth of participation, observation and conversations before my formal research project began. Through these, I came to the conclusion that my research must be, for ethical and epistemological reasons, based in shared experiences, reliant on storytelling, and grounded in relationship. I allowed these commitments to inform my specific research methods of participant observation, individual interviews, and group interviews.

## “Showing Up & Being A Part Of”: Research Based in Shared Experience

First and foremost, I learned the community of Magdalene by participating in it. A few months ago, I was talking with the director of Thistle Farms about my project and she said, “You know, people come to Thistle Farms all the time to do research, write newspaper stories...you know, to try to ‘get us.’ But it’s just so hard – it’s hard to understand, it’s hard to know what’s important. It’s hard to know what questions to even ask. I like it that you’ve been here because you’re one of us. You understand how things work and what needs to be done.” In addition to feeling somewhat relieved that this person did not see my presence as a researcher as a burden, I also felt affirmed in my previous observation that I do not think I could have understood Magdalene and all that they do if I had spent 3 months or 6 months or even only a year there. The luxury of graduate school is that I had the opportunity to spend the time in the community – nearly 2 years in order to “get it.” I have been there when women come into the program, when they graduate, and when they relapse. I have been there for the death of family members, the birth of grandchildren, and the excitement of adoption. I have seen people struggle and seen them succeed. I myself have learned, grown, doubted and hoped. In addition to these “milestones,” I have also regularly engaged in the daily activities at Thistle Farms, which are in and of themselves creative pursuits. Residents, graduates, staff members, and volunteers often sit together to make bath and body products that will later be sold at a store or home party. The act of being in the same place, working on the same project, is a partnership, of sorts, a bonding experience. Because much of knowledge is created in the actions and silences of every day living, being there for more than just discourse was essential to my data collection.

The principals of action research alert us to the fact that, in addition to learning “what is right,” by participating in the process of change, action is the best (and some might argue, only) path to knowledge creation (Fals-Borda, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). In general, with action research, the type of “action” of which people are speaking is working for direct social change through political action or activism (Fals-Borda, 1987; 1991). While in many ways, my work at Thistle Farms would probably not be considered “activism,” I believe that my work along side the women was an act of social change. And I believe that without the action – the working along side, the doing the stuff of life together – I could not have known the ins and outs of life in recovery as I do today. It was essential for me to be more than just an observer. It was essential for me to pour candles and attend sales events. It was essential for me to give rides and to ask favors and to have enough in common that I shared *experiences* (not just conversations) with the people in my study.

Because of my deep involvement in the community, I was also able to experience (albeit second hand) many of the social phenomena that I find unjust and frustrating, but that I typically experience from the side of privilege. For example, after three failed attempts to secure food stamps for a woman who clearly qualified, I seriously considered offering to give her the \$20/week that the food stamps were worth (despite my somewhat limited graduate student budget), just for the relief of being able to stop fighting a seemingly-ridiculous battle over basic provisions. While my experience of this struggle was not “authentic” in the sense that the results of it would affect my ability to afford groceries, it was a different (and I would argue, more empirically accurate) experience than if I had merely “observed” and taken notes as the woman went back and forth with

the Davidson County Health and Human Services office. For this reason, I join pragmatist philosophers and action researchers in the belief that personal relationship and collective pursuit provide fertile ground for knowledge creation.

In order to capture the day-to-day events of the Magdalene community, as well as the collective nature of dialogue and relationships within, I built on my shared experiences and conducted formal participant observation 10 to 15 hours a week over the course of 3 months. Although the community of Magdalene includes 4 houses, a transition home, and Thistle Farms, I conducted participant observation only at Thistle Farms and public Magdalene events. One of the tenets of Magdalene is that women should have the dignity of feeling “at home” and “in control” of their own homes. Because of this, and because Thistle Farms is the location of a large majority of community interaction, I conducted my participant observation at Thistle Farms, and purposely avoided “observation” in the residences. I spent time at Thistle Farms on Mondays and Wednesdays, and attended other Magdalene events such as book-readings, resident graduate ceremonies, and community meetings.

After I spent time at Thistle Farms or Magdalene events, I returned to my office to type comprehensive field notes regarding the conversations and activities that happened during my time on site. I chose not to take notes while I was on site at Thistle Farms, realizing that relying on memory may have provided less accuracy (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1999). However, I felt comfortable with my own memory skills and ability to recall information, and felt that I gathered an accurate record of what is occurring by recording my experiences immediately after I left the site. Not taking notes allowed me to look at the people at Thistle Farms the entire time I was there, which enabled me to

notice things I otherwise might not have - body language, non-verbal exchanges between members, and other mannerisms that contribute meaning to discussions without necessarily being the substance of the dialogues themselves (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1999). Furthermore, I felt that it was more respectful of the women at Thistle Farms to not take notes - my fear was that taking notes would make them feel as though they are on display or being inspected or evaluated. I believed that the alienation that this could potentially create was a greater risk than the risk of losing detail and accuracy in my descriptions.

#### “Speaking Our Truth in Love”: Research Reliant on Story Telling

For ethical and epistemological reasons, I found it necessary to find a way to allow people to provide information using a mechanism that was familiar to them. I believed that uncovering the ways in which knowledge was already created and transmitted within the community would allow me to gather better information and more accurate representations of the people with whom I was working. Although there is a great variety of experiences and abilities at Magdalene, I have yet to meet a woman who could not or was not willing to tell me her story. For this reason, I chose to conduct qualitative interviews that began with oral history research and concluded with questions that lent themselves to answers presented in narrative format.

According to ethicist Stacey Floyd-Thomas (2006), when women tell their stories, they are telling stories of the present and future as well as the past – they present their past through an interpretive narrative structure that allows them to make sense of their lives in terms of where they’ve been, where they are, and where they’re going. Inherent

in this type of narrative is a notion of telos – an end, a goal, and an ethical assessment of how past experiences are contributing to notions of purpose and rightness. The past is remembered through the lens of the present, and the present is interpreted as a production of the past. This is not to say that the stories and recollections are inaccurate, but rather that they are not objective, nor are they concrete. Furthermore, the standard of objectivity and concreteness is not the appropriate standard to apply. Instead, the dynamic stories that are reported by participants should be understood as a representation of what has happened in the past, and how those happenings influence and are influenced by the creation of the self and experiences of the self’s world in the present. At first glance, this might seem a rather peculiar method for gathering data for empirical analysis. As one pushes in closer, however, we see that this methodological approach has all the problems of any self-report measure, but rather than trying to ignore or “control” the problems, it instead uses them to develop a richer assessment of the research participants’ beliefs about themselves, the world, and the kind of life worth living.

In order to capture both empirical information and ethical assessment given by Magdalene community members, I conducted 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews with community residents, former residents, program graduates, staff, and volunteers<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of definition, “residents” are women who are currently living in one of the Magdalene houses, “former residents” are women who have been a part of the community but have left, “graduates” are women who lived in the community for approximately 2 years and completed program requirements, “staff” are people who are paid to work for Magdalene, and “volunteers” are people who work for Magdalene without monetary compensation. Making these distinctions is somewhat difficult, however, because people move from one category to another fairly often, and often occupy more than one category. For example, two members of the program staff are program graduates, volunteers often become staff, the executive director is technically a volunteer in the sense that she is not paid, but still maintains a place of centrality and authority, etc.

This sample represents approximately 75% of the number of residents and staff. It is a much smaller proportion of the total number of volunteers who support Magdalene, however, it is representative of the number of volunteers who provide substantial time and support to Magdalene. I met participants in the place of their choosing in order to conduct the interviews. Interview times ranged from 25 minutes to 85 minutes, but most lasted a little bit less than an hour. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and discussed with the participants for their feedback. I encouraged participants to comment on what they had said, and add, change, or take out any information that they thought necessary. In general, participants left their interviews as they were, however, I did have some people make additional comments.

“We’re All Broken, and We All Need Each Other”:

#### Research Grounded in Relationship

Not long after I had begun volunteering at Thistle Farms, I was standing at the copy machine, making copies of product order forms, when Gina walked up to use the copy machine for her shipping orders. While we waited for the copies to finish, I chatted with Gina. She asked me how old I was and what I was learning in school and if I had a boyfriend. When I told her I was 29, she gasped and said, “See, I love that, because my daughter is 29. And that means we’re like, the *same*...” Through most people’s eyes, there were few similarities between Gina and me beyond the fact that we were both, at that moment, standing at the copy machine. Gina is an elderly African-American woman who grew up on the streets in Knoxville, Tennessee. Her mother was a prostitute and a drug addict, just like Gina, and just like Gina’s daughter. Gina has never had much

formal education, is missing fingers on each of her hands, is nearly bald, and is reliant on an oxygen tank most of the time. She has experienced a life of violence and racism and poverty that I, as a white, well-educated, middle class woman whose life has mostly been marked by safety and privilege will probably never experience. Gina is also an incredible artist (an ability to which I have long aspired, but feel certain I may never attain), a powerful speaker, and a listener, who “hears the voice of God” with a certainty and clarity that makes me doubt the strength of my own faith (or perhaps, the strength of my own doubts). I think that I would have felt naive and ignorant had I ever had inclination to say to Gina, “see...we’re the same.”

But Gina went on to explain her claim of sameness, and told me something that has shaped my experience at Magdalene, and my relationships in the community, as well as my approach to research. Gina went on to say, “Before I came to Magdalene, I always believed that people like me weren’t as valuable as people like you. I was raised to believe that people like me shouldn’t talk to people like you...that people like me don’t belong in the same room as people like you. But you know what I’ve learned? I’ve learned that that’s a *lie*. Because I’ve learned that we’re all broken. And I’ve learned that we’re all valuable.” Just as Gina was claiming that we all need and are needed in the community, the notion that knowledge and meaning is constructed in and through relationship and dialogue was central to my research. In addition to the collective nature of the community that I experienced in and through my participant observation, I conducted 2 group interviews with the specific purpose of generating and capturing relational knowledge construction around issues of import to my research and the community (Wilkinson, 1998).



I used reoccurring themes from my participant observation and interview findings to develop topics for discussion for two group interviews. In addition to themes around freedom, I also included concepts such as “healing,” “self,” “community,” and “responsibility.” The group interviews were held at Thistle Farms in order to ensure transportation and a comfortable and private environment for everyone who wanted to participate. There were 8 women present at the first group interview, and 12 women at the second. In both group interviews, the majority of the women had also participated in individual interviews; however, there were women who had not. I audio recorded the group interviews in order to ensure accuracy in data collection. Once they were complete, I used the audio recordings to generate transcripts of the group interview.

### Protection of Participants

Any time researchers engage in interviews during which people are asked to tell their stories, and particularly when the stories are such that they contain a great degree of trauma, researchers run the risk of retriggering memories that the participants experience as painful, shameful, or haunting. For this reason, it was essential that certain precautions be taken to ensure that control of the stories and their interpretations remained in the hands of the participants as much as is possible. In order to work towards the greatest protection of participants, there were two mechanisms in place for this study: one preventive, and one “worst case” precaution. Preventatively, the women at Magdalene were used to telling their stories – many of them speak at sales events, church services, and other recovery-focused events. Through this process, they are able to practice telling their stories in a manner that feels liberating and safe to them. Furthermore, they were

instructed in the initial research project description and the consent process that they were “in charge” of what they chose to share and not share. They were given a preview of the questions that would be asked in the interview in order to help them determine what they wanted to say, and in order to prepare for the questions that were asked. Lastly, they were instructed that they were free to skip any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering. In the worst case, unlikely event that an interview uncovered something harmful or painful for the interview participant, there were counseling staff available on-site at Magdalene, and these staff members were available to the Magdalene community at any time. Additionally, participant consent forms listed the names and contact information for free community counseling services. Fortunately, none of these services were needed.

In addition to taking precautions in the process of data collection, I also used pseudonyms throughout my dissertation in order to protect the identity of the women who were kind enough to allow me to interview them. While their stories and descriptions may be recognizable to those intimately involved in the community, they should not be to those outside of it. Additionally, Magdalene as a community is impressively open and committed to truth-telling, therefore, there was little information revealed during the interviews that I had not heard in other community contexts. For this reason, I believe that even the stories that are identifiable by members of the community are reported into safe hands. Lastly, no one revealed any information that led me to believe they were in danger physically or psychologically, so I had no need to report any information of this sort to outside sources.

## Analysis

I began my analysis using many of the concepts and questions of freedom indicated by the theorists that I used in my first chapter and in my understanding of the field. These concepts included the ways in which material and institutional resources support individual capabilities to exercise freedom of choice, the ways in which language and discourse operate to create understandings of freedom and therefore influence the material and social conditions that support or inhibit it, and the ways in which relationships expand and/or restrict freedom. In order to best explore Nussbaum's theory of capabilities, I found it useful to concentrate on the capability "bodily integrity" in my analysis, versus trying to conduct a broader exploration that included all of her listed capabilities. Although this type of parsing of capabilities is somewhat contradictory to Nussbaum's theory, and runs the risk of eclipsing the ways in which capabilities interact and support and/or conflict with one another, it also allowed me to more deeply explore the complexities of one capability. I chose bodily integrity because it is the capability most compromised by addiction and violence experienced by many of the women I interviewed. Furthermore, the implications for mind and body that accompany addiction, mental illness, and trauma illustrate the complexities of understanding bodily integrity separate from one's environment. Similarly, I chose to use Rappaport's (1995, 2000) framework of community narratives as scaffolding with which to explore and interpret Hirschmann's theory of freedom and discourse in community context. Although this marrying of frameworks is not precise, it provided a means through which to conduct productive dialogue around philosophical notions of discourse and empirical data.

From within these frameworks, however, I preferenced the experiences, descriptions, and interpretations of the participants themselves, so there was a grounded aspect to my work as well (Charmaz, 2006). I read all interviews and field notes for themes around conceptualizations of freedom and the role of the community in supporting, creating, and restricting freedom. I relied on the data to inform my theories and understandings of freedom, community, and sex work (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I identified categories in participant responses that cohered because they dealt with the same topic or theme. Categories were then divided into several subcategories based on re-occurring themes within the larger categories. The creation of sub-categories allows for more in-depth analysis and more complex understandings and interpretations of each particular theme (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Each of the categories and sub-categories were given a code, and all codes were compiled in a codebook along with a description and definition. Initial categories, subcategories, and codes were discussed with Craig Anne Heflinger, the researcher's advisor. Dr. Heflinger and I worked to provide clear definitions for each code, and to ensure that all codes fit into a structure, and "relate to or are distinct from each other in meaningful, study-important ways" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 65).

Once the codes were developed, I coded all group and individual interview transcripts and field notes using Atlas-ti software, a program that allows line-by-line coding and overlapping codes. This type of program is useful in exploratory research because the ability to give multiple codes to a particular phrase or participant response aids in more comprehensive and robust data interpretation. After coding the data, I examined the

content of each coding category and the interactions between the codes to generate my findings.

Before I began my analysis, I expected to write three results chapters, each loosely based on a different core concept provided by the theories (and corresponding to my specific research questions): one on capabilities, one on language and discourse, and one on the role of relationships. As I conducted my analysis, however, it became clear that while these were important lenses with which to understand my data, they were not the best categories to present the full picture of what I found. For example, the role of caring relationships was so important to both capabilities and discourse that I found it difficult to separate them. Similarly, the role of community was ubiquitous in providing a mechanism through which to develop and distribute the means of freedom. For this reason, the centrality of relationships and community to the understanding and practice of freedom has intentionally been woven throughout my dissertation. My data led me to decide that the best manner to present both the value and importance of freedom, as well as the many complexities and paradoxes it entails, was to discuss the contexts of freedom, the subject (self) of freedom, and the challenges of freedom as they are experienced by women leaving the community. My findings chapters reflect these themes.

### *Establishing Reliability*

I engaged with two different methods for ensuring reliability in my interpretation of the data. First, I practiced a constant comparative method (Dye, Shatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000) in which I continually returned to previous coded material in order to determine whether or not my coding decisions were remaining true to my original code

definitions, and were used consistently throughout my analysis. Secondly, I traded several sets of coded interviews and field notes with Cheri Hoffman, a colleague who was in a similar phase of her dissertation research and invited her to play “devil’s advocate” on behalf of my data. I also played a similar role for her, and our intentions were to suggest alternative interpretations and to check for coding consistency.

### *Establishing Validity*

Increasingly, researchers are exploring more democratic methods for establishing the validity of the conclusions they draw from the data their participants provide. One of the primary ways that this is accomplished is by conducting “member checking” (Bloor, 2001) – a process in which the researcher returns to participants at various times during the researcher’s analysis phase, presents preliminary findings, and allows for participants to affirm or contradict the researchers conclusions. I conducted two group interviews with women who work at Thistle Farms in order to check my findings and generate more data. This process allowed the women involved to respond to my findings, and serve as a corrective to any erroneous conclusions I may have drawn. At the times that there were disagreements among the participants, or between the participants and me, those disagreements were recorded, and included in the data analysis.

### Limitations

At the beginning of each workday at Thistle Farms, before meditation begins, the member of the group in charge of reading the meditation begins by saying, “Let’s open this meditation with a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer.” The Serenity

Prayer, of course, is the mantra for virtually all 12-step programs, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference, just for today.” The moment of silence is never very long, and I suppose exists so we can all stop moving long enough to pay attention. It is a focusing exercise of sorts, at least for me. It isn’t long enough to be a time for prayer. At the end of the meditation, however, as we all stand with our arms around each other, the person who closes the meditation says, “Let’s take a moment of silence for the sick and suffering addict inside and out.” This moment of silence is longer and more purposeful, and I believe that people do think about friends and family members who are still on the streets. The moment of silence reminds me to leave room in my analysis for the people who aren’t represented. To let their absence be known and to make space for their claims and their concerns. To take a moment of silence to acknowledge what might have been said if their voices had been included in my project. With that in mind, I feel that it is worth mentioning the limitations of this project.

First and foremost, the women living, working, and volunteering in the Magdalene community do not constitute a sample of “the” sex worker population, or even “the” recovery program population at large. Therefore it would be difficult and irresponsible to claim that they represent either the whole or the full range of the phenomenon being studied (Becker, 1998). My research did, however, yield a deep description (Geertz, 2001; Weiss, 1994) of the experiences of the people who come to Magdalene, and these experiences provided a better understanding of the factors and influences that affect the lives of women with histories of addiction, abuse, and participation in sex work, as well as an extensive knowledge of the Magdalene

community as a whole. Furthermore, it developed knowledge about a type of community that has been successful at bringing healing to hundreds of people, whether they are residents, graduates, staff or volunteers. There are ways that I feel as though this research could be strengthened, given more time, more connections, or greater resources. It would have been advantageous to interview more women who entered the program but did not complete it. The two women I was able to interview who fit this description still held a very positive view of Magdalene, though there are likely women out there who do not. It would also have been interesting to interview some of Magdalene's major donors, as they represent an important and influential aspect of the community, however they are not represented here.

