

“Their own way of having power”

Female Adolescent Prostitutes’ Strategies of Resistance in Cape Town, South Africa

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Strategic Agents

Adolescents engage in prostitution across the cultural record, and yet their decisions and actions negate what is widely seen as appropriate or desirable behavior for children who in contemporary Western society are viewed as vulnerable, innocent, and dependent “becomings” (Lee 2001, 5). In order to conceptualize this anomaly, adolescent prostitutes are either described as “powerless victims” or “irrational delinquents” acting in conflict with social norms. There is little conceptual clarity or theoretical analysis of the choices these adolescents make and the manner in which they intentionally use their sexuality to fulfill their preferences and meet their needs. This chapter argues that prostitution is a strategy employed by female adolescents in Cape Town, South Africa, in order to resist the structures that bind their decision-making capacity and their actions.

As strategic agents, adolescent prostitutes devise various tactics and use a range of resources to exercise power in the face of exploitation and slavery. Power in these contexts is not owned by any particular actor, institution, or system but is diffused into social relationships and exists only in “action” (Foucault 1982, 794). Action in each power relationship implies a “strategy of struggle” and has the potential for resistance (ibid). Even the “victim” is capable of action and therefore exercises power in a “power relationship” in which “a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up” (ibid, 789).

Foucault emphasizes that one needs to consider the “aim of the struggle to overcome the effect of power” (Foucault 1982, 780). Bandura’s (2001) model of intentionality elucidates this form of agency. People’s intentions are often based on plans of action and forethought. Agents weigh the options they

perceive to be available as observed in their environments or as rooted in their value systems or rationalizations. The foundation of human agency is “self-efficacy,” the belief that one is capable of exercising some measure of control and power over one’s own functioning and environment (Maddux 1995; Schwarzer 1992). This notion of agency can be used in conjunction with Giddens’s (1986) theory of “bounded agency” to understand the manner in which agents draw on various norms and resources embedded in the social structure. These resources or weapons are central to agents’ strategies of resistance. For example, in his research on peasant rebellions in colonial Africa, Scott (1985) describes the “ordinary” weapons utilized by the “*relatively* powerless” including “foot grading, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned innocence, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth” (29).

Giddens (1986) argues that humans may themselves become resources that others use. This echoes Bandura’s (2000) argument that agency can be exercised directly, by proxy, or collectively through or with others who are perceived as more powerful. These resources are therefore derived from relationships and defined in relation to the power exercised by others. In these “power relationships” many children make use of a number of tactics including manipulation and moral reasoning (Harre 1986). Kitzinger (1984) argues that even in the face of sexual abuse,

children employ the strategies of the most oppressed, dispossessed and victimised: joking and gossip, passive resistance and underground rebellion . . . although such tactics are rarely recognized by adults, children seek to evade abuse with all the resources they have of cunning, manipulativeness, energy, anger and fear.

These tactics amount to strategies in which children act alone or through or with others. Despite their attempts at forethought, many of these strategies are double-edged in that they may ensure the girls’ immediate survival but increase longer-term risks of violence and exploitation.

This chapter describes structural constraints on the agency of twenty-four adolescent prostitutes and forty street children who occasionally engaged in prostitution in Cape Town in 2005. It reveals that in the face of poverty and abuse my respondents are active agents who make decisions to ensure their own survival and that of their families and friends. Many perceive prostitution to be a viable and desirable option, given the scarcity of alternative economic choices and mechanisms of social support in impoverished and violent contexts characterized by discriminatory norms and institutions. Such

norms lend support to the notion that the differences associated with ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and age are natural and legitimate determinants of the power, control, and freedom that individuals can exercise, and that violence is a reasonable and acceptable way of exercising power and resolving disputes over these differences. My respondents did not passively accept these norms but instead actively interpreted, contested, and revised them depending on the demands of a particular situation. Prostitution was one means by which they were able to resist these structures.

*“It is like a wheel; you can’t forget”:
Socioeconomic and Ethnic Constraints*

In South Africa ethnic and socioeconomic structures cannot be disengaged. Given the age of my respondents, their awareness of Apartheid structures did not emerge from direct contact with state institutions but was mediated by their caregivers’ experiences in the workplace and other social spaces. Their parents either discussed these encounters with them or exhibited frustration and aggression in front of them. Alternatively, children joined their caregivers and other adults in public spaces where they observed and experienced ethnic discrimination. Through these experiences they formed the belief that ethnicity is a marker of socioeconomic status, as well as a determinant of power and freedom. This belief was entrenched rather than challenged by my respondents’ experiences in post-Apartheid South Africa. The lack of ethnic integration coupled with extreme deprivation in black and coloured communities have had a significant impact on their options, aspirations, and values so that they perceive prostitution as their only option.