Additionally, a challenge to conducting this research is the fact that I am not, nor have I ever been, involved in sex work, nor do I have personal experiences with drug addiction. My life experiences most certainly shape the lenses through which I observe, form my questions, and understand the population I am studying (Baca Zinn, 2001; Duneier, 2001). Being mindful of such differences were essential to the quality of my research. Reflections on how this lens was affecting me were discussed in my field notes and were included in my data analyses and written work. Furthermore, I spent much of my analysis focused on the lives of women who had participated in prostitution and experienced addiction in order to bolster my understanding. As I wrote the chapters that follow this one, I relied heavily on quotes from my interviews in order to provide ample room for the voices of the women who participated.

Lastly, being mindful of the ways in which relationships (including research relationships) create interdependent selves was essential as well. In many ways, I



considered myself an “insider” to the Magdalene community, and this has no doubt affected my research. In her book, *Feminist Ethnography*, Visweswaran (1994) asserts that all ethnographies are also, in a sense, autobiographies of the researcher. I accept this assertion, as there were (and are) times when it was difficult to distinguish “my story” from the story of the community or the stories of the participants. As I reported my findings, I did my best to be clear about whether I was drawing my conclusions from observations and interviews or my own personal experiences.

### Conclusion

The chapters that follow provide description and analysis of my research findings. These findings are the result of two years worth of participation in the community of Magdalene, 25 individual interviews, 2 group interviews, and three months of participant observation. Of the 25 people I interviewed, there were 6 residents, 7 graduates, 6 staff members, 5 volunteers, and 1 woman who was both a graduate and a volunteer. They include rich descriptions of life before, during, and after the Magdalene community for women who have left prostitution and life on the streets and are seeking recovery from addiction. They also include descriptions and analyses of the many manifestations of freedom and unfreedom, and the complicated relationships between the contexts and selves that support and inhibit the enjoyment of liberation.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CONTEXTS OF FREEDOM

I didn't wake up one day and decide, "I want to be a junkie. I want to be a prostitute."

There were things that led me to that. (Mindy, Magdalene Graduate)

As demonstrated by Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000), Hirschmann (2003), and the care theorists (Tronto, 1993; Kittay, 2000), developing theories of freedom that pay close attention to issues of structural inequality and the hierarchies based in race, class, gender, and sexuality that greatly influence them requires attention to the *contexts* that support and undermine freedom. These contexts are broadly conceptualized as the material, relational, and discursive conditions in which the choosing self acts. By Hirschmann's formulation, the separation between the context and the self, as well as the discursive and the material, is a problematic separation, something that will be somewhat evident in the voices of the participants included in this chapter and the next. For conceptual purposes, however, and because the distinctions between the self and context are somewhat more clear for the other theorists, this chapter provides an exploration of the contexts in which residents and graduates of the Magdalene community have and do live, play, and work. The chapter begins by exploring their early childhood experiences, families, and neighborhoods, and moves through their time on the streets to end with their descriptions of life in the Magdalene community. This chronological structure is not necessarily meant to imply that the streets were a place of unfreedom while Magdalene is a place of freedom - to be certain, there are qualities of freedom and unfreedom in both locations.

However, it is meant to serve as a contrast between contexts that are more or less supportive of human capabilities, positive caring relationships, and liberating discourse, and to explore the implications of these contexts for the practice of freedom.

Furthermore, I demonstrate the ways in which infringements upon freedom in one context can result in diminished freedom in another – particularly when the infringements are traumatic or violent in nature. Lastly, I intend to make connections between the biographies of the women I interviewed and broader social structures in order to illustrate the implications of such structures for the development of freedom and human flourishing.

For the 14 residents and graduates I interviewed, descriptions of freedom often began with explanations of what freedom is *not*. Women talked about early experiences with addiction and abuse, and linked these experiences to their lives on the streets. As we shall see, and as Mindy’s words suggest, freedom and oppression are complicated issues that take root in multiple systems and relationships, and accumulate over the lifespan.

### Early Childhood Experiences

From a care or capabilities perspective, few of the women I interviewed described early childhood experiences that would be considered supportive of individual freedom or human development. Half of the 14 women described growing up in households marked by poverty and lack of access to appropriate, life-sustaining resources and services, and far more of them described chaotic and often harmful relationships.

Families are typically the primary context for child and adolescent development, and economic and/or relational stress in those families has direct implications for human

development (Caughy & O'Campo 2006; Kasper, Eusminger, Green, & Fothergill, 2008). In a society that does little to support alternative family constellations, stress is all but inevitable for families that do not fit the two-parent, dual wage-earner model. Importantly, this model was not typical for the women I interviewed: Eight women were raised by a single parent or caregiver, 1 by siblings, and 1 by foster parents. Although this widely-varied representation of family constellations is something that we would expect, former and current economic practices (such as the lack of a living wage), and socio-cultural beliefs (such as identifying a two-parent, heterosexual household as the ideal for healthy child-rearing), work to create environments in which some families thrive while others are denied basic necessities. For example, according to the U.S. census bureau, 1,759,000 single-parent families with children under 18 had household earnings of \$10,000 or less in 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). If these families included only a single parent and one child (which is less often than not the case – for example, in my sample, women reported having between 1 and 12 siblings), this translates to approximately \$13.70/person/day to cover rent, utilities, food, clothing, healthcare, education, and all other expenses. This level of poverty often results in lack of adequate provision for the child (DeVoe, Angier, Graham, & Baez, 2008), but it also means that parents and caregivers are likely not receiving the services and supports they need for themselves as well (Herman-Stahl, Ashley, Penne, & Bauman, 2007; Lazear, Pires, Isaacs, & Chaulk, 2008). Many of the women I interviewed talked about parents or caregivers who had unmet health and mental health needs, and were quick to link this to difficult or unstable home environments.

For the purposes of this paper, as well as general social practice and policy, it is important that pathology not be linked to individuals, families, or communities experiencing poverty as inherent qualities of those individuals, families, or communities. Nor do I mean to suggest belief in a “culture of poverty,” or imply that experiences of mental illness, addiction, or abuse are constrained to families who earn below the determined “poverty line.” Rather, I mean to demonstrate that social ideologies and practices contribute to the existence and experience of poverty (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000), and that lack of resources can work to alter and exacerbate the consequences of addiction, abuse, and mental illness (Singer, 2008), as we shall see.

### *Childhood Abuse*

Abuse and early childhood trauma, such as loss of a parent, were common themes in the stories that the women told about their families and home lives. Nine women reported addiction in the home, and 9 reported being physically and/or sexually abused at an early age (3 by a parent or step parent, 1 by a sibling, and 5 by extended family members or close family friends).<sup>9</sup> Additionally, 5 women described situations in which a parent or caregiver knew about the abuse that was occurring, but did not intervene. Three women reported having a parent or caregiver die while they were still children.

The abuse that many of the women experienced as children was often persistent and profound. One woman described being sexually abused by several of her mother’s boyfriends. Recalling a particularly frightening episode, she said,

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<sup>9</sup> This represents 64% of the women I interviewed. By comparison, the American Academy of Pediatrics estimates that 1 in 20 (5%) of U.S. children are physically, sexually, or emotionally abused each year. Additionally, AAP estimates that 1 in 4 girls will be physically or sexually abused by the time they reach 18.

...and then my mom got with another guy. And he was abusive. And he tried to rape me. My mom gave me a couple pills that night, telling me to go to bed...and they came in, I was still awake, I had my back towards 'em. And they came in there and started having sex and then, I'll never forget it. He tried to get on top of me, I was moving a lot, you know. And she said, I'll never forget it, she said, 'Don't hurt her.' So I got out of the bed, and I started screaming, yelling, and ran away. And the cops found me and took me back there. And you know, so I started dealing with the abuse like maybe this is how my life's supposed to be.

When the women I interviewed talked about the abuse they experienced, statements such as “That really messed me up, and I’m just now getting over it” or “I’ve never been the same since,” often followed their stories. Statements such as these demonstrate the ability of physical experiences to take root in the psyche, producing lasting effects (Bolton, Hill, O’Ryan, & Udwin, 2004). Linking her childhood abuse to later choices towards drug use and prostitution, Natalie said:

I feel like if the people that are the abusers could see what they’re doing to their victims, um, that would definitely probably curb a lot of abuse...you know, you’re having less women that are hurting, so maybe there would be less drug use, less prostitution. I mean, obviously that’s not going to stop everything, but it’s like, in my case, I wish my stepmother could see how she hurt me.

According to Natalie’s formulation, and that of many others, abuse, particularly when it is sexual in nature, is an infringement on freedom both in the moment and beyond. In the moment, abuse infringes on a person’s ability to make choices about his or her own body. However, this affront to bodily integrity often has lasting effects that extend beyond the episode and lead to further limitations on freedom. These findings support Nussbaum’s claim that “bodily integrity” is a capability requisite for freedom (Nussbaum, 2000). They are also concomitant with care theory by demonstrating that the appropriate provision of care through interpersonal relationships is essential to healthy human development (Kittay, 2000; Tronto, 1993).

### *Early Experiences with Addiction*

In addition to abuse, the presence and availability of alcohol and drugs was often part and parcel with chaotic family situations. Four of the women I interviewed were using drugs on a regular basis by the time they were 12. Krista, who was 9 when her father died in a jail fire, remembers being “high” at his funeral. Her drug use started the earliest of all the women I interviewed – she drank moonshine for the first time when she was 5, and smoked marijuana for the first time when she was 6. Aimee, who was drinking frequently by the time she was 12, smoked marijuana for the first time when she was 13, snorted powder cocaine for the first time when she was 14, and was dealing at the age of 15. Paula began stealing from her Dad’s liquor cabinet when she was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Samantha, whose mother died when she was 13, was raised by her siblings, and enjoyed the lack of authority, saying it allowed her spend most of her time using. About her early teenage years, she said, “I just basically always drank and partied and had kids...my sisters kept my kids all the time...they basically just picked up the pieces.”

Members of the Magdalene community linked early drug and alcohol use to early exposure and modeled behavior (typically by addicted family members), and questioned whether or not the use of illicit substances at an early age qualifies as a “choice.” Although none of my participants reported being forced or even overtly coerced to take their first drink or smoke their first joint, the range of choices presented by their primary caregivers and others in their immediate environments presented few other options. Apart from these four participants, the majority of the women I interviewed (8 of 14) began using when they were between the ages of 13 and 17. Only two began using after the age of 18. For those who started using as teenagers, drugs and alcohol were often

characteristic of the environment long before they started using. However, the women who began using as teenagers and young adults credit friends and boyfriends for introducing them to the substances that would later become their constant companions.

Many of the traditional political philosophers (against whom the feminist theorists I have chosen for this paper were writing) conceptualize freedom as little more than the ability of an individual to enact his or her will. The problem with this conceptualization, says Hirschmann (2003), is that, “the relevant point...is *that* I want it, and that I *know* I want it, not *why* I want it” (p. 4). Knowing *why* is important to Hirschmann, specifically because she believes the *why* itself may be restricted (and is most certainly constructed). Illustrating this, she says,

Many theorists of freedom recognize that desires and preferences are always limited by contexts that determine the parameters of choice: if chocolate and vanilla are the only flavors available, I am not free to choose strawberry, but that does not alter the fact that I would have preferred strawberry if it were available...What is not addressed by most freedom theorists, however, is the deeper, more important issue of how the choosing subject is herself constructed by such contexts: could the repeated absence of strawberry eventually change my tastes so that I lose my desire for it? (p. ix)

Applying this illustration to the childhood experiences of the women at Magdalene whose environments were constructed by and around drug use makes it possible to see why choosing abstinence or sobriety would have been difficult (if not impossible) for some. Certainly, some of the women at Magdalene, as well as people in all communities, chose drug use even in situations where alternatives were available. In situations in which alternatives are not available, however, the “choice” to use drugs, alcohol, and other substances is perhaps a restriction, rather than an exercise, of freedom.



## *Leaving Home*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, eight women reported leaving their families as teenagers, only to end up with abusive or addicted partners. At first, leaving home was an experience of great freedom. Rita described it this way,

...and later on that year in September, we ran away and got married in a court house and I was just like, Oh, that was *freedom*...coming out of my mom's house and my mom's strict rules and I couldn't do anything other than be at home and take care of my brother and sister. And so I married this guy and we moved in public housing on Shelby Avenue, Casey Homes. And I thought was he my air, and I was so in love...

Often, however, the tide of these relationships turned quickly, and women found themselves back in abusive situations. About her first husband, Rita went on to say,

He became an abuser...and, he um, he never allowed me to be outside if he wasn't there. When he came home, he would check me - my vagina - to be sure that nobody had been there and I had not been having sex and all this crazy stuff and he used to smoke weed a lot...And we used to fight and he used to beat me up all the time...

Another woman told me about an abusive boyfriend who would pin her down and take her false teeth any time she called the police to report abuse. When the police came, if they took him to jail, he would take her teeth with him. Another woman talked about a boyfriend who threw her over the railing of a 4<sup>th</sup> story balcony, because she told him he couldn't smoke crack cocaine in her apartment. The police told her that the only reason she survived the fall was because she was high herself. As these stories demonstrate, the violence that was enacted on the bodies and psyches of the women at Magdalene was brutal, and produced physical and psychological scars that had lasting effects on their abilities to make choices, form relationships, and act in a way that promoted their own well-being.

Many scholars and activists who work on issues of addiction and prostitution are resistant to the idea that drug abuse and prostitution are influenced by childhood abuse and exposure to addiction, saying that these claims pathologize the person, the substance, and his or her family, as well as involvement in prostitution (Nagle, 1997; Vanweesenbeck, 2001). Furthermore, this argument does not explain the many people who are abused and never participate in prostitution, or the many people who are addicted that never experienced any kind of abuse. While these are indeed important critiques, it does not diminish the fact that abuse and early exposure to drugs and alcohol were the standard versus the exception for the women I interviewed.

### Drug Use and Addiction

Each woman reported that her early experiences with drugs were positive, exciting, and liberating. Describing her first experience with marijuana, Keri said, "...I would see my Dad drink and I would say, 'I'm never going to drink,' and 'I'm never going to act like that,' and then I started smoking weed, and I was...whew...I fell in love...." Natalie described a similar experience the first time she tried cocaine saying, "...so I did it, and I loved it. I *loved* it. It took all of my worries and fears away. I could do anything." Dealing drugs also was a powerful and lucrative experience for the 10 women who reported that they sold in addition to using. Rita said,

I wanted to make some money and so I started selling marijuana, and you know, smoking the hell out of marijuana, 'cause I had it to do, and um, I became prestigious in the streets...and then it went from selling weed to selling powdered cocaine, and then I was selling Ts and Blues...and then I started selling delottas and I made a whole heck of a lot of money off of delottas...

Rita contrasted dealing with other, legal forms of work, but described that they always came up short: "...the jobs I worked, it just didn't pay me what I was making from the drugs, and so I'd work a job for, maybe a few weeks, then I'd stop..." Eventually, however, Rita and others found that it was difficult to be responsible dealers when they were addicted to the substances that were intended to bring in a profit – typically, they ended up using the drugs they were supposed to be selling, or using the money they earned to buy drugs, leaving debts to others such as drug suppliers and landlords unpaid.

Along with the feelings of excitement and power that went along with drug use, many women described drug use as a way to “numb the pain” of traumatic childhood events or abusive relationships, and most attributed their propensity for addiction to the families and communities in which they were raised. Others however, claimed that the relationship was much more complicated. Shelley recalled a conversation with her cousin, who had formerly been addicted, in which he urged her to stop using drugs. “You weren't brought up like that,” he said. To which she replied, “Well right! But neither were you. And neither were a whole lot of people that are on drugs.” She went on to say,

It's just something that...I don't know if I want to say that it's something that happens or something in your life happens or something that triggers you to do drugs, but there are a lot of different reasons – I honestly believe that – that people start doing drugs.

Regardless of the various or specific reasons that the women at Magdalene began using drugs, their addictions quickly moved towards similar ends: Women reported eventually “settling” on drugs of choice – typically crack cocaine and heroin. Ultimately, the women say, the drugs stopped being agents of power and pleasure and became

faceless substances that ruled them as oppressive masters. For many, the process was gradual, but for others, the destructive nature of addiction manifested in a rapidly progressing series of events:

So he and I used pretty steadily on a daily basis for about a year before things really started falling apart. We were behind on our bills, and within about a week's period of time, we lost everything. I lost everything. It was the end of 2005, um, and my husband got arrested on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, I lost my job on October the 26<sup>th</sup>, we got evicted from our apartment on November 1<sup>st</sup>, and my parents took my son away from me on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. And so it was just like all of that hit me, bam, bam, bam, bam and so I just didn't know what to do. And so my parents took my son and they helped me put my stuff in a storage unit. And they tried to help me straighten out, you know, but by this point, I felt like I was so far gone, I didn't know what to do, I didn't want to get clean, I didn't want to have to face all those problems. So that's when I became homeless.

All but two of the women I interviewed were homeless for at least some time during their addiction. Periods of homelessness lasted anywhere from 6 months to over 30 years. During that time, women found the resources to pay for drugs, food, and temporary shelter through stealing, dealing, prostituting, and sometimes, the provision of others such as service agencies, family members, or friends on the street. During Rita's interview, I asked her what percentage of drug-abusing homeless women she thought were also prostituting. Her estimate was 9 out of 10. Although this is a guess, informed by Rita's personal experience, large scale studies, as well as the stories of the women I interviewed confirm that drug addiction (particularly for poor women) and prostitution are closely related (Inciardi, 1999).

### Prostitution & Life on the Streets

Eleven of the 14 women I interviewed began prostituting to support their addiction. For at least a handful of women, prostitution was preceded by escorting, exotic

dancing, and/or participation in internet pornography. For most of the women, exchanging sex for drugs with drug dealers or acquaintances preceded street prostitution. Of the three women who began prostituting for reasons other than addiction, one ran away from home at the age of 13 and prostituted as a means of survival; two others reported having sex with men in their neighborhood as teenagers, so that the men would pay their mothers and provide extra income. Aimee told a story about sleeping with a much older man in her community, who helped her mom pay rent and utilities when she was unable to make ends meet for their family of seven,

I'd tell him what would be goin' on at home, or "I've gotta figure out a way to make some money..." And I laid with him eventually. We ended up sleeping together, and he would take my momma, I mean, \$500 or \$600 a time. And my thing was, you're just doing that 'cause you don't want her to know that you're sleeping with your daughter, man, you're goin' to go to jail...and I knew it was wrong, and evidently he did too, but I felt like he saved us, our family.

This type of ambivalence towards tricks or the very act of exchanging sex for money was not uncommon. Particularly when they were recalling some of their early experiences with prostitution, women reported feeling a number of emotions, ranging from revulsion to excitement. Keri said, "I was like really just screwing whoever for whatever. This was the beginning...But, like, it was really exciting to me. Like I felt like I totally had power...like I called the shots, you know." She went on to talk about her experiences with prostitution saying,

...when it comes to absolutely nothing, like you have *nothing*, you can always sell yourself. You don't have to go to work on time, you just...all you have to do is just...and it's not hard to find somebody who wants to pay for it...I had an ophthalmologist that traded me contacts for sex. I had a landlord that traded me rent for sex...

Keri's experiences with prostitution rapidly deteriorated, however, as did those of every woman I interviewed. Mary said,

I was 7 years out there on the streets, prostituting. Nowhere to go. Nowhere to live. And of course I made some, um, "acquaintances," uh, some people that would, you know I 'd pay 'em a little bit of money or sleep with them to stay the night...I was raped twice...I was abused...I had my nose broke twice...so much happened it's just hard to just...spit it out.

The violence experienced by women living on the streets was exacerbated by the risks posed by living in direct exposure to the natural and industrial elements of Nashville, Tennessee (e.g. intense heat, intense cold, car exhaust, and pollution). I have often heard women at Magdalene make comparisons between their physical appearances now versus when they lived on the streets. For many, descriptions of physical appearances were presented as a metric for the extreme conditions endured on the streets, as well as the all-consuming nature of addiction. When I asked Mindy to tell me about a specific day on the streets, she said,

Okay, I'll tell you about this one day, because it always sticks out in my mind. It's about 2 or 3am, it's pretty cold out, I have on some stretch pants that I got from somebody else that I've had on for probably about 4 days, and I have on some pants over top of the stretch pants that I've had on probably about 4 or 5 days, and I have on a sweatshirt, and it's dirty and smelly, and I have on a jacket, not a coat, just a jacket, and I have on a hat. And I walk up Hancock, which is one of the streets in East Nashville, and at that time of the morning, there are no cars really on that side of the street. So I really can't see, except for the lights from the vehicles, and it's...it's real spooky. And every now and then, you'll see the headlights from a car, and I remember turning to look on the top of the car to see if it's a police car - if I could see the lights or not, or if it's a trick that's ridin' down the street. And I remember this one particular morning, as I was coming up the street, another young lady that has now been through the program (Magdalene) was coming down the street. And a lot of times, that time of the morning when it was quiet and no cars were rolling and it was scary I would cry...I'd walk and cry...walk and cry and walk and cry...and I remember this morning, I saw this lady, and she was crying and walking, too. And we both kind of stopped, and I had some drugs that morning, and we kind of like, stopped, right where we met, sat on somebody's steps right in front of the house, and smoked some crack. And she went on her way and I went on my way. But how scary and lonely and isolated that felt, um, and it was during a time when a young lady had gotten murdered in that area too, so it was a real scary time. So that always stands out...that one particular...you know, how we crossed each other's paths that

morning. And you know we were both saying, 'Ain't nobody out here but us,' and she was saying, 'Yeah, us and somebody crazy.'

Fear of being killed on the streets was common among the women, and several described near death experiences resulting from drug violence and/or abusive "tricks." During their time on the streets, the women were robbed, raped, beaten, stabbed, shot, kidnapped, and pushed out of cars. They were abused by tricks, dealers, police, and other prostitutes. Similarly, they robbed, stabbed, and shot other people in an effort to stay alive, exact revenge or get the next hit.

For many of the women, "life on the streets," was, in reality, an unending cycle of homelessness, prison, and inpatient treatment centers, none of which seemed to have any kind of permanent effect. Describing her last day on the streets, Krista said,

I can remember standing on the side of the street, cussing God, asking God why my life had to be the way it was, why he didn't allow me to die. And I can remember being suicidal, wanting to die...didn't want to die, but didn't want to live neither. And I can remember asking him, "if I take this next hit, let me die or send me to jail." And let me say, I found God in the back of the police car. And, staying in jail for 36 days, I began to make some decisions. I didn't want to continue to live the life that I was living. And I wanted a way out. And I can remember going to court, asking the judge for some help. And asking him for a long-term program, because I had been in programs before. But I went into them programs to beat the system. Not really wanting to stop. I just wanted the pain to go away. And I was so sick and tired of being sick and tired of myself. I wanted something different.

The confluence among abuse, addiction, prostitution, and life on the streets makes it difficult to draw conclusions about one activity without implicating the other. However, the nature of the women's experiences indicate larger social and economic trends that shape(d) their realities, the interlocking nature of structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal violence (James, Johnson, Raghavan & Lemos, 2003), and the ways that these influence freedom. For example, it is significant to ideas of freedom and bodily

integrity that all of the people who seek residence at Magdalene are female. While there are men prostituting on the streets of Davidson County (so the women at Magdalene report), there are very few compared with the number of women. This implies that threats to bodily integrity are often gendered, and that freedom, at least in this sense, is restricted by patriarchy and beliefs about appropriate bounds of male and female sexuality. Furthermore, the racial composition of the residents at Magdalene also demonstrates that threats to bodily integrity are raced as well as gendered.

### Experiences with Treatment

Every woman I interviewed had been in jail and/or treatment multiple times before she came to Magdalene. Many of the women I interviewed expressed frustration with treatment programs that either ignored or were not capable of addressing issues of childhood loss and trauma, abuse, and mental illness, saying that these programs helped them get clean but not recover. According to the Magdalene database, which is maintained for programmatic and grant reporting purposes and contains data on all residents who entered after 1999, between 70-75% of program participants meet the clinical qualifications for dual diagnosis at any given time. Few if any women were receiving mental health treatment before or during their time on the streets, joining 4.8 million other American adults who report needing but not receiving treatment for mental health problems (SAMHSA, 2006). Similarly, 146,000 adult Tennesseans reported needing but not receiving services for drug addiction, and 316,000 adult Tennesseans reported a treatment gap for alcohol dependency (SAMHSA, 2006). For the women at Magdalene, however, lack of prior treatment for addiction is less the problem than



efficacy of services received. Residents report a continual cycle of addiction and rehabilitation (either through treatment centers or prison facilities) before coming to Magdalene. Although the cycle continues on for some, for most, Magdalene was the end of the road when it came to their active addiction.

Recovery was of utmost importance to the women at Magdalene. When asked what freedom meant to her, every person included “being clean” as part of her definition. With the exception of the women who began using at a very young age, most women described their initial experiences with drugs and alcohol as something they did by choice. However, at the end of their experiences with active addiction, women described “using against my own will.” They reported that their relationships with drugs replaced all other relationships, prevented them from making healthy decisions for themselves, and led them to do things that they never thought they would. When asked what freedom meant to her, Mattie said,

...I mean, I'm free from my drugs...I don't ever want to pick up again, no matter what. I don't have to pick up today. I do know that. My freedom is like, I don't have to use my body today to get money today. I have a job today, and I can buy myself or save to get whatever I want today. I'm free from different men laying on top of me. Just for me to get a drug. I'm free from that today...

Describing freedom in contradistinction to addiction, Catherine said,

Free to make a choice...just anything like, when you're using, you don't have a choice. It's all about using. You take the first hit, and that's all your mind thinks is more, more, more, more, more. Sometimes I just find myself crying...I'm just so overwhelmed with joy, just from being free of using, all the misery that comes with that. I mean, I can go to the movies, and I can go bowling, and I can enjoy it. Used to when people would say, "I'm going to the movies," I'd be like, "Well, okay, I'm fixin' to go get some more dope..."

Among other things, participants reported that freedom from active addiction also meant the opportunity to mend damaged relationships, make healthy decisions, and be

proud of one's choices. Freedom from addiction is not always easy, however: At least in the case of the women I interviewed, freedom required a transition to new contexts and the development of new selves. The new contexts took form through membership in the Magdalene community, which ensured free and safe housing, access to necessary services, recovery support, and caring relationships. Exploring the Magdalene community in contrast to life on the streets is instructive for understanding the complexities of freedom as well as the (potential) role of community in supporting and mediating the material, relational, and discursive resources required for promoting freedom. On one hand, the Magdalene community represents a *less* free environment than life on the streets: women commit to participating in program activities, living in community, and taking steps towards recovery that require considerable discipline. These commitments often result in deferring immediate, individual desires in order to fulfill obligations to rules, relationships, and alternative, yet un-realized notions of the self. Conversely, these obligations, along with the safety, healing, and material provision provided by Magdalene afford women the space and time to make choices towards human flourishing.

### The Magdalene Program

From its inception, the Magdalene program was intended to be a place where women who were coming off the streets or out of prison could live together in loving community and with personal dignity. Currently, 22 women live in four houses located in different neighborhoods of Nashville. When a woman enters the Magdalene program, she is immediately given a key to the house in which she lives, a bedroom, and unlimited access to all other amenities in the house. While there are staff members who check on the

houses to ensure that repairs are maintained, there are no staff members who serve as authorities in the houses themselves. The philosophy of Magdalene trusts the community created by the women living together to serve as the authority.

### *Finding Home*

The main house that belongs to Magdalene is The Ann Stevens Community House, more affectionately called “Lena,” a reference to the house’s street address. Lena is a large, gray residence that sits in the middle of one of the most run-down neighborhoods in Nashville. Magdalene was given the land on which the house sits, and the Magdalene board hired a female architect to design a home that was both functional and beautiful, and had ample common space to promote community gathering and activity. Magdalene conducted a large capital campaign, and began construction of the house in 2003. One volunteer that I interviewed described the somewhat lengthy process that Magdalene went through to get approval for the house from Metro government, and then told me,

I think the beauty of what happened there is that we are right in the middle of drug-infested Nashville. I mean, they’re dealing drugs right next door probably. And on our street for sure. But it has never felt scary for us there, ever. I mean, even in building the house, we went through, blessed all the walls, blessed all the lumber, everything. And we’ve not had things stolen. Nobody’s bothered the women. It’s been an amazing situation.

This sentiment of beauty and safety is one that was echoed by many of the residents that I interviewed. Krista recalled seeing the house for the first time:

I can remember when Rita and them took me to the house on Lena, and they showed me this beautiful house, and I'm like, ‘This is the house I *prayed for* when I was in my addiction,’ and to know what I came from, and where I'd been and to see that blessing, just that house, I kissed the floor. Because...dreams just don't...prayers just don't...come true like that. Not from where I come from - you can pray for another hit, but you just can't pray for a way out. And to get it? Oh my God! And, a key? Your own key? To a house that was like a mansion?

Many other women described similar feelings of astonishment when they left the streets or prison and came to Lena. They talked about the thrill of being in a place that was beautiful, safe and clean, and described the house as “a light,” “a sanctuary,” and “a blessing.” The other Magdalene houses are somewhat less spectacular, but no less committed to being places of safety and comfort. When talking about the philosophy behind the Magdalene program, Becca, the community’s founder and an Episcopal priest, talked at length about the importance of the houses:

...the philosophy, I guess then, is I wanted to set up something the way I would want it done to me. So where other people may have put some really good program pieces in place, I made welcome baskets and put nice sheets on the Sealy Posturepedic beds. We had, actually, a specific donor for good beds, because I just kept thinking I really would want it to be so comfortable. If you've been on those jail cots when you go in there...they're just so hard. And you go on the streets and you're literally sleeping under bridges and stuff, and it was like, I want a really sweet little lamp, and a good bed, and I want everybody to leave me the hell alone, and I don't want anybody bossing me around...

The commitment to dignity and equality is evident throughout Magdalene community practices, as is a profound commitment to mercy. Mercy is demonstrated in countless ways, but perhaps begins by offering women the ability to come off the streets and have space and time to rest and heal.

### *The Process of Healing*

During the first week to two weeks that a women lives at Magdalene, she does little more than rest. Particularly for women who come directly from the streets, this time is essential for reestablishing basic habits such as eating and sleeping. Describing her process at Magdalene, Mindy said, “It took me two months to relearn how to go to bed at night and get up in the morning...I was so used to being up for days at a time – never

sleeping, never eating, never bathing...” In addition to rest, women typically undergo mental and physical health assessments, and many of them see a dentist for the first time in years.

During the second or third week, women begin the process of a 90-day intensive outpatient (IOP) treatment. Magdalene contracts with Centerstone, a large mental health provider in the state of Tennessee to provide these services, and the women travel back and forth from Magdalene to Centerstone on a daily basis to attend 12-step meetings, counseling sessions, and other treatment activities. During the first 90 days, Magdalene also provides the women with a small weekly stipend so that they can buy food or cigarettes without having to worry about where the money is going to come from.

According to Becca, this is one of the most generous things that Magdalene does for the women. She expounded on this idea saying,

I mean, it's just hard when you're struggling with no money, and I know the women coming out of jail don't have any money, and so I just wanted to erase that. So that's where we came up with the idea of ‘we're going to pay you to stay for the first 90 days. You're not going to pay us; we're going to pay you.

Becca contrasted Magdalene with other programs or halfway houses where residents have to pay to have housing, food, and other necessities. While this model is relatively common, the staff and women at Magdalene say that requiring someone who is coming straight out of jail or off the streets to pay \$125/week to live in recovery housing is ignorant of the realities of addiction, prostitution, and life on the streets. For women who have little to no work history, this type of requirement only leads them back to the streets – the quickest and most accessible way to make money is through prostitution or selling drugs. Furthermore, the idea of running a recovery community for financial profit seems unthinkable to many members of the community. Rita, a Magdalene graduate who now

works for the program staff at Magdalene related this practice to another that she clearly sees as exploitative when she said, “I mean, are they promoting recovery or pimping people? *Seriously.*”

After the 90-day IOP is over, the women spend another 8-12 weeks doing computer training at an adult education facility that provides free services to residents of Davidson County. Pat, a member of the program staff, explained that the role of the computer training is two-fold: to teach basic computer skills, and to give the women time to “ease into” the responsibility of showing up consistently and on-time to do a work-related task. Throughout the process of IOP and computer training, the staff of Magdalene works with each new resident to develop an individual plan for acquiring necessary health and mental health services, education and/or vocational training, and long-term goals of the resident. Additionally, the staff works with the women to address any unfulfilled responsibilities such as outstanding warrants, unpaid child support, or other debt. Although women are allowed and encouraged to identify their own interests when it comes to education and vocational training, the women are required to work towards their GED if they do not already have a GED or high school diploma. Once a woman has completed IOP and computer training, most women seek employment at Thistle Farms, Magdalene’s cooperative business.

Thistle Farms was started in 2001 when the staff and women at Magdalene discovered how difficult it was for the residents to find employment. There is a range of employment experiences and capacities at Magdalene; however, many of the women have criminal records, and some of them have never held a legal job. At Thistle Farms, the women create high-quality, handmade bath and body products that are “as kind to the

environment as they are to the body” (Thistle Farms, 2008). Symbols of healing and wholeness run throughout the practices of Thistle Farms – each work day begins with a meditation, the products that are created by the women are sold at events where women tell their stories, and all proceeds from the products go back into the community of Magdalene. Thistle Farms is open from 9:00am – 2:00pm, three days a week, and employs approximately 20 Magdalene residents and program graduates. The women are encouraged to spend their paychecks as they determine; however, Magdalene offers each woman a matched individual investment account – for each dollar that a woman saves in her Magdalene account, the program matches it, and she is able to withdraw the money when she leaves to spend on school, a car, or housing.

On the days that the women at Magdalene are not working, there are a number of programmed activities available to the women, including spirituality groups, art classes, writing classes, and community meetings. As women near the end of their time at Magdalene, the program offers them several options, including continued employment at Thistle Farms (if they were working there while in the program), space in a one-year transitional home, or support in finding an apartment or home on their own. The recommended time for participation in the Magdalene program is two years, however, some women leave early either because they are ready to move on or because they have relapsed. For women who stay in the community for at least 30 days, the recovery rate is over 70%, which represents far greater success than most recovery programs (Gossop, Stewart, & Marsden, 2007; Hubbard, Craddock, Flynn, & Anderson, 1998).

Magdalene’s retention rate and success (measured by sobriety, employment, and stable residence) is especially impressive considering the population it serves. In the

general population, treatment completion is more likely for clients who abuse alcohol as their primary substance, have at least a high school education, are 30 or older upon entering treatment, have stable employment, and are non-Hispanic White males (SAMHSA, 2006). Conversely, crack cocaine and heroin are the typical drugs of choice for Magdalene residents, most lack employment and a high school education, and all are female. According to the residents and graduates for whom Magdalene was successful, there are many important differences between Magdalene and other treatment programs. Women mentioned the long-term nature of the program as an aspect that allowed them time to heal spiritually and psychologically, as well as physically. Women emphasized that recovery was about more than just “being clean,” and that true recovery takes time and multiple forms of support. In addition to the material conditions that supported their recovery, women also noted the importance of the loving community that provided the context for their recovery.

### *Freedom and Authority*

Clearly, the Magdalene program is one of structure and regulations in addition to love and mercy. In addition to requiring participation in the program activities listed above, women must be abstinent from drugs and alcohol as long as they are living in one of the Magdalene residences, and they are not allowed to have children or other family members live with them.<sup>10</sup> There are a number of rules and expectations that govern

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<sup>10</sup> In general, women who enter Magdalene have children, but do not have custody of them at the time they enter, for obvious reasons. Working with residents to regain custody of their children (should they so desire it) is one of the program goals of Magdalene, however, this typically does not happen until close to the end of the two-year program.



behavior in the residences, including a midnight curfew, respect for other people and their property, and responsibility for household chores. Once a resident begins working at Thistle Farms, she is expected to show up for work consistently and on-time, be responsible for her assigned tasks, and participate in continuing education opportunities. Ideally, the women in the community enforce these responsibilities themselves, but in reality, the accountability of staff is often required as well.