Apartheid’s segregationist policies denied the realization of their parents’ human rights, circumscribed their movement, limited their employment options, and restricted their social spaces. Their parents “could have got further in life if it wasn’t for Apartheid”; they had to carry a “pass” when traveling between white, black, and coloured-designated areas; and “everywhere you went there were signs ‘For Whites Only.’” Apartheid affected the composition of my respondents’ households during their early childhoods. For example, Jenny attributed her father’s absence to Apartheid. She explained, “All I know is that he is a black man and was killed.” Frustration and anger—a product of Apartheid—also affected the quality of interpersonal relationships, especially the incidence of intimate partner violence within their homes. As Susanna stated, “My parents used to argue a lot because my mother worked for white

people and my father used to have a tough time working for white people on the railway where he worked.”

Apartheid’s migrant labor system and color bar policies meant that my respondents’ parents worked for white employers, which informed their commonly held perception that ethnic differences amount to social inequalities, and that socioeconomic hierarchies exist in which wealth and power are distributed on the basis of ethnicity. Susanna’s only experiences interacting with white children occurred when her mother was employed as a domestic worker for a white family. She stated, “We used to play with a white woman’s child because we had to look after the child. We could not kiss the child because we were black—that was because of Apartheid.”

The democratic transition has not had a marked effect upon socioeconomic inequalities and the differential poverty experienced by particular ethnic groups. Black and coloured people continue to be the most disadvantaged in terms of employment, income, skills, and education. For example, one girl said, “We just want to forget our past, but it is like a wheel, we can’t forget.” This was affirmed by Melissa, who argued,

Nothing has changed. The blacks are more advanced but people still do not have jobs. Blacks can go wherever they want to go. I heard and learnt about Apartheid but didn’t feel it. But nothing has changed. The president still does not care about us.

These hardships have significantly affected my respondents’ options, desired outcomes, and long-term aspirations.

My respondents’ perceived options were informed largely by the fact that their parents, siblings, and peers were uneducated and either unemployed or working as unskilled laborers. Despite their aspirations to be teachers, nurses, and lawyers, their lived reality suggests that the immediate financial returns gained from working as a prostitute were valued more out of necessity than the potential long-term benefits of being educated. Emphasis was frequently placed on the absence of alternatives: “Sometimes you think you can’t live with yourself, not with what you are doing I mean. If I don’t have a choice, what can I do?” By challenging the structures that have failed to provide them with alternatives and solutions to poverty-related stressors, they resist the cultural constructions of themselves as “child dependents.” In this context, many engaged in prostitution to assist their families:

The children leave to go look for a job to help and send money to families. They lie to their family and say they doing nightshift. But when your family finds out, you run away because you embarrassed. It is too hard to work on a farm picking oranges for only R250 [U.S.\$36.41] a week.

Many tried to reciprocate the care they received from their parents. One factor behind Jenny's decision to start working as a prostitute was that "my mom was suffering for us. Sometimes we go to school and do not have anything to eat. Mom borrowed money. It was hard for her to give it back." Hence their desire to fulfill their obligations at home, to show respect to their mothers, and to seek autonomy emerged as key factors supporting their decision to engage in prostitution. Prostitution was one means through which they could "help out" in contexts characterized by high levels of socioeconomic deprivation.

In their accounts it was evident that many girls wanted more than economic security; they wanted to be wealthy. As one girl stated, "It would be nice to be rich because of the lifestyle. I would like to be rich one day." Others highlighted the "comfortable life" of rich people that included fast food, stereos, clothing, and jewelry. Melissa attributed her desire for material goods to the deprivation she experienced as a child: "I know it's wrong, but I never had those things when I was growing up so now I just want more all the time." Hence my respondents did not criticize socioeconomic hierarchies per se or the value attached to commodities; instead, they sought to improve their position within these hierarchies by accessing goods, even if it involved prostitution.