Although the rules and responsibilities are often a point of contention for staff and residents, most people agree that at least some structure and restriction is necessary for the realization of freedom. The idea that the restriction of some freedoms is necessary to the enjoyment of others is not new, nor is the idea that participation in any community requires varying degrees of conformity. However, the often-present conflict between freedom, restriction, and conformity is particularly salient at Magdalene. Lynn, a staff member, who chose to become involved with Magdalene specifically because of programmatic commitments to the absence of staff or other authority figures living in the houses with the women, described the conflict, saying,

...I mean the tension in Magdalene has been and continues to be wanting to be a community about love and needing to be a place where people are safe. And in order for people to be safe, there do have to be some limits, and there has to be some authority. And, um, particularly the women that we bring in, um, certainly in their first year there, they need to know, they need some outer parameters...But I think what's different about Magdalene is that that isn't the whole program...it's a piece of what we provide.

Lynn went on to say that the structure of Magdalene works to counteract what are often life-long experiences of disorganization, chaos, and license that was mistaken for freedom, and helps women establish healthy relationships with authority. Explaining the connections, she said,

I guess what I think about freedom in regard to Magdalene has almost everything to do with authority...for me I have to go back and think about each individual woman's early experiences with authority, and then throughout the course of their life, what their experience of authority has been, and typically, it was not been good. It was not been nurturing, it's not been healthy for them. It's not been life enhancing, it's not been positive. And so, Magdalene represents, I would hope, the gift of Magdalene would be to give somebody a respite in life to, I think, essentially, re-parent herself. You know, the best we can offer, the best we can aspire to everyday is to be a benevolent enough community that somebody gets...that people get the time, the resources they need to do some re-parenting. So that they can, you know, come away with a sense of authority within themselves that allows them some freedom...

The stories of the women confirm that identifying and learning to live out of an internally-determined set of regulations (guided, of course, by the practices and narratives of the community) was essential in their paths toward recovery. Mary, a Magdalene resident who was sexually abused by at least two of her mother's boyfriends before getting married and leaving home at age 14, called the establishment of an internal authority "being responsible," saying,

...there's not much I don't like about Magdalene. When I first got here, I didn't like nothing about it. I was scared. I didn't want to change. I wanted to be this little girl still instead of growing up and being the adult that I am. And I'm not there yet. I may never get all the way there. But I am, I am getting, just an edge of responsible today. I really am.

Mary then described how Magdalene is teaching her to be responsible. She said,

...maturing and being responsible is a great deal of freedom for me. Because I feel good about myself when I do something good. I feel good about myself when I be responsible for what I may have done. Or something I may have said. Like for missing my days at work...I'm being responsible now. And, 'cause I got wrote up, and, you know, that really woke me up. And like, "Dang, I'm not responsible," and, you know, maybe that's just what it takes for me...to get where I need to go.

The idea that freedom is made possible through structure, and that internal authority often needs external authority to facilitate its development tells us something about the complicated and paradoxical nature of freedom. At the beginning of this

chapter, I discussed the ways in which restrictions of freedom in one instance can lead to diminished freedom in another (for example, in the case of bodily integrity). At this point, however, it appears that there are times with the restrictions of freedom in one instance can lead to *increased* freedom in another (for example, in Mary's description of learning to be responsible). There are differences, of course, between being sexually abused as a child and choosing to submit oneself to the authority of program staff. Still, it implies that there must be something involved in freedom beyond a simple equation involving authority, autonomy, choice, and the contexts that support or limit them. It also alerts us that freedom, at least for the women at Magdalene, includes a notion of the ability to choose what is "right" for oneself and others, as opposed to merely choosing what one "wants." As shall be discussed more extensively in the next chapter, the ideas of freedom held by women in the Magdalene community suggest that freedom used to accomplish "wrong" ends is more than an abuse of freedom: it is not freedom at all.

### *Supporting Freedom: Staff, Volunteers and Fundraising*

Providing the opportunities and structures that support freedom and recovery requires a tremendous amount of resources, both monetary and otherwise. The community of Magdalene is maintained by a large network of staff, donors, and volunteers that provide funding, resources and services to women who live at Magdalene house. There are 10 staff members at Magdalene and Thistle Farms, including an executive director, a Magdalene program director, four Magdalene program staff (two of whom are licensed counselors, and two of whom are Magdalene graduates), an education coordinator, a Thistle Farms director, and two public relations and development staff. The staff is mixed

in terms of age and race, however all staff members are women with the exception of one male who serves on the program staff.

In addition to Magdalene residents, graduates, and staff, the community is supported by a number of different agencies (e.g., Interfaith Dental provides dental care, Siloam Health Clinic provides medical care), and hundreds of dedicated volunteers who do everything from plan the annual fundraiser to repair the Magdalene residences. For the most part, volunteers represent a range of ages, are male and female, and have disposable resources, either in terms of money or in terms of time. The e-mail list for the volunteer newsletter goes out to over 1,000 volunteers around the Nashville area. While most of these volunteers donate time or money to Magdalene once or twice a year, many of them spend countless hours each week contributing to the Magdalene community. For example, Linda, a retired teacher living in Nashville, schedules every sales event that women from Thistle Farms attend. Her work includes identifying potential sales and speaking events, contacting the organizations to solicit speaking engagements, managing the logistics of the sales events (time, space, location, directions, speakers, how many products the women should take), and writing thank you notes to event hosts. Speaking engagements generally occur once or twice a week, however, the holiday season of 2008 was busy enough to include 10-12 speaking engagements and sales events each week. Needless to say, Linda's efforts are essential to the success of Thistle Farms, and her work for Thistle Farms is full-time. Although nearly all the volunteers are at Magdalene or Thistle Farms because they want to "help," most of them would also say that they volunteer because it contributes to their own well-being. As one volunteer often says to

the Magdalene residents working at Thistle Farms, “I don’t know if you need to be here, but I know *I* do.”

Although no one I interviewed said this directly, my observations led me to conclude that another key difference between Magdalene and other recovery programs was that most of the staff and volunteers at Magdalene do not have a background in psychology or social work. Without a doubt, the therapy and treatment that the women receive once they come into Magdalene is *essential* to their recovery. However, the presence of other individuals, whose vocations range from priest to accountant to massage therapist, and whose connections to the community are equally as varied, creates an environment in which residents and graduates are seen primarily as *people*, not as clients. Additionally, for many of the staff and volunteers, the women’s stories are not far from their own: Of the staff and volunteers I interviewed, several had personal or family experiences of addiction and abuse. Although Magdalene stands firmly against prostitution as a legal or legitimate practice, many of the women, staff and volunteers join critical feminists in saying that the exchange of sex for money (or resources or power or myriad other things) is not a practice that is restricted to dark streets and back alleys. While an awareness of systems of racism, sexism, and poverty, and their effects on the lives of women who come to Magdalene is not lost on those within the community; residents, graduates, staff and volunteers are quick to make connections that reach across traditional analyses and demonstrate the similarities between people and experiences as well as the differences. Talking about the popularity of Magdalene, Becca, reflected on why she thought people felt so connected to the issues of addiction and prostitution: “...there is a mystique about it and I think everybody knows there's a part of themselves that's a part of that, too - that we

sell ourselves to get something else...” This explanation falls in line with something else I have heard Becca say on several occasions: “The line between priest and prostitute is very small.”

Magdalene’s annual budget for FY 2008-2009 is approximately \$557,000, which supports all Magdalene and Thistle Farms expenses, including repairs, maintenance, supplies and utilities for the houses; medical, dental, and mental health care for residents; staff wages (including program staff, marketing and fundraising, and Thistle Farms); and other various programmatic expenses. Magdalene’s cost per day for each of their 21 residents is \$50.60, and this figure includes all occupancy, transportation, and staff salary expenses, as well as costs associated with treatment, educational and vocational services.<sup>11</sup>

In the 11 years of its existence, Magdalene has been able to raise enough money to meet or exceed its budget each year, and has done so largely through individual donations. Individuals have donated approximately \$360,000 during the past year, and private organizations or congregations have contributed another \$150,000. The remainder of the money is generated through grants (mostly from local foundations), and income from the John School,<sup>12</sup> which Magdalene runs for Nashville Metro Government. Likewise, Thistle Farms sustains itself through a combination of product sales, private grants, and individual contributions. Magdalene and Thistle Farms do not take any government money; rather, they rely on the contributions of money and time given by its large network of donors, supporters, and volunteers.

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<sup>11</sup> While this amount is considerably more than the \$13.70 that was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is considerably less than the per diem rate at prison facilities for women in Tennessee of \$84.20.

<sup>12</sup> The John School is a program for men who have been caught hiring prostitutes.

The presence and commitment of such a large network is demonstrative of the tremendous amount of resources that are required to assist women coming off the streets, as well as the importance of the work. Furthermore, for many involved, the provision of resources for women who have been without is not an act of charity – it is a restoration of justice. When talking about the relationship between freedom, justice, and the resources provided by Magdalene one volunteer told me, “...the women shouldn’t feel shame...the shame lies with society – that society has not...that it has...I don’t want to say ‘betrayed them,’ but that society hasn’t supported them in the way in which they deserve to be supported.”

### Conclusion

In line with Sen and Nussbaum’s claims of environments that support capabilities, the community of Magdalene allows women to enjoy basic freedoms of life, bodily health, and bodily integrity. Furthermore, these capabilities lay the groundwork for others: Through caring relationships and clinical expertise, it provides a place in which people can explore their thoughts and imagination; reason; and emotions, and begin to trust them as individual experiences and qualities that are “real” and legitimate as opposed to distortions created by addiction or trauma. But it seems that, from the perspective of people in the Magdalene community, freedom is something more as well. Describing the centrality of freedom to the work of Magdalene, Becca told me,

I do think freedom is our core value and the way that I’ve always understood it is that...you know...what we were looking for was the freedom to speak our truth in love. That was part of the definition: the freedom to speak your truth in love. And that where freedom comes from and where it begins, I don’t know. And that freedom to me, specifically in relation to Magdalene and to the women that are residents in Magdalene, to me freedom means freedom to make your own choices

in this world. And freedom to live how you want to live. Freedom from drugs, freedom from having to buy and sell your body, freedom even from verbal or emotional abuse from anybody in this world. That you're free to walk away from it. Free to walk toward whatever you want to walk toward. I think that includes, you know, freedom from oppression by authority whether it's judicial authority or church authority or whatever that hasn't served you well. You're free to walk away from that.

What allows us to walk? Certainly material provision and environments such as those described by freedom theorists that support choice and safety. But many of my interviews with well-resourced and seemingly “capable” volunteers and staff members indicate that there must be more to it. One staff members told me,

I did live many years feeling like I had no choice and that I was backed into a corner, and, um...those kind of things happen in suburbia, you know, and it's still about, whether you're trapped behind the door of a crack house, or trapped behind the door of a suburban house, even though the risks are much, much greater for a woman or a man who's caught in that other cycle...the cycle of addiction, prostitution, that sort of thing. The cost of not being able to chose your own life, be self-determining, and chose what to do with your own body, I think in particular for women...I think that's just a great, great risk.

Explanations such as these demonstrate that there is more to freedom than having a supportive environment, or perhaps that the division between “self” and “environment” is one that is largely false. Understanding the process of how capabilities translate into action and opportunity are important. Particularly for women who wear so many of their scars on the inside, we must explore how the subject of liberty is constructed (or reconstructed) as a self, capable of making choices and walking forward.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONSTRUCTING THE FREE SELF

...there's this saying that we have, and it says that "freedom ain't free." And I understand what that means now. At first I didn't understand what that means, and um, I think, to, like, get to a place where you feel free, that you have to do some work to stay in that place. It doesn't just come and then it's there all the time. You have to constantly work...do some *inside* work...to keep your freedom there... (Mindy, Magdalene graduate)

Although Mindy's definition of "inside work" is somewhat different than the work of reconstruction described by Nancy Hirschmann<sup>13</sup> (2003), her words demonstrate that freedom requires a self that is constructed in such a way that making choices and acting on them extend beyond an environment that supports capabilities. It also demonstrates that internal bondage, particularly internal bondage that has been caused by another individual, relationship, or external condition, requires the work of changing notions of "self" in addition to altering social systems and material conditions. As Hirschmann (2003) so artfully describes, the work of reconstruction is accomplished mostly through discourse – through language, the meanings we make of things, and the ways that these meanings influence both self and environment. Perhaps because of public fascination with both drug use and prostitution, it is not difficult to identify discourses that potentially work to shape the experiences of the women at Magdalene.

For example, hegemonic narratives that inform beliefs about addiction tend to attribute addiction to either personal moral shortcomings or the biological predisposal of

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Hirschmann is concerned with reconstructing the self through de- and re-constructing broader, hegemonic discourses that produce and are produced by patriarchy.

a particular individual. While there is considerable evidence to support the claims of addiction's biological correlates (Haile, Kosten, & Kosten, 2008; Schumann, 2007), there is equally as much that indicates the role of family, community, and social factors that contribute to addiction (Singer, 2008; Wallace, 1999). In addition to informing beliefs that we hold about addicted individuals, and that addicted individuals hold about themselves, hegemonic narratives inform the way addiction is addressed and treated (Mulia, 2002; Singer, 2008). Furthermore, the "service system" most commonly accessed by persons of color who suffer from addiction is the justice system, which provides little opportunity for rehabilitation (Mulia, 2002; Roberts, 2000). In this sense, the discourses about drug use (e.g., that it's a moral failure) inform systems-level structures such as laws and institutions (e.g., drug laws and prison facilities that recommend "punishment" as adequate and appropriate treatment for addiction), that in turn shape individual experiences in such a way that individuals experience the dominant narratives as real (e.g., women who develop internal self-concepts that tell them they will never be more than an addict, a prostitute, a felon, a throw-away). For the women at Magdalene, reconstructing a "self" that is different than these narratives describe was one of the most crucial components of experiencing freedom. In this chapter, I discuss the role of discourse and narrative in constructing individual identities. Specifically, I explore the ways in which the community of Magdalene influences the freedom of its members through narrative and identity construction.

## Freedom and the Self

When I asked the people I interviewed to talk about freedom, I expected them to talk about freedom from addiction, freedom from having to sell their bodies for drugs, and freedom from poverty. I also expected people to talk about freedom as freedom to live in a house that is safe, freedom to work in a job that is enjoyable, and freedom to make decisions about the type of life they want to live. While people *did* talk about these things, and saw them as foundational to a life marked by freedom, they talked more often about freedom as the ability to know, trust, and be oneself, an ability that is made possible in the context of a loving and accepting community. Aimee, a resident, described freedom and the ability to be herself this way:

My whole thing is that being free is being able to be yourself. Being able to be angry. Being able to express your anger...in a good way... a healthy way, should I say? Be sad, happy, I mean, whatever you're feelin'... be able to feel it in a healthy way without feeling judged or put down. Does that make sense? I ain't miserable no more. That's freedom. I don't have to say "yes," no more when I want to say, "no."

Janie, a volunteer, offered a similar definition,

I think freedom, a lot of times, is to be the person that you are instead of being the person that you think society wants you to be...I think the key thing is to be valued for who you are. I think that's very freeing, and that's what I get here. I feel like I'm valued for who I am...warts and all.

Catherine, another resident, said, "There's a lot of freedom getting clean and then being at Magdalene." When I asked her what, specifically, about Magdalene enabled her to be free, Catherine said, "...the love...just makes me feel free. That they love me for who I am, regardless of what I've done in the past, they still love me and want to see me do something good with myself."

Although there are numerous academic perspectives on self and identity, the most widely accepted theories operate from a concept of identity that is constructed and negotiable, largely through the processes of language and discourse interacting with the body and the material environment (Etherington, 2007). As demonstrated by the quotes above, however, large-scale discourses rarely flow directly from structural-level phenomena to individual. Rather, they travel through the intermediaries of place and relationship, and are reinterpreted in ways that more directly affect the self and the material context. As with all people, the discourses that shape the identities of the women I interviewed are interpreted through multiple communities, however, Magdalene played a leading role in helping women to reshape their notions of self and identity.

### Constructing the Self through Narrative

Community psychologist Julian Rappaport uses the framework of community narratives to help make sense of community stories and practices that shape individual and collective identity. Narratives, as discussed by Rappaport (1995, 2000), are the stories we use to define ourselves. They tell us “not only who we are but who we have been and who we can be” (Rappaport, 1995, p. 796). These narratives affect individuals by creating meaning and influencing emotion, memory, and identity; however, they exist on many levels of analysis (individual, organizational, community) and all of these levels influence each other (Rappaport, 1995). Narratives are created, recreated, and internalized or manifested through a constant interplay of dominant cultural narratives, community narratives, and individual narratives (Rappaport, 1995, 2000) These narratives can be “true” or “untrue,” positive or negative, or constructive or harmful, and

work together to form the identities and inform the behaviors of the people and communities who create, transmit and interact with them.

*Dominant cultural narratives* are most easily identified as stereotypes that are displayed in highly visible arenas such as political debates and public discourse, and are transmitted through major socializing institutions of culture (e.g. schools, churches, media). For people who lack social, political, or economic power, narratives that define their community, neighborhood, or culture – and by extension, themselves - are often negative and/or other-imposed. Confronting and reconstructing these narratives can result in transformative change within an individual or community because it allows the members to redefine themselves as valuable and see themselves as sources of potential action (Salzer, 1998). Additionally, narratives can be used to call into question the power inequalities and rule of dominant culture, often reframing the “problems” experienced by a given individual or community (Shaffer & Smith, 2004). When it comes to addiction and mental illness, dominant cultural narratives are often particularly distorted (Hersey, 2005).

As discussed earlier, a similar distortion exists in dominant images of prostitution. During a particularly candid conversation of which I was a part one afternoon at Thistle Farms, Val talked about the “myths” about prostitution she sees in the popular culture that surrounds her. In particular, she talked about being on a college campus in Nashville and seeing a sign advertising a sorority/fraternity party whose theme was “Pimps and Hoes.” “They have no idea...” she said. She went on to talk about her belief that most people who have never prostituted romanticize the idea of exchanging sex for money, and that events such as this encourage it. Another woman participating in the conversation

said she thought “most people” think women who prostitute do it because they “just really like sex,” rather than because, “there’s a deeper issue.” In addition to feeling misunderstood, the women I interviewed talked about fighting internal battles to uproot such narratives that were embedded in their notions of the self. Hirschmann’s reading of dominant discourse extends this critique by allowing us to see that these narratives also influence the very structure of our society, and work to reproduce women upon whom violence and oppression may be exacted. For this reason, combating dominant discourse and claiming new narratives is essential for the practice of freedom. For individuals who are experiencing or recovering from mental illness and addiction, the communities in which they live and work have the potential to act as mediators between dominant narratives and personal identities, and construct alternative community narratives.

*Community narratives* are descriptive and historical accounts that represent the collective knowledge and experience of a specific group of people. They are constructed collectively through social interactions and are granted legitimacy when they are shared by others. Community narratives are identified through consistent themes that present themselves in personal stories expressed by individual community members. In general, people claim membership in multiple communities, and community belonging has different requirements and practices depending on the community itself. For people who participate in recovery communities, the practice of story-telling is typically a central practice of the community. Often, a core value of recovery communities is to give people space to explore their own story and work to create a healthier and more functional alternative (Rafalovich, 1999; Kuehl, 2001; Tangenberg, 2001).

*Personal narratives* represent the stories we tell ourselves about our “self.” They shape how we think about ourselves, our world, our relationships, and the actions that we take. The importance of narratives in helping individuals make sense of mental illness (and by extension, addiction), and in providing scripts for recovery is increasingly acknowledged. Researchers have found that individuals use narratives to gain greater understanding of their illness experiences (Stern, Doolan, Staples, & Szmukler, 1999; Mallinson & Popay, 2007), construct alternative identities that accompany their journeys through recovery (Rafalovich, 1999; McKeganey & McIntosh, 2000), combat stigma (Kondrat & Teater, 2009), and negotiate localized cultural politics that shape definitions and beliefs about individuals who experience addiction and mental illness (Prussing, 2007). For the women at Magdalene, the transformation of personal narratives is an integral part of the healing process, and a necessary step in the journey towards freedom.

As I mentioned in my methodology chapter, one of my primary observations about Magdalene was the centrality and ubiquity of narrative and storytelling – stories are used to explain decisions, to recall old friends, to teach lessons, and to communicate identity. They create a common understanding of what Magdalene “is,” and help its members to understand their place within it. Although narratives are created and shared through several different community practices, the three most common are “the circle,” spiritual discovery, and public events at which Magdalene residents and graduates speak. In these locations, women are able to create and perform individual and community narratives that provide the framework for the reconstruction of identity.

*“The Circle”*: Community Meditation

There are many forms of story telling and multiple narrative frames represented in the tradition of story telling at Magdalene, not the least of which is the 12-step tradition of recovery. Within the 12-step tradition, individuals come together to hold one another accountable and take steps towards recovery, often by sharing past experiences and current struggles with one another (SAMHSA, 2006). Women living in the Magdalene houses are encouraged to have group “meditation” once a day at a time of their choosing, during which they set aside 20-30 minutes to read a passage from a 12-step text, and share their thoughts about the passage or anything else that might be of immediate importance for their recovery. At Thistle Farms, a similar meditation is held at the beginning of each workday, and includes anyone visiting, volunteering, or working at Thistle Farms. Meditation is often referred to as “the circle,” which is an apt description: Everyone participating in meditation shows up at 9:00am, grabs a folding chair, and finds a seat in the large circle that fills the main room at Thistle Farms. The membership varies virtually everyday, but the practice stays the same – a Thistle Farms resident or graduate reads the meditation for the day (chosen from a variety of sources), and then we work our way around the circle, one-by-one, each person reflecting on what had been read or, often, the community in general. 12-step mantras such as “just for today,” “you spot it, you got it,” “the God of my understanding,” and “a grateful addict is a recovering addict,” are commonplace. In addition to being a practice that the women say helps their recovery, the circle and other 12-step meetings provide a place for confession, truth-telling, and identity reconstruction that the women find healing. Recalling one particularly memorable meeting, Mindy told me,



I can tell you what my first sense of freedom was for me. It was when I began to talk about being HIV positive. That was like this huge load was lifted from my shoulders because for probably about 5 or 6 years, I lived in this world trying to keep everybody that knew me from knowing that I was HIV positive. And I had conjured up all this stuff in my head about what people would think, and what people would say, and how people would treat me. And I remember the first time I talked about it, I was in a meeting, I thought my heart was going to stop beating...but people's reactions were not what I thought they would be, and it was just a relief. And there was so much freedom.

For Mindy, the ability to tell her story provided freedom because she was able to confront fears and expectations of isolation and rejection. She told me that the healing that came from this experience was the one that encouraged her to talk more openly with her therapist and to deal with some of “the underlying issues” of her drug use. For many of the women, the presence of an open and accepting community provided a place in which they could dispose of secrets and old narratives that had haunted them for years.

Talking about her experience with telling her story, Leah said,

I started telling my story and the first time that I was able to tell the big secret that I had never told anybody and got that much freedom from it, then I became willing to do it again because I've been toting this stuff and I've been miserable and nobody judged me and everybody is still okay with me...and the more I told it, the less power it had, you know, so it started becoming a selfish thing to me. You know what I'm saying? I want to do this, you know, I want to get better, because I've been toting this stuff for 30 or 40 years.

In addition to providing a safe and supportive environment in which women are able to lay down the secrets and burdens that they have carried for decades, the circle provides the opportunity to create, claim, and be held accountable to new notions of the self.

### *Spiritual Construction: The Journeying Self*

Although the women draw on numerous sources for their re-creations, within the context of Magdalene, beliefs in God are deeply informative of new identities. When the

women I interviewed told their life stories and described their processes of recovery, they talked about the importance of prayer and meditation and coming to their own understanding of God in addition to working through issues of abuse, addiction, and trauma through more clinical means. Women talked about the importance of finding a God who was not their “grandmama’s God.” Women told me that they “found God” in the back of cop cars, in deserted alleys, in prison cells, and in friendships with other addicts. To them, this meant that God was present in darkness as well as light, and enabled them to construct an identity of one who was cared for, accompanied and empowered, regardless of circumstance, rather than cast off and alone. Explaining this process, Krista said,

And coming into Magdalene, I never had any discipline before. They taught me how to...find myself. Um, they taught me how to look deep within. They taught me how to find my own God, um, not my Mom's god, not my Grandmama's god, not that God that they said was going to come from the sky and beat me down. But I finally found a God that was loving, caring, forgiving, and compassionate.

Krista and others described that the process of finding one’s own God was facilitated by the 12-step tradition, but also by the spiritual leadership that is provided by Becca, the executive director. Personal, spiritual discovery is encouraged at Magdalene, and Becca’s unconventional style seems to enable residents, graduates, and volunteers to embrace the process in a way that is healing and freeing. After describing her resistance to come into Magdalene because it was a “religious” program, headed by “some damn priest,” Rita told me about the first time she met Becca,

She had on some daisy duke shorts and a midriff top and her hair was just...I mean, she was like one of us, you know what I'm saying? And I was just like, "Oh my God...she's not a priest!" You know what I'm saying - priests do not dress like that. And it was just like overwhelming and it was just like love just oozed from her. It was just like, it is okay for you to be who you are. It is okay and we're going to walk with you for everything that you...whatever you want to do. As

long as it's positive. And you don't have to go back and sell your body, you don't have to go back and use any dope, you don't have let anybody abuse or use you. We're gonna help you walk into your life. And I was just like, in just...shock. Just looking at this woman, and I was just amazed that she doesn't look like a priest. But then what does a priest look like? And I say all the time that Becca reminds me of the Lord...she reminds me of Jesus. You know, it's just like standin' there...just come as you are. We're going to walk with you and we love you and I mean it was *genuine*. And it still is.

Although I have never seen Becca dressed quite like Rita described, she is certainly unlike any priest I have ever encountered. More importantly, however, her ability to inspire people to find their own path and walk in it is remarkable. Members of the Magdalene community find it to be a place of inclusion, forgiveness, and creativity. Holli, the director of Thistle Farms described coming to Magdalene and finding the freedom to explore her own spirituality,

I'll never forget going to one of the first staff meetings and they had a meditation, but it wasn't necessarily the kind of beat that I was used to going to growing up...it was like, even though we have an Episcopal priest as our executive founder, there is no, at least I don't see it, there is no at all push to be cookie cutter...and that we all can find ourselves on different paths of our spiritual journey...and to find yourself on whatever journey that is. I remember Hope saying, "I don't know that I believe in God." And it was very freeing to be in a place that wasn't like, "What do you mean, you don't believe in God?!" The response was like, "Yeah, I've been there before, too." It was just very, like...wow...I could breathe or something.

Clearly, the imagery of being on a journey is one that is central to the processes of self and spiritual discovery at Magdalene. Among other things this metaphor allows the freedom for individual members and the community as a whole to look at themselves and say, "I'm not there yet...we're not there yet...but we're on our way." The identity that is constructed by such a narrative is one that is healing because it allows for and embraces imperfection and re-creation. As I have heard many times at Magdalene, it means that "the only thing that matters is showing up and being a part of" the community. Zoe, a

divinity student who also works for Magdalene talked about this aspect of the community in her interview:

Something that stands out to me is...I think the drive of the people who participate, the people who volunteer, the people who are staff members, the women who are in the program. We are reading Niebuhr in one of my classes and we were talking about how, basically, you're going to have dirty hands...like, you're not going to go into something able to do what is right, like completely what is right - you're going to have dirty hands. And I think that that is acknowledged - you can kind of come as you are. And you can come and....but there is still a yearning to do something. Like you're going to have dirty hands, but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't do something.

Along with the journey metaphor, the stories that were told again and again are messages of hope and healing. During one particularly memorable meditation at Thistle Farms, I witnessed the power that language has to shape the mood and identity of a community. In the week preceding this meditation, several painful things had happened at Magdalene – a graduate who worked at Thistle Farms relapsed and no one could find her or contact her, two other women learned that their mothers had cancer, and it seemed as though the newly-redesigned Thistle Farms products were not going to be ready in time to meet the deadline for their launch with an advertising company in New York. The weight of the losses, fears, and disappointments were tangible as the women went around the circle and responded to the day's meditation. One of the women said, "I feel like everywhere I look, there is death and darkness all around me." When it came to Becca, however, she acknowledged the legitimacy of everyone's feelings, but went on to say that she was not discouraged - that her time as a part of the Magdalene community had taught her to never give up hope on people or on situations, even when they seem desperate. She went on to say that addiction did not have the last word on Suzanne, that death does not have the last word on any of us, and that the women sitting in the circle

itself stood as a testament to the truth that, in the end, love wins. Almost as if lightning had struck, the entire community changed – moods were better, relationships were stronger, and productivity was higher. Using Rappaport’s framework, we can see how Becca called upon familiar community narratives to redirect the beliefs and identities out of which people were operating. Whether or not Becca’s words were “true” when she spoke them is of little importance – they became true after they were spoken, which is the lesson that theories of social construction offer. Hirschmann (2003) warns against an understanding of social construction in which we envision an *unconstructed* self or society. Rather, she says, everything is always, already constructed, and our challenge is to look for holes in oppressive discourses in order to reshape them into discourses of liberation.

*Grounded Theories of the Self: Self as Essential, Self as Constructed*

As discussed in the first chapter of my dissertation, the freedom theorists I chose to use hold quite different ideas of the “selves” of freedom. Sen and Nussbaum seem to posit an “essential” self, and their reliance on Rawls results in a liberal individualist notion of the self that is unitary and autonomous. While care theorists provide better tools with which to explore the self-in-relationship, they have often been criticized for holding notions of the self that do not allow for multiple and fluid identities (Keller, 1997). Hirschmann (2003) is the lone theorist who allows for a self that is non-essential, constructed and multiple, and this chapter has demonstrated the importance of such a concept of the self in making sense of the journey towards freedom for the women at Magdalene. However, Hirschmann’s idea that the self is nothing more (and nothing less)

than a being constructed by various forms of discourse and their resulting material implications also seems contradictory to the claims of my participants who repeatedly said that freedom is, ultimately, the ability to “be myself.” And that uncovering this self, or perhaps letting the self grow into a human being marked by flourishing rather than suffering, was in fact the basis for all other freedoms: for making choices, for realizing possibilities, for creativity and relationship.

Indeed, the process of recovery often appears to be a process of putting the pieces of self back together. For women who have experienced childhood abuse and trauma, long-term drug use, destitute poverty, and violence done to their bodies and minds, disorders such as dissociative disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder are common if not standard (Bolton, Hill, O’Ryan & Udwin, 2004; Christensen, Hodgkins, Garces & Estlund, 2005). In these disorders, the “self” scatters and enables the individual to disengage mind from body (Brison, 2002). One of the first steps of recovery as described by the women is the often-painful process of reintegration. This isn’t to say that the self is independent of discourse, material conditions, or relationships, nor is it to say that it is always the same, static, or non-negotiable. Rather, it is to say that the people who inhabit said selves *experience* them as more than constructed – they experience them as entities that have a “true” nature, and as entities that, given the right material and relational environment can work towards fuller manifestation. A Hirschman-esque reading of this situation could justifiably argue that the experience of a unitary and essential self (as well as the theories of Sen, Nussbaum, and the care theorists that imply one) is produced by language that treats and describes the self as unitary. However, for the women at

Magdalene, it was important to be able to believe in and identify a self that is more than past experiences and social constructions.

### Performing New Identities: Speaking at Magdalene Events

Outside of the meditation circle, the practice of storytelling is used for the purposes of fundraising and advocacy. In his theory of community narratives, Rappaport does not specifically address the creation and use of narratives that are of the community but intended for an outward audience. These “outward focused” narratives are important to the Magdalene community, however, because it helps them confront dominant discourses about addiction and prostitution, and in turn works to secure and protect individual and community narratives as they are constructed within the community. During 2008, Magdalene residents or graduates spoke at over 180 events. Although most of the speaking engagements took place in the Nashville area, women spoke to audiences in Kansas City, Atlanta, New York, Chicago, and Orlando as well. The events vary in terms of nature and audience, but are usually held by groups that connect with at least one aspect of Magdalene’s mission. Faith communities, university classrooms, local businesses and women’s groups are typical hosts, as are individuals living in Nashville who have Thistle Farms “home parties” at which Magdalene women come, sell Thistle Farms products, and talk about Magdalene and Thistle Farms. Many also talk about their lives on the streets, experiences with addiction and prostitution, and the journey of recovery, if they so choose. The women who work for Thistle Farms will be the first to tell you that their “stories” are what sells when it comes to raising money and enticing customers who purchase Thistle Farms products. As I conducted my interviews, the act

of public story telling emerged as one of the most controversial issues among members of the community. While many members saw it as a way to perform new identities and confront negative and pathologizing narratives about addiction and prostitution, others saw it as exploitative and objectifying.

### *Performing Success*

Krista, who likes telling her story to public audiences told me that sharing her story with others reminds her of who she is and how far she's come, saying, "I love telling my story because that's where I came from, but that's not who I am. You know, that's not the person that I am...that was bad choices that I made in life, you know?" She went on to say that she also believes that telling her story helps other people, particularly those dealing with addiction and prostitution, heal and have hope:

...we just don't know how powerful our stories could be to a person that don't have a clue about what addiction and prostitution is, and they always got this lie that nobody never recovers, or they gonna be that way all their life, and we, we givin' them that hope shot, so our stories is important. No matter what kind of story you have, it's important, because you never know who needs to hear it...

Aside from healing the self and helping others, Mindy, a Magdalene graduate and the sales manager at Thistle Farms, emphasizes that she believes that telling her story can challenge broader cultural narratives, which she calls "myths," saying,

I get to travel all over the world to talk about and break the myths about prostitution, and how there are enough places for women to recover, because there are not - there are not enough places for women to come, and feel safe, and deal with some of the issues that have led us to the streets. Um, and to break the myths that once a prostitute, always a prostitute: No - we heal. We heal. We grow and we move on.

Many of the women say that the ability to believe that they have something positive and healing to contribute to the world is an essential part of their recovery and one of the



many building blocks used to construct a valuable and useful self. Women describe wanting to use their stories to encourage other addicts and family members of addicts, to challenge dominant discourses about prostitution and the use of women's bodies, and to destigmatize mental illness. Furthermore, speaking engagements, especially those with young people, are often seen as opportunities to prevent other people from ending up on the streets. In addition to combating negative discourses, members of community also believe that speaking about Magdalene can work to cast a more "beautiful" vision of what the world might be: a world in which people love without judgment, care for their neighbor, support one another regardless of circumstance, and embrace difference and creativity.

### *Performing Difference*

Sometimes, however, the beauty of the vision is not intoxicating enough to subdue the realities of addiction and prostitution as experienced by the women at Magdalene, nor is it enough to hide the prejudices of those sitting in the audience.

Shelley, a resident who has recently begun speaking at events and home parties, said,

Sometimes, I feel like I'm being put on display. Some things that have happened to me in my life, I don't really choose to rehash, you know? Sometimes, I honestly feel like when we have some people come and they're like...in awe, like, "This happened?" (Incredulously). These are my thoughts when I look in their face...is that they're like, "Oh my goodness. You did this, and you did that, and that happened...Oh my God..." And you know, sometimes it makes me feel like I'm being put on a display, you know? 'Cause there are not a whole lot of nice things that we've been through. Being in drug addiction. And there's not a whole lot of nice things. And I just don't want to be made to feel like I'm...put on display. Period. That's my thing. That's what I think.

Lynn, a Magdalene staff member, goes even further in her criticism of the practice of public story telling, saying,

...it has always concerned me on a number of different levels...I think it's mildly to moderately to even more exploitative of the women. I think it can set certain women up for relapse...you know everybody can talk a good game, but it's never been clear to me how they feel about it individually. And it's great to, you know...gotta talk about it...gotta disclose...you know, but nobody in the audience has to talk about it.

For people who work on issues of voice and power as they relate to freedom, the traditional concern is that some voices have been silenced, and that their silencing is a form of oppression. In this case, it appears that the opposite is true – that there are times when amplifying the voices of those who have been silenced can be destructive as well, particularly when the amplified voices work to reify divisions that exist between people based on life experiences that have been shaped by social injustice. To be clear, no one within Magdalene is ever forced to speak, either privately or publicly, when they do not want to. Speaking has been normalized as a community practice, however, and there are those who believe that this normalcy should be challenged. Susan, a Magdalene resident, reported that she didn't mind telling her story, but thought that it should be a practice in which everyone engaged, illustrating the problematic nature of who speaks and why in the context of Magdalene. Speaking to me as a volunteer, and one who does not tell my story on a regular basis, Susan said,

...I feel like everybody past the age of 20 has a story. And I just think that we shouldn't be the only ones telling our stories. 'Cause I'd like to hear y'all stories, too. 'Cause I know y'all got some, you know. And some of are good, some of 'em may not be good, you know whatever, but I feel like you all should feel just as...I mean the same way you want us to tell our stories, I feel like you all should feel the same way about telling yours. It shouldn't be such a private thing, you know, because the things that we have been through, some of those things have been crucial to us, you know, and detrimental to our life. And so, I mean, that would make me, myself, that would make me feel a lot more comfortable telling my story if we got to hear some of you all's stories, too. 'Cause I feel like everybody in the world's got a story, past the age of 21, whether it's good or bad.

The challenges of recognition and representation are not new to debates about freedom and justice; however, Magdalene provides a poignant example to illustrate some of the many ethical tensions surrounding who speaks, who listens, and for what purpose. Furthermore, it illustrates the challenges of constructing a “free” self in a world that is full of unjustly distributed restrictions.

### Conclusion

The conversation with Susan that I reported above took place in the context of a focus group, in which I asked a group of Magdalene residents and graduates specifically about their experiences with “telling their story” to public audiences (or to me, a researcher). After Susan’s comment, I asked her, somewhat uncertainly, “Do you want me to tell you ‘my story’?” She nodded, and I said, “Right now?” She and others in the group nodded again. After spending months in the community, interviewing and observing people, I felt as though honoring their request was the appropriate thing to do. I told my story, being careful to include details with which they might connect, details that I thought confirmed Susan’s suspicion that I, too, must have a story – details about addiction and recovery in my own family, details about times when I had felt alone or afraid or cast out, details about times when I had felt loved and valued and included, details about my own experiences with God, details about other events that have come to define me. After what felt like a long and intimate disclosure, I stopped talking. Not leaving any room for silence, Susan said, “That’s it?”

I was not exactly sure how to respond to someone who had just implied that my life story was charmed and boring to the point of being disappointing, so I said, “Well,

it's not selling any Thistle Farms products.” Everyone in the group laughed, and we went on with the rest of the focus group, but the moment had been profound, as had Susan’s words. Based on my experience at Magdalene and in life in general, there is deep and healing truth to the idea that “we’re all broken and we all need each other” – truth to the idea that when a community of people comes together, we all have wounds and scars, as well as strengths and gifts to offer one another, regardless of life experience. On the other hand, there is also truth in recognizing differences. It does not make the world or even the community of Magdalene a more just place if everyone pretends that all the scars and wounds are the same. There is truth in recognizing that I have never spent even one night on the streets, that I have never been thrown over a balcony railing, never been shot, never been beaten, never been abused, and that my family has never been so marginalized that I would need to sell my body to help my mother pay our bills. There is also truth in recognizing that many of the women at Magdalene fight harder every day to stay clean than I have ever fought for anything. The problem, it seems, comes when life experiences and identity narratives define us beyond the ability to move past them, or when they are used to flatten the textures of human experience, in an effort to make them fit categories of “good” and “bad.” Noting this tension, as well as a “next step” for Magdalene, Rich, a volunteer and board member who has been involved with the community since its formation, said,

...they deserve the spotlight, you know, they deserve to stand up and tell the world, "Look at me...I was that way, and I'm now this way." But, you know, I think that that's not the end of their journey. Rita can go and tell that story, but she doesn't tell that story anymore. Her whole life doesn't have to be defined by her recovery, by her prostitution that's now been reversed. I mean, I think if there's a challenge for Magdalene...the women would be women who would no longer have to talk about that...so that you're not defined by the person that was on the street...that you're always going to have an asterisk by your name, that I

am, let's just say, "Rita, recovering prostitute." Why do you even have to have that anymore? Can't you go on and just talk about, "I am Rita, the mother of so and so, and I'm this and I'm that, and I'm that," and I'm not sure we're completely there...but I don't know how you get there...

The challenge of "getting there" is an important one, and one that has serious implications for freedom. As we shall see in the next chapter, the ability to move past experiences with addiction and prostitution is difficult, even for the most "successful" Magdalene graduate. Tremendous physical, psychological, and spiritual healing occurs for many, many women who walk through the Magdalene community, and this healing results in greater freedom to make desired choices, to be one's self, and to participate in relationships that support rather than restrict human flourishing. However, when the women of Magdalene leave the community to seek out life on their own, they often find that their "healed" selves are confronted with unhealed patterns of prejudice, racism, and sexism, deeply rooted in the very fabric of our society. Theories of freedom alert us that these patterns are maintained by institutions, dominant discourse, and paradigmatic invisibilities (such as those that marginalize care) that operate at a systemic level. With this in mind, it is worth exploring the obstacles faced by the women of Magdalene (and communities like it) as they leave the community and journey onward, re-immersed in the communities and systems that often failed to support them.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CHALLENGES OF FREEDOM

According to all four Gospels in the Christian Bible, Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Christ and to tell others about his resurrection from the dead. Magdalene house is named after this iconic woman, Becca says, not because of her association with prostitution (which is more speculation and tradition than a claim for which there is much support) (Carroll, 2009), but because she was the first preacher of the resurrection. Likewise, say members of the Magdalene community, residents, staff, and volunteers who come to Magdalene often experience the healing power of love and community and “stand as a witness to the truth that in the end, love and grace are more powerful than all the forces that drive women to the streets.” (Thistle Farms, 2008) “Love,” of course, is practiced through material provision, necessary services, and the creation of new narratives, in addition to loving relationships. “The forces” responsible for women being on the streets are identified as judgment or apathy on the part of the privileged as well as experiences with abuse and addiction on the part of the residents.

Illustrating this belief, Becca said,

...when we go out there and talk and share things, people are humanized for other people. People that may have been written off in one sense, or judged so harshly in another sense, you know, "They just want to be out there, they just want to do all that..." No. It's a lot more complicated. It's a story of brokenness and a community breaking down. All the stories we hear of the women, we've got families breaking down, school systems breaking down, church systems breaking down, penal systems breaking down. And so it takes a broken community to make sure the women get on the streets, it's going to take that same community to get women off the streets. And so we're out there talking to that same community and reminding them to not be judgmental in how they love people...

Relationships within the Magdalene community demonstrate that the work of “reminding” the community has indeed been successful in many cases. Staff, volunteers and donors tell stories of transformation almost as powerful as the stories of the women coming off the streets. In this chapter, I report stories of transformation as told by residents, graduates, staff, and volunteers. I also explore the limits of these transformations, particularly as women leave the Magdalene community and are faced with new, less supportive environments. Lastly, I link the struggle between transformation and limitation to demonstrate some of the complexities of working towards freedom in a world vastly in need of systemic change.

### Transformation

Of the women I interviewed who had been through the Magdalene program, eight of 14 said, unprompted, that they believed that they would die on the streets, and credit Magdalene for the fact that they are alive today. Relating similar experiences to those described by women in earlier chapters, Rita told me,

I felt like I was going to die on those streets, I wasn't going to be able to see my sons again, I wasn't going to be able to be *whole*, you know, and all I really wanted was to go home and be a mother to my children...the day that I found out that I really couldn't stop (using) without help it scared me to death, and I started to believe the lie that I was going to die on those streets...that if a trick didn't kill me, then I would probably hit a piece of dope and blow my heart up or something...

But, Rita says, “thanks to God and to Magdalene,” she didn’t die. She got off the streets, got clean, and now helps other women in their recovery from addiction.

Describing how she began to “talk to God” and find her way off the streets, Rita said,

...I prayed, and I asked God to please help me, if he was real, you know, it's like, I hadn't ever experienced him really, and I started out praying, but then I ended up cussing God out. And it was just like, "You mother fucker, you're sittin' up there on your high throne," but, now, let me say, I'm not trying to justify it, but I had a crack pipe in my hand, and I was hittin' the crack pipe and cussin' God, I was hittin' my crack pipe and I was cussin' God, and I was like "*Do something!*" And He did.

Rita's journey toward recovery started with prayer, and when she tells her story, images of transformation encompass both the growing importance of God in her life, and her own experiences of conquering addiction and escaping death on the streets. Other women who survived on the streets by stealing and exacting violence on others report that freedom from addiction allows them to "be somebody different today." As the women tell it, "somebody different" means being honest, trustworthy, and responsible – doing things of which they are proud. Gloria told me that one of the biggest changes in her life since she's been in Magdalene is that she has stopped stealing, even though it is sometimes still a battle of conscience:

I've been out there on the street for damn near 45 years, and this is all I know. I got that street mentality - the lying, the stealing, everything, the manipulation, all of that. Before, I called myself one of the best boosters there was. I ain't boost out of no bag - I wore a girdle. And I came back like I had a big bag, you know what I'm saying? I would go into them stores and take people's stuff like it was mine. I paid my way, and I don't know how many others way. Everyday. (But) I'm able to recognize today. I don't go into a store and don't pick up nothin' - ain't nothin' but \$0.05, I'm going to pay for it. I'm able to be honest today - I don't care how bad it hurt.

Without a doubt, the changes that the women make after they get clean are substantial and hard fought. Nearly every woman who comes to work at Thistle Farms talks about what a difference it is for her to get up in the morning and "do something good." I have been at Thistle Farms and seen a woman cry because she got her first paycheck in 25 years. I have seen a woman dance around the room the morning after a home party



because she had \$900 in cash from product sales, and managed to keep the money all night “without stealing a dime.” I have watched women learn to forgive themselves for neglecting their children, shooting their partners, and abusing their own bodies. I have seen the women extend forgiveness to those who hurt them. I have seen women begin to live out of courage and hope instead of shame and fear. Describing the transformation that took place in her life once she came to Magdalene, Krista said,

I just wanted somebody to finally hear me. And Magdalene finally heard me...And I found out that I wasn't alone. That was the most important thing for me, because all my life, I thought I was alone...once I found out that I wasn't alone, that I didn't have to walk through the pain by myself, it got easier. I started dealing with the molestation, I started dealing with the abandonment, I started facing my fears...I was able to go back at 60 days clean, back to Columbia, and when the guy that molested me...I was face to face with him, and I asked him why he took my childhood from me, the only thing he could say was, "I'll pay you this time." I couldn't run. And I wanted to. I wanted to go to get high. I wanted to numb them feelings that I was feeling, but I knew that I had to forgive him. I knew that he didn't know what he had done to me. And the day that I forgave him, my process started, because I had to look back at all the things that I had done to my kids, to the people that loved me, and if God can forgive me, why I can't forgive him? And by me forgiving him, I was able to forgive myself. And I was able to move on, you know? It hasn't been an easy journey, but this journey is better than the journey that I lived. I wouldn't give this journey up for nothing in the world.

Staff and volunteer accounts of transformation are often more metaphorical than those of residents and graduates, however, the experiences are no less sincere. Linda, a full-time volunteer who works at Thistle Farms, told me that Magdalene has helped her see the many things in her life that she had taken for granted, and talked about how her experiences in the community have helped pave the way for a life filled with gratitude. She went on to say, “...many of us wouldn't be living the lives that we are living if it wasn't for Magdalene. And it has given me...it has given my life a new perspective...I feel like I'm fulfilling a purpose.” Andrea, a woman who was once a staff member at

Thistle Farms told me about a specific instance in which the Magdalene community helped her to see her own prejudices.

...one of the moments that really stands out for me is one of the first times I took a group to a bank...there was gonna be a holiday party...so this was probably like around Christmas when I had started working in September, and we were gonna have, you know, not really a home party, but we were going to set up and sell in this bank. And after we were done, there were three women, and we were all packed in my car, and we started driving, and all three of those women pulled out their cell phones and called their children. And I remember being surprised by that, and then feeling sort of a little bit chagrined, but because I hadn't seen them with their children, I hadn't thought of them in terms of being mothers. And that was an expansion of my idea of a prostitute or a drug addict...and it was sort of like, "Oh, and they have children." And the fact that they were asking their kids about their homework, really struck me.

Other volunteers describe similar experiences, and usually describe them in terms of personal reformation. However, recent scholarship alerts us that when people come together who would typically not otherwise encounter one another, these relationships provide fertile ground for the beginnings of political transformation as well (Bowden, 2006). During my time at Magdalene, I have seen people from all walks of life come together, relate to one another, and work towards common purposes. I have seen a woman who lives in the same neighborhood as Al and Tipper Gore learn to make candles from a woman whose “inconvenient truth” is that she once turned a trick to pay her electric bill. While Magdalene is certainly not immune to the invisibility of privilege that exists throughout the world, it provides a context in which relationships and experiences like these can occur – relationships and experiences that have the *potential* to uncover privilege and challenge oppression.

There are times when, through such relationships and connections, the women of Magdalene are able to take part in conversations that they never envisioned. For example, Mindy met with Karl Dean, the mayor of Nashville, to talk about the City

providing Thistle Farms with an abandoned building so that the company could relocate to a larger and much needed space. While sitting in Mayor Dean's office, high up in a government building in downtown Nashville, Mindy looked out the window and saw a run-down motel to which she used to go with "dates." Mindy talked about the experience as being "surreal" and noted that she felt it was representative of how far she has come over the past 3 years. Tellingly, she seemed undaunted by the semi-celebrity status that has been afforded to her as a result of her connections with Magdalene, nor did she appear particularly impressed that in one moment, she could see and claim authority of experience in two places that most Nashvillians will never encounter – turning a trick in a seedy motel and sitting in Karl Dean's office. Mindy's experiences allow her to speak to issues of freedom and justice in a way that goes beyond conventional understandings, and she sees advocacy for these issues as part of the responsibility of her "resurrection." The challenge of bridging lives and experiences as different as those lived by Mindy requires a systems-level look at the larger problems that surround the lives of women leaving recovery.

#### Beyond the Magdalene Community: Barriers to Living Free

The systems change to which many of us aspire must certainly take place at the level of community and interpersonal relationships as well as the level of institutions (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). In the same way that many policy changes never reach intended communities, however, changes that occur within the community often do not reach larger systems and social structures. Much like the gospel accounts of Mary Magdalene, women who preach resurrection are often met with doubt and skepticism

from those who are outside the Magdalene community. Furthermore, they often find that the exercise of a “reformed” self is made difficult by the “unreformed” world they reenter (Snarr, 2007). Although audiences who gather to hear the women tell their stories are almost always receptive and appreciative, when it comes to family members, landlords, and potential employers, prior relationships and criminal histories often speak louder than claims of reform. Sadly, when it is time for women to leave Magdalene, the freedom that they have worked so hard to accomplish is confronted by other communities and systems that are not designed to acknowledge (or alleviate) their struggle (Kelly, 2006; Snarr, 2007). Among other things, this makes the challenges of staying clean, securing housing, and finding employment all the more profound.

### *Staying Clean*

When women begin to transition out of Magdalene, staying “clean” is of utmost importance to them, as well as to the staff. Natalie, who lives in Magdalene’s transition house, but is preparing to live on her own sometime within the next few months describes her experience of leaving the program, saying,

Being out of the program and kind of being on my own, I can say that it’s not easy to stay clean, but it’s not hard either, because I know what I want. I know that I don’t want to be in that lifestyle anymore. But I do have to do the work...you know, I go to meetings and, you know I try to keep myself surrounded with the women. And I try to keep myself around people who don’t do drugs and aren’t in that lifestyle. And that makes it pretty easy for me...to stay clean...I am scared about when I get my own place and stuff and I won’t be around the women as much as I have been...you know, it does make me nervous, but like I said, I know what I want. I know I don’t want to use, and I know what I have to do to stay clean. As long as I continue to take those steps, I have a bright future.

Connection to the community and to other people in recovery is a tested strategy for staying clean (Gossop, Steward, Marsden, 2007), as is maintaining goals for the future.

For the women in the program with young children, regaining custody is often their most motivating goal. When I asked Natalie what she wanted for herself in the future, she said,

I would have custody back of my son, um, I would have a nice place to live, um, you know, somewhere safe and secure for me and him, and really, just kind of doing the same thing I'm doing. I like working for Thistle Farms. I can't say that I'm gonna stay there forever, 'cause I don't know, but I would say I'll be working for Thistle Farms, and being able to provide for me and my son. That would be a dream come true for me.

It would seem that dreams as simple as having a safe place to live, an enjoyable place to work, and a healthy relationship with one's child would be easy to come by - such desires reflect human capabilities at their most basic level (Nussbaum, 2000). Reality, however, is not always simple, particularly for women leaving Magdalene. Often times, two years is not long enough to heal from a lifetime of abuse and the trauma of living on the streets. For others, poor work histories and criminal records that accumulated while they were in active addiction are difficult to escape, despite adequate job skills and positive recommendations. Contrasting the prospects of women leaving Magdalene with those of others who have enjoyed somewhat different backgrounds, a Magdalene staff member said,

...and I do think it has a lot to do with socio-economic status...(people who) are from middle, upper-income background that are addicted, and they can get into recovery, they get clean, and because they have some of that other support in their life, you know whatever, they can go on and live fairly stable lives.....getting the women (at Magdalene) clean from alcohol and drug use doesn't necessarily prevent them from relapsing and it surely doesn't guarantee that they aren't going to continue to have a good bit of trouble in life...

This staff member's assessment of the socio-economic factors contributing to maintaining sobriety is indicative of the interlocking nature of injustice (and unfreedom) (Farmer, 1999; Snarr, 2007). It also illustrates, once again, the variability of consequences for those who experience addiction (Roberts, 2000).

### *Finding Employment*

Perhaps because I spend so much time at Thistle Farms, and many of the women who work there aspire to move on to new and different jobs, the challenge of “finding a job” seems to be a constant struggle. There are some women for whom full-time, outside employment is unlikely because of severe mental illness or learning disabilities that impair their aptitude for basic, job-related practices. For these women, Magdalene and Thistle Farms have agreed to continue to provide employment indefinitely, even though this arrangement proves to be a challenging for Thistle Farms as a fledgling company. Describing why providing employment is important for women like Jenny, who cannot get outside employment, Becca said,

...you're talking about women who cannot get hired at *Goodwill*. Goodwill will not hire Jenny, or will not work with her for whatever reasons. And it's like, that does something to your heart...Jenny's sick, and you know, she will never be completely well, some of the stuff she's dealing with, but because she gets money for coming into work, and being there at this company, I think that gives her a big gift of freedom, and pride and all kinds of stuff.

According to Becca, the importance of holding a job, showing up for work, and contributing to something about which one feels proud, goes beyond financial provision. Continued employment for women who would not otherwise be employed allows them to stay connected to the Magdalene community, and feel as though there is a place in which they belong and are wanted and needed. Financial provision is important however; indeed, the long-term plan for Thistle Farms is that it will grow large enough to employ all Magdalene residents and graduates who desire employment, and provide them with a living wage and health benefits. At the present time, however, Thistle Farms offers only part-time employment, and does not provide health benefits. For the women who work at Thistle Farms and still live at Magdalene, earning roughly \$100/week for 15 hours of

work is certainly a viable income because their expenses are minimal, and typically include purchases such as cigarettes and other non-essential personal items. Additionally, the Thistle Farms director and members of the managing council work diligently to find ways to employ Magdalene graduates, and pay them enough to support their needs. Most graduates who work at Thistle Farms earn approximately \$10/hour, work 20 hours/week, and receive Medicaid and other government subsidies such as food stamps. This combination of wages and subsidies is typically “enough” for graduates who receive other support such as disability, or who are married or live with employed partners. For other graduates, however, finding employment apart from or in addition to Thistle Farms is necessary.

Finding outside employment proves to be a difficult task for many women at Magdalene. Natalie, a Magdalene graduate who has a high school diploma and excellent work skills, recently began looking for work to subsidize her part-time job as the office manager at Thistle Farms. Before coming to Magdalene, Natalie spent 6 months on the streets (a time period considerably smaller than most Magdalene residents and graduates), during which time she acquired several misdemeanor charges: indecent exposure, theft of gasoline, possession of cocaine, soliciting prostitution, and assault. Although Natalie has been clean, housed, employed, and violation free for 3 years, she was turned down from most jobs to which she applied. During one particularly embarrassing incident, Natalie was hired to work at McDonald’s and then fired in the middle of employee training. On her first day of work, she was sitting with other trainees in the back room, watching a video about food preparation, when the manager came in and pulled her aside. Apparently, the manager had not run her background check, as was required during the

hiring process, and ran it instead while she was completing her training. Once he saw her record, he realized his “mistake” according to McDonald’s policy, and worked quickly to undo it. He abruptly handed Natalie a print out of her record, said, “You can’t work here,” and pushed her towards the door.

Natalie did eventually find a job at Moe’s Southwest Burrito, and works there part time in addition to Thistle Farms. When I asked the women I interviewed what they wanted to do once they got back on their feet, their aspirations were varied: Mattie wanted to go to hair school and become a beautician, Samantha wanted to start her own in-home cooking business, Mary was interested in working with computers, and Paula is currently enrolled in college classes to get her prerequisites for nursing school. Paula’s road to nursing school has not been easy: She came to Magdalene with prior student loan debt and thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes. Her first year in Magdalene, everything she earned at Thistle Farms went to pay her creditors, and Magdalene matched her efforts. Becca described the philosophy behind the matched savings program, saying that it was designed to free people of debt, so that they don’t have to go out into the world fighting an uphill battle:

...the other thing that I think is a huge gift of freedom is to not be burdened by huge debt. So the reason that we started the IDA accounts and to match the women's money they save was so, of you're saving \$1000, if takes you forever, but the incentive should double it, and that means that if you can put \$2000 down on a car, that one car, that starter car, is not going to strap you in for 5 years and that you never get ahead. I mean part of the thing of poverty is that you never get ahead, so you're always pushing from behind. And there is no freedom in doing that. So my thing is that if you stay for two years and you really save and we double your savings or whatever, that you can make a dent and get ahead a little bit.

This strategy worked for Paula, who was able to start attending classes at the local community college during her second year in Magdalene. At the time of my research,



Paula was working part time at Thistle Farms, attending classes, and living in a house given to her by a member of her church. Describing her long-term goals, Paula said,

...what I really want to do with this degree is to do some home health care for the elderly because I realize that not only are there problems with homeless people and the drug addicted and the mentally ill, there also are problems with the elderly. And that's my goal right now. So...I'm 53, and I probably won't graduate from school until I am 57 (laughs). But I determined to do this, and I'm determined to do the best that I can. Last semester was a bit of a challenge - I ended up with Cs in both classes, but I didn't have the availability, the access (to a computer)...but now I have my own computer, my own printer, I'm on-line, and that's huge. Because I spent a tremendous amount of time in the library last semester, and, you know, where now I can get way ahead of myself like on all of my papers, and save them and come back to them, and so now I've got stuff ready that's not even due until April.

Each of the freedom theorists, as well as the women at Magdalene, implies that an important component of freedom is the ability to work in a job that is safe, fulfilling, and justly compensated. The stories of Paula, Natalie and others like them demonstrate that finding such employment is often the exception instead of the rule, especially for people who fall on the wrong end of certain raced, classed, and gendered hierarchies (Hartmann, 2003; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). Furthermore, their experiences highlight many of the mechanisms (both formal and informal) that work to keep people marginalized, regardless of skill, ability, or special circumstance (Farmer, 1999; James, Johnson, Raghavan, & Lemos, 2003; Kelly, 2006). For many people at Magdalene and elsewhere, the freedom to work and work with dignity is undermined by an economic system in which employees are valued as little more than a cog in a machine (Folbre, Bergmann, Agarwal, & Floro, 1992). Thistle Farms' commitment to providing employment to women from Magdalene regardless of skill or ability posits a radically different economic form. Similar organizations, such as Grayston Bakeries in Yonkers, New York, whose mission statement reads, "We don't hire people to bake brownies, we bake brownies to

hire people,” demonstrate that alternative economic forms are possible (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Still, the challenges of Thistle Farms to stay financially solvent and continue to employ the women for whom it exists requires a tremendous balancing act in which Becca, Holli (Thistle Farms’ director), and the Thistle Farms council must try to integrate non-capitalist commitments with a capitalist market.

For the most part, women who leave Magdalene and find employment remain working poor. Many continue to work in highly gendered professions, such as professional caregiving and housekeeping, which tend to be less secure as well as disproportionately underpaid (Estévez-Abe, 2006).<sup>14</sup> Along with many other Nashville residents who earn below a living wage, maintaining basic essentials for living such as housing, utilities, transportation, food and health care is difficult, if not impossible (Snarr & Faires, 2008). Additionally, the stress of living such an economically marginal existence can be threatening to the mental and physical health of women fighting to recover (Kasper, Ensminger, Green, & Fothergill, 2008). In these cases, women sometimes talk about the temptation to return to selling drugs because it was a lucrative and easy practice, not to mention a status that was revered on the streets. Interestingly, in my two years at Magdalene, I have never heard a woman say she was tempted to return to prostitution, even though, according to several feminist theorists, there are many similarities between prostitution and other forms of work that is gendered, low-paying, and/or physically demanding (Chapkis, 1997; Nagle, 1997, Nussbaum, 2000).

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<sup>14</sup> These jobs are, of course, essential to a functioning society in which there are people and places that require care. The argument of import at this juncture is not so much whether these jobs should be marginalized (I believe that they should not), but rather that they *are*.

## *Securing Housing*

The challenge of finding safe and affordable housing upon leaving Magdalene is paramount to maintaining recovery, and the stress of finding such housing is palatable among women who are reaching the end of their two years in the program. As it has grown over the past 10 years, Magdalene has been able to invest in the transition processes of many of its graduates by providing a transition house, and by helping two graduates purchase their own homes. The transition home houses three graduates at a time, and each woman pays \$100/month for rent, plus one third of the utilities. Ideally, a woman lives in the transition home for a year, during which time she establishes better credit, gets to practice budgeting money, and has the opportunity to continue to save in order to be on her own. In the two years that the transition home has been opened, 5 women have lived there, some for only a few months, and some for longer than a year. Mindy and Stacia, the two graduates who were able to purchase their own homes with the help of Magdalene, did so through a federal buy-down grant that allowed Magdalene to co-sign on the mortgages and enabled the women to build their own houses at much lower cost than the market value. The security and accomplishment of owning one's own, affordable home is a source of great pride for Mindy and Stacia, as well as the entire Magdalene community.

There is high hope in the community that similar opportunities will be afforded to other graduates, however, Mindy and Stacia were “best case scenarios” – neither of them had felonies on their records, both were employed in stable jobs, and both have long-term partners that are able to help with mortgage and utility expenses. For women who have more extensive criminal records, or are on their own financially, finding a place to live

often seems a near impossibility. Michelle, a graduate who has been clean, steadily employed, and violation-free for 8 years, recently divorced her husband and began looking for an apartment for her and her 15-year old daughter. Michelle's experience with apartment hunting has not been unlike Natalie's experience with job searching. At one place she applied, the apartment complex manager refused to rent her an apartment after viewing her background check, and told her she was never allowed to return to the premises. Michelle admits that her record is "impressive," but also asked, "but haven't I proven otherwise?" To date, Michelle is still apartment searching, and says she feels like her options are limited – the places that she can afford and that will take her with her record are not places in which she wants to live or raise her daughter.

Again the experiences of Michelle and other women like her have more to tell us than the stories of individual suffering and frustration. Difficulty in securing safe and affordable housing is indicative of larger trends in the Nashville housing market. According to the Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA, 2009), the hourly wage needed to buy a house at the median home price for Davidson County in 2008 was \$25.26, and for the state of Tennessee was \$21.17. The hourly wage needed to rent a two-bedroom apartment at the median rental price in 2008 was \$11.61 in Davidson County, and \$12.38 for the state of Tennessee over all. With a minimum wage of \$6.55, these prices mean that many people who work fulltime jobs are unable to rent or buy an apartment or house at the median price. While there are, of course, houses and apartments that sell and rent for lower rates, it is often the case these housing options are accompanied by decreased access to neighborhood resources (Kuno & Rothbard, 2005) poorly performing schools, and higher crime (Galster & Santiago, 2006). Women who

cannot secure or maintain housing often end up living with siblings, cousins or partners. While this is sometimes a good option, it often leads to women living in environments that they have neither the power to control nor the resources to exit.

### Conclusion

Despite the stories of continued struggle, I feel it necessary to reiterate that women who come through Magdalene and are able to get clean, access necessary services, create healthy identities, and experience positive relationships will be the first to insist that their lives today are better and freer than they were before. According to the women, living in an apartment or with relatives is better than living on the streets any day, and earning money at Moe's Southwest Burrito is a tremendous victory compared to turning tricks on Dickerson Road. Furthermore, staff and volunteers who work with Magdalene describe the freedom they experience from being in a community that allows them to examine their own prejudices and brokenness and seek healing through loving relationships. Residents, graduates, staff and volunteers alike talk about the freedom that is made possible by Magdalene being a community that is committed to truth-telling and acceptance. Still, this chapter seems to demonstrate that there is more work to be done, and that the changes made within the community are only lasting to the extent that other, healthy communities and systems are developed (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

In the introduction to my dissertation, I proposed that feminist theories often overlook the important role of community in providing contexts for realizing and mediating the systemic changes necessary to promote freedom. The research I conducted within the Magdalene community explored the role that one specific community plays in

supporting freedom for a population of women whose freedom is often restricted. Magdalene works to mediate otherwise oppressive social, economic, and legal structures to provide women with an environment that supports and encourages freedom and well-being. Furthermore, the centrality of relationships to the process of healing and journey towards freedom seems to indicate that even if perfect structures and systems existed, community would remain essential to the practice of freedom. My research revealed that the women at Magdalene have very specific notions about what freedom means and what it does not. Based on my interviews and observations, Magdalene residents and graduates were better able to articulate their beliefs and definitions of freedom than were most staff members and volunteers. This phenomenon is in line with theorists of many different disciplinary persuasions who claim that persons who experience the absence or diminishment of freedom (or justice, or equality, or well-being) are best positioned to speak to its content. It seems, then, that a valuable “way forward” for Magdalene is a strategy for affecting systemic change even as it continues to work towards individual transformation. In light of the conceptualizations of freedom represented by Sen, Nussbaum, Hirschmann, and the care theorists, as well as the many complexities presented by a deep exploration of the lives and stories of the women at Magdalene, what would such a strategy look like? How can communities affect systemic change to enhance freedom? What are the challenges to affecting systemic change while providing the individual attention and relationships required by the work of rehabilitation and recovery?

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

I began my dissertation with the story of Tam, a Magdalene woman who is now in recovery. Throughout this project, I have worked to explore understandings and concepts of freedom in the lives of women who are leaving prostitution and recovering from addiction. In many ways, their stories and experiences are concomitant with feminist theories of freedom emphasizing capabilities, discourse, and relationships of care. While these theories are somewhat at odds with each other, and certainly consider themselves “correctives” rather than strands of the same cord, I have found each of the theories to be useful in exploring various aspects of freedom and unfreedom described by the women I interviewed. By working in conversation with these theories, I have also discovered ways in which the theories could be stronger, and ways that these theories could be applied to inform more freedom-enhancing practices for Magdalene and similar organizations.

In this chapter, I offer a brief summary of my findings as presented in previous chapters, emphasizing the necessary role of community in supporting freedom. I then call upon theories of change from the fields of critical and community psychology to illustrate ways in which the Magdalene community might work to affect the broader, systemic issues and inequalities that affect its members. Lastly, I discuss an important way in which the feminist theorists and Magdalene offer a challenge to the theories of community psychology, and propose an alternative understanding.

## Summary of Findings

By studying the Magdalene community as a mechanism through which to explore and understand feminist theories of freedom, I was able to provide a specific example of the ways in which “freedom” is understood and exercised in the lives of real women. Similarly, examining these theories in the context of community allowed me to see the ways in which community itself works to inhibit or promote the goals of freedom. Through my research, I demonstrated that the Magdalene community was a powerful force in providing freedom and justice to women who had otherwise been marginalized and oppressed. The community worked to do this through providing freedom-enhancing contexts and working to recreate narratives of identity that informed the women’s concepts of self. Problems of community also allow us to examine the limits of community (or possibility for community to do more).

### *Contexts of Freedom*

The contexts of freedom and unfreedom as described by my participants illustrated that supporting freedom requires myriad components, not the least of which are material provision, protection of bodily integrity, and healthy relationships with caregivers. When these components are lacking, freedom of opportunity and choice to realize human development and a life deemed “worth living” is difficult to accomplish. Furthermore, the deep connections between self and environment provide a mechanism through which unsupportive contexts can create selves whose bondage is experienced and carried internally. Although the feminist theorists I used conceive of freedom-supporting contexts as those that exist and are maintained at the level of social, economic, and



political systems, my work at Magdalene demonstrated that communities play a central role in shaping the contexts of freedom. In some cases, “community” proved to be detrimental to individual freedom, particularly when the community itself was marginalized or oppressed. In other cases, “community” served to mediate systemic injustices by providing access to material resources, physical safety, psychological respite, and healthy relationships. In these cases, community worked in the service of liberation and well-being.

### *Selves of Freedom*

Due to the confluence of self and environment, supporting freedom for women who have lived through experiences of oppression and domination (whether at the hands of specific people or due to broader social injustices or both) often requires “inside work” in addition to the provision of freedom-enhancing contexts. The work of healing the self and restor(y)ing identity relies, in many ways, upon the creation of new narratives in the context of safe relationships and loving community. Narratives generated in, by, and through the community work to mediate and adapt hegemonic discourses and reform old concepts of the self. By working at the level of community to develop these narratives, the women of Magdalene are able to construct identities and meanings that are shared, yet still personal and particular. The creation of these new selves, capable of freedom and right living, was an essential component of freedom.

### *Challenges of Freedom*

The experiences of women leaving Magdalene demonstrate the strength of community in mediating oppressive environments and providing a context in which to heal the self. They also demonstrate the limits of community to accomplish these purposes when broader economic, social, and cultural systems go unreformed. The Magdalene community is impressive in its ability to create a beautiful, safe, and supportive environment for its residents. Furthermore, the residents' abilities to recover a free and healthy self speak to the strength and resilience of the human spirit. However, the challenges faced by women leaving Magdalene indicate that there is much work to be done to ensure that free and healthy selves are enabled to continue. The challenge remains, then, to discover a way in which communities (such as Magdalene) can work to support individual recovery and freedom, while also challenging the social, economic, and political systems that make continued freedom difficult.

### Answering the Guiding Questions

Although my original research questions proved not to be the most accurate or effective framework through which to interpret or report my findings, they did not go unanswered. My interviews taught me much about the ways in which women in the Magdalene community understand freedom, and the ways in which material resources, narratives, and relationships work to support and inhibit the practice of freedom.

### *How Do the Women in the Community Understand "Freedom"?*

Unsurprisingly, the women I interviewed offered varied and multiple definitions of freedom. Across the board, residents, graduates, staff, and volunteers connected

freedom to participation in a community in which they were loved and accepted as they were, “warts and all.” Freedom also meant recovering from addiction, living in environments that were structured and safe, and having the resources, materially and relationally, to accomplish positive personal goals. Freedom was intimately related to spiritual beliefs, practices, and experiences, particularly those that offered meaning and direction.

*How Does the Community Mediate the Material Conditions that Support and/or Inhibit the Women’s Freedom?*

Most of the women who enter the Magdalene program grew up in homes and/or communities in which material poverty was part of the equation. Furthermore, nearly every woman had very little in terms of economic means by the time she reached Magdalene, typically via prison or the streets. Through grant writing, fundraising, and receiving in-kind donations (including hundred of hours worth of volunteer activity each month), Magdalene provided its residents with housing, clothing, food, health and mental health services, job training, education and employment. The provision of these resources provided women with many of the basic capabilities described by Nussbaum (2001), and allowed them to make choices toward human flourishing that they otherwise would have been denied. The provision of material resources allows women to live with dignity, in good (or at least better) health, and forms an environment in which they have the space and time to heal.

*How Does the Community Generate and Mediate Narratives that Support and/or Inhibit the Women’s Freedom?*

Within the Magdalene community narratives were created and used as a resource through which to re-story the self. Narratives are generated through story telling and other, more formal practices, such as 12-step meetings, community meditations, and public events. The narratives of Magdalene establish a community culture in which each individual is valuable and necessary, honesty and forgiveness is essential, and personhood and community is an on-going journey. These narratives are freeing in the sense that they allow women to create new, positive identities that combat the destructive and demeaning identities they developed on the streets. To the extent that the narratives of the Magdalene community include a limited range of possibilities (as do the narratives of all communities), they can also be restrictive to those who wish to develop identities outside of or contradictory with community norms.

*How Does the Community Influence Relationships that Support and/or Inhibit the Women's Freedom?*

Relationships are the foundation of the Magdalene community, and, I propose, the foundation of freedom as well. Relationships among residents, graduates, staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners, not to mention friends, family members, and significant others, are the mechanisms through which material resources and community narratives flow. Furthermore, the norms of the community offer unwritten and informal guidelines by which to form relationships that are healthy and safe relationships, as opposed to manipulative and abusive. For residents and graduates, positive relationships are often the motivation for getting clean, and participating in the difficult struggle towards recovery. For staff, volunteers, and donors, fulfilling relationships serve as a

positive reward in exchange for hard work, money, and time. Relationships serve as both means and an end of the journey towards freedom.

### Implications for Theory

Community psychology is a field that offers insights about the role of community in human development as well as the possibilities of community to bring about systemic change. Such an approach values individual human development, but sees the need for broad, systemic change if such development is to be positive and sustainable. Community psychology originated out of the experiences of researchers, scholars and practitioners who saw that individual “pathology” was, in reality, often the result of social injustice (Prilleltensky, 2002). As a result, they believed that the best way to understand and address individual issues was through the lens of social change and political action, rather than individual treatment. Describing his commitment to critical community psychology, Prilleltensky (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002) writes,

I was determined to practice a psychology that would not blame victims, that would not be divorced from social issues, and that would listen to people’s concerns, in all their complexities. I have been searching for theories and practices that show the intricate connections between psychology, power, oppression, and domination (p.1).

Community psychologists often differentiate between “ameliorative change” and “transformative change,” where ameliorative change works largely to teach individuals to function within current economic, social, and political systems, and transformative change works to change oppressive systems of injustice with the belief that individual-level change will follow (Bess, Prilleltensky, Perkins, & Collins, 2009). To provide an

example, ameliorative change would be change in which women are taught job skills in order to climb the economic ladder. No one debates that this is a positive change for the women involved. However, there is also no answer for the women who are unable to work themselves up the economic ladder, no answer for the millions of persons working minimum wage jobs, and no answer for how those jobs are going to be accomplished in the event that everyone “works up.” A transformative change, then, would be one in which women are allowed to acquire job skills should they so desire them, but also that wage structures and employment scenarios are altered in order to provide a living wage and benefits to all workers, regardless of type of work.

Changes such as these are changes that are recommended by the freedom theorists, who argue for social institutions that support human capabilities for all (Nussbaum, 2000), the recreation of social and political structure through liberating discourse (Hirschmann, 2003), and the centering of care as a vital human activity, worthy of political and economic recognition (Kittay, 2000; Tronto, 1993). These transformations do not happen without a politically engaged public, however, and political sensibilities develop at the level of relationships and collectivities (Eliason, 1998; Rochon, 2000). For this reason, communities and community organizations are prime mechanisms through which to develop individual participation, political aptitude, and critical consciousness that are then used collectively to bring about social change. According to Bess, et al. (2009), local communities and community organizations have the potential to work towards the goals of “seeking to challenge existing power hierarchies, privileging local knowledge, building on the strengths and gifts each member brings to the table...” (p.12).

In many ways, the narratives of the Magdalene community demonstrate a similar commitment, locating the individual “problems” experienced by community members in broader social systems and raced, classed and gendered hierarchies. Furthermore, much of the outward-focused activity of Magdalene is oriented towards addressing the injustices that were suffered by the women at Magdalene. For example, the Magdalene community sees Thistle Farms as an opportunity to speak to a broader audience about the results of addiction and violence against women. When Becca or women from Thistle Farms speak in public, they always talk about the many systems that have failed in order for people to end up on the streets. “Treatment” within the Magdalene community entails redistributing material resources, re-storying individual and collective identities, and restoring relationships in addition to providing clinical treatment for addiction and mental illness. Recently, a Nashville woman who knew several people in the Magdalene community was picked up by a truck, taken to a field, raped, shot twice (once with the gun placed in her vagina), and left to die. In the wake of this horrific occurrence, there was a flurry of activity within the community to find a way to support this woman in her recovery (she did not die, but now has several serious and long-term disabilities). There was also a tremendous amount of discussion about the fact that this is a distinctly gendered crime, and further prevention lies not in treating individuals but in changing social beliefs that make it “okay” to do violence to women’s bodies. There was also a keen awareness that the woman’s assault went completely unnoticed by local media and law enforcement, a situation that would surely not be the case if the woman had been, say, a Vanderbilt graduate student or a well-known Episcopal priest, rather than an addicted woman living on the streets. Still, the difficulties experienced by women who

leave the Magdalene community (not to mention the fact that such a community is necessary in the first place) alert us that there is more work to be done.

Magdalene is, of course, well-positioned to advocate for larger structural change that would influence the social and institutional systems that created the necessity of its existence, and in many ways, it does. Becca, and the women who speak on behalf of Magdalene, see their work as work of activism with the potential for personal, community and social transformation. Furthermore, the personal connections between the donors who support Magdalene and the people who benefit from their support open the possibility for dialogue about the realities of poverty, the consequences of addiction, and the experience of prostitution. Often, however, the stories of the women at Magdalene are told or interpreted as stories of personal triumph as opposed to social criticism. Among other things, this conflict reveals the ways in which freedom-supporting narratives of the self can work at cross-purposes with the establishment of contexts that support freedom. Although there are a number of examples that could illustrate this claim, the widespread nature of 12-step ideology in communities throughout the world (Makela, 1996) provides a poignant example of this conflict.

From its inception, the 12-step model of recovery was designed to be voluntary, non-hierarchical, and to have a fluid membership (Makela, 1996). The role of a “sponsor” ensures individual accountability and attention (if a person so desires), though the program is largely self-directed. In the 12-step tradition, people are allowed the space and time to work on themselves in the context of a supportive community (SAMHSA, 2006). According to Jordan, a Magdalene resident, she feels empowered by the community of Narcotics Anonymous, because they focus on similarities rather than



differences within the community. She gave me an example, saying, “Like, if we were both in an NA meeting, we would focus on what is the same about our lives and our disease, rather than what’s different.” From this perspective, experiences with addiction serve to level the playing field and create possibilities for recovery through noticing commonalities. For this reason, most people in the Magdalene community were supportive of the 12-step model of recovery, and, in my experience, this model is effective for many people. I also noticed, however, that there are aspects about 12-step discourse that seem to prevent people (residents, graduates, staff, and volunteers alike) from constructing broader arguments that promote a consciousness about addiction and corollary experiences as a social problem that varies across social position.

The conflict with the 12-step model and accompanying recovery narratives lies in the overtly individualistic focus, specifically when it comes to responsibility for addiction and recovery. Within this tradition, addiction is conceptualized as a “disease,” and can only be healed if the individual recognizes his or her “powerlessness” over addiction and follows appropriate steps towards recovery. For many women at Magdalene, this type of narrative is an important counter to what they have heard their entire lives – that they are addicts because they have a moral deficiency, a weakness of character, or pathological tendencies. The disease narrative allows them (and thousands of others) to understand their struggle with addiction as “sickness,” instead of “evil.” We live in a culture that tolerates illness of body better than defects of character (Hinshaw & Cicchetti, 2000), and is more comfortable with individual problems than societal complicity (McKnight, 1995), and this is reflected in 12-step narratives. While relationships are certainly important to the 12-step process – healthy relationships are seen to improve the chances of recovery,

and unhealthy relationships are thought to jeopardize it – the internal focus often works to preclude any type of larger, systems-level critique. For example, the fact that volunteers who suffered from addiction ended up in rehabilitation facilities whereas residents ended up in jail, prison or on the streets is never addressed by most. Although (almost) all the members of the community were women, and the cause of prostitution was located in patriarchy, there was little discussion (beyond drug use) about how patriarchy could result in prostitution for some women and feminist academic study for others. If the lessons of Magdalene, community psychology, and feminist social theory are true, however, responsibility for supporting freedom (including freedom from addiction and prostitution) lies with families, communities, and economic, social, and cultural systems, as well as with individuals.

Despite decade's worth of admonition on the part of community psychologists that social service agencies and practitioners must work for social change if they are truly interested in the well-being of their clients, such agencies and other structures of rehabilitation (such as recovery programs, public education campaigns, and the justice system, just to name a few) continue to be primarily individual-focused (Heflinger & Christens, 2006; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). This is most often attributed to the pervasive “Western” and/or “American” ideology that purports individual responsibility, self-determination, and personal independence as the highest achievement of the developed self (Bess, Prilleltensky, Perkins & Collins, 2009; Blazer, 1998; McKnight, 1995). By virtue of these values, the self is understood divorced from the systems and relationships that influence and support its existence. Critical and community psychologists criticize this view of the self, as well as American service systems for

integrating these values into the treatment of their clients, thereby reifying the very structures that created need for services in the first place (McKnight, 1995; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). Community psychologists prefer instead an understanding of the self as one that is embedded in other “layers” of environment: interpersonal relationships, family, community, government structures, etc. (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002), and view proper intervention as one that affects multiple levels versus solely the individual level.

While this concept makes for a strong and well-organized framework through which to address individual problems, my research at Magdalene as well as the work of Nancy Hirschmann (2003) seems to suggest that this notion of the self is also problematic. Ecological models seem to rely on a notion of the self that is embedded and influences but yet still separate from the environment that surrounds it. The “separateness” lends itself to the ideology in community psychology that “second order,” transformative change is superior to and (almost) possible apart from “first order,” ameliorative change, and that these two types of change are often in conflict (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). It seems, according to most community psychology theory, that the belief is that changing social structures alone would lead to human liberation, if only we could make it happen. In many ways, Nussbaum’s theory of capabilities is also consonant with this view. Conversely, the other theorists, as well as the stories of self provided by my participants, demonstrate that an adequately sophisticated understanding of the self is one in which the self is *created* through narrative, relationships, and systems, as opposed merely embedded in them. If selves are created through the systems in which they are embedded, changing systems alone will not

lead to individual change, nor will systems change occur without individual change and community change – recreation of society requires recreation of selves, recreation of selves requires recreation of society, and all is accomplished through and in relationship. Furthermore, if selves are created through the systems in which they are embedded, this helps us to see the ways in which people who often appear as “oppressors” are themselves created by the hierarchies from which they benefit (Hirschmann, 2003). The realization is important, particularly for organizations like Magdalene that bring together people from all walks of life, and all positions in raced, gendered, and classed hierarchies.

It seems, then, that Magdalene, feminist social theorists, and the field of community psychology all have lessons to offer each other. Feminist social theorists and community psychology challenge the community of Magdalene towards more overtly political activity to affect systems and structures as well as individuals and interpersonal relationships. In addition to being outspoken about women’s issues, such activity would require Magdalene to also take aim at systems and structures that are oppressive on the bases of race and class in addition to sex and gender. Additionally, I believe that the experiences of women leaving Magdalene and meeting significant barriers to obtaining employment and housing due to their criminal records, calls for the need for “forgiveness” in social institutions as well as in interpersonal relationships. Magdalene and community psychology challenge feminist political theorists to recognize the importance and centrality of human communities in supporting, mediating, and/or obstructing individual freedom, as well as being mechanisms through which individuals might work to create more freedom-enhancing systems. Lastly, some of the feminist theorists, as well as the experiences of the women at Magdalene, illustrate the ways in

which community psychology might explore a more sophisticated view of the self and community change – one in which human persons are creating and created through the relationships and systems that surround them.

### Implications for Research

An important aspect of this research has been the opportunity to learn about and reflect about research itself. During my two years at Magdalene, I did my best to pay close attention to the epistemological and methodological issues that would inevitably shape my research questions, methods, and findings. My first lesson was that while there are standard methods and practices for research, and adherence to such methods is essential to conducting research with quality and rigor, there is also room for innovation and adaptation within those methods. I believe that my ability to be “in place” in the community of Magdalene allowed me to notice the mechanisms of knowledge creation within the community, and conduct my research in such a way that facilitated voice and authenticity among my participants. For the community of Magdalene, at least, this meant that quality research required knowledge creation processes that were based in shared experiences, reliant on storytelling, and grounded in relationship. While I believe that these epistemological tools will translate well to other environments (particularly other intentional communities), I believe that the broader implication is that each environment will have some of its own knowledge creation practices and methods for understanding. Recognizing and harnessing these practices and methods is imperative to conducting research that is rigorous, both epistemologically and ethically.

Beyond the methodological implications, I believe that my research at Magdalene has raised as many new questions as it has answered. These questions, of course, leave ample room for new research (good news for the academics – we’re all still in business). My research demonstrated that community has enormous implications for theories and practices of freedom; however, the role of community in this sense is largely understudied. Continued understandings of the meanings of freedom and the role of community in supporting or restricting it require the exploration of more and different communities. Furthermore, a more in-depth analysis of the intersections of feminist political theory, community psychology, and communities such as Magdalene would continue to push the theories and practices of individual and social change in a more sophisticated and (hopefully) more effective direction.

Additionally, I believe there is tremendous opportunity for an action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) project between Magdalene and an energetic researcher to establish an “exit” program for the women who are leaving. Such a project would begin by asking women to identify the specific barriers they encounter when they leave the program. It would also ask women to identify specific supports that they have or would like to have upon leaving. Based on my findings, I anticipate that these barriers will be related to housing and employment opportunities, as well as continued need for physical and mental health care services. I believe that a transformative approach to addressing these barriers and supports would be one in which women were allowed to envision the world they are entering differently, and have the support to work together to pursue their vision of freedom. In addition to being a much-needed addition to the program, I believe it could be a platform on which to build collective knowledge and political action that

implicates larger systems of race, class, and gender in the oppression experienced by many in the Magdalene community.

## Conclusion

I used the lens of freedom to explore the Magdalene community because I discovered that it was an important and meaningful concept to women in the community, as well as scholars and theorists working on issues of prostitution and addiction. In conducting my interviews, I was struck by the ease and conviction with which residents and graduates in particular were able to tell me what freedom means to them and what it does not. For something that is a fairly illusive concept in theory, “freedom” has authentic and definable implications in the lives of women who have often been without it.

For the women at Magdalene, freedom meant having a place to live, food to eat, and access to medical and educational services that could keep them physically and psychological healthy. It meant being free from addiction and the overwhelming compulsion to “use” instead of engage in enjoyable activities or meaningful relationships. It meant the ability to “be myself,” an ability that was made possible by a living, honest, and forgiving community. It meant choosing sexual relationships based on love or desire rather than necessity, and it meant leaving those relationships when they ceased to be fulfilling. It meant telling the truth and being authentic. It meant “staying in God’s will” instead of one’s own. It meant being proud and hopeful as opposed to feeling alone and

ashamed. And it meant participating in the freedom of others. My time, research, and relationships at Magdalene have taught me much, personally and intellectually, about the means of freedom and what freedom means.



## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR RESIDENTS AND GRADUATES

1. Tell me your story...
2. How long have you been a part of Magdalene?
  - a. What made you decide to enter Magdalene?
  - b. Why have you stayed?
  - c. What's the best thing about being at Magdalene?
  - d. What's the worst?
3. At Magdalene, we talk a lot about "freedom"...what does that mean to you?
4. How has Magdalene contributed to you being "free"?
  - a. How about in terms of resources?
  - b. How about in terms of "beliefs" or "values" in the community?
  - c. How about in terms of relationships?
5. How does Magdalene restrict you being "free"?
  - a. How about in terms of resources?
  - b. How about in terms of "beliefs" or "values" in the community?
  - c. How about in terms of relationships?
6. Is there anything else you want me to include about your or your story?
7. Do you have any question for me?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAFF

1. Often, the resident and graduates at Magdalene are asked to “tell their story.” If someone were to ask you the same thing, what would you say? What’s your “story”?
2. What is your job with Magdalene?
3. How long have you worked at Magdalene?
4. Why did you decide to come to Magdalene?
5. Why have you stayed with Magdalene?
6. What do you see as your role in the Magdalene community?
7. How does Magdalene contribute to your quality of life?
8. One of Magdalene’s stated goals is to support “women’s freedom,” how do you understand “freedom” in this context?
9. In what ways do you think Magdalene supports “women’s freedom”?
10. In what ways do you think Magdalene restricts “women’s freedom”?
11. If you were to say that Magdalene as a community had a “story” or a “narrative,” what would it be?
12. How does your involvement with Magdalene fit into your own story?

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS

1. Often, the residents and graduates of Magdalene are asked to “tell their story”...if someone asked you the same question, what would you say? What’s your “story”?
2. What is your volunteer job with Magdalene?
3. How long have you volunteered with Magdalene?
4. Why did you first decide to get involved with Magdalene?
5. Why have you continued to work with Magdalene?
6. What do you see as your role in the Magdalene community?
7. How does Magdalene contribute to your quality of life?
8. One of Magdalene’s stated goals is to support “women’s freedom,” how do you understand “freedom” in this context?
9. In what ways do you think Magdalene supports “women’s freedom”?
10. In what ways do you think Magdalene restricts “women’s freedom”?
11. If you were to say that Magdalene as a community had a “story” or a “narrative,” what would it be?
12. How does the story of Magdalene fit with or influence your own story?

## APPENDIX D

### ANALYSIS CODES

#### **Major Code Themes:**

- Magdalene
- Recovery
- Drug Use & Addiction
- Spirituality
- Prostitution
- Life on the Streets
- Healing
- Freedom
- Community
- Family

#### **Sub-Code Themes:**

##### Magdalene

- Becca
- Program staff
- Thistle Farms
- House
- Other resources and services
- Good experiences
- Bad experiences
- Relationships
- Initial impressions
- How I found out about it

##### Recovery

- Experience with other programs
- 12-step
- Relapse
- “More than being clean”

##### Drug Use & Addiction

- First exposure
- Good experiences
- Bad experiences
- Effects on self

- Effect on loved ones
- Time in addiction

### Spirituality

- God
- Church
- Providence
- Journey
- Gratitude
- Acceptance
- Love
- Diversity

### Prostitution

- Introduction to
- Time spent involved
- Tricks
- Power
- Abuse
- Relationship to other notions of sexuality

### Life on the Streets

- How I got there
- Experience of
- Fear
- Poverty
- Violence
- Feeling trapped

### Healing

- Physical
- Psychological
- Spiritual
- Relational
- Growth
- Process

### Freedom

- Definitions
- Voice
- Body
- Love
- Role of God
- Role of relationships
- Leaving home
- Recovery

- Resources
- Bondage
- Work
- Possibility
- Choices
- Self
- Fear/Courage

#### Community

- Communities of origin
- Community w/in Magdalene
- Communication
- Community after Magdalene

#### Family

- Childhood experiences
- Current relationships
- Relationships with children

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