Although white people were associated with wealth, my respondents stated that "we are all the same" and "we are all human." Nevertheless, when they were not questioned explicitly on this issue, racial prejudices cropped up in their descriptions of their clientele. For instance, Melissa explained how she deliberately chooses white clients because "black clients treat you like a prostitute but white people do not look at me like a prostitute. They could be friends with me." In the accounts of all my respondents, ethnicity emerged as the main criterion for evaluating a client's proclivity for violence. This is evident in the following statements: "I am not racist but I stay away from black guys"; "Black guys . . . do not treat me like I want to be treated"; and "[Black guys] don't play the game right. They are a danger to prostitutes. Once they get you in the corner you must pray." Ethnicity was also associated with socioeconomic status when selecting clients. White clients were preferred, because they "show more money" whereas black guys are "too

cheap.” The most favored client was a white foreigner from European countries such as Holland, Germany, England, and Sweden with whom the girls tried to establish longer-term relationships. Clearly adolescent prostitutes appeal selectively to certain norms. They challenged discriminatory practices that were constructed during Apartheid by adopting the language of the new democratic “rainbow” nation of South Africa; in their daily practices, however, they use these norms and discourses to structure their behavior and decisions.

The sex work industry is itself divided by racialized barriers. In hostess clubs, escort agencies, and many nightclubs, the majority of prostitutes are white, although a few are coloured. In contrast, in the Cape Town metropol clubs catering to fishermen and in township *shebeens* (illicit bars), prostitutes are mainly black and coloured. The ethnicity of sex workers on the streets varies according to what are still largely segregated communities in Cape Town. The legacy of Apartheid’s geospatial politics and socioeconomic inequalities remains in residential spaces divided by ethnicity, to the extent that, in 2001, only eight suburbs in the metropolitan area contained at least 20 percent of African coloured and white population groups (Smith 2005, 14). Their ethnicity and economic standing affects their working conditions, which in turn impacts their ability to make decisions in this context. Their ethnicity, in particular, has an effect on the clients they come into contact with and can choose from.

Children “Fight for Life”: Generational Constraints

My respondents believed that age is a marker of one’s capabilities, which denote power and freedom. They associated childhood with learning and dependency, adolescence with physiological changes, burgeoning freedom, and increased autonomy, and adulthood with enhanced capabilities as well as complete freedom and control, aptly summarized in the statement: “Adults can do what they want to do when they want to do it.” Despite the freedoms adults enjoy, my respondents generally felt that certain constraints should be placed on adults’ behavior, particularly relating to the rights and protection of children.

Discussions with street children (“strollers”) revealed a disjunction between normative and actual experiences of childhood. Despite constructions of childhood which suggest that children should not work and should be cared for by adults, many of the respondents had to “fight for life” by working and living on the streets. Thus the association of childhood with a

carefree, blissful, playful period does not reflect the manner in which childhood is experienced. Still, although norms surrounding childhood constrained the girls' agency, these norms were also manipulated by the very same girls. It was held that children, regardless of age, could exercise power over, with, and through others. Infants, for example, may be physically weak, but their mothers exercise power on their behalf: "If you hit a baby, *mos*, its mother will kill you." Similarly, in the context of abuse, it is held that young children, despite their age and size, can exercise more power than teenagers can, because adults are more likely to listen to younger children while it is assumed that teenagers either can protect themselves or are culpable. Thus, although teenagers are therefore attributed more agency, the support they receive is often reduced.

The adolescents I studied constantly struggled against generational hierarchies. For instance, Sarah threatened to run away from the street shelter where she stayed because the director refused to allow her to date an older man: "If I was her [the director] I would let a child go if she wants to go, because she is a big girl who knows what's right and wrong. I am a big girl. I don't look thirteen, I tell people I am eighteen." Sarah explained that she lies about her age to make herself seem older so that people will acknowledge that she is capable of making her own decisions.

Youth is regarded as a resource in the context of prostitution because "young girls make money easier than old girls." Because younger girls are in greater demand, they can be more selective about their clientele. Youth is therefore a source of power in this context. As one adult prostitute complained, "I am getting too old; guys are always looking for young girls." This preference for youth was not often seen as a matter of age *per se* but reflected the value placed on appearing young. Youth, it appears, tends to be associated with beauty. Rinalda said, for example, "It was easier when I was younger. I had a beautiful build and boobs. I had what men want. Now I am lucky to get one or two a day." She added that young girls "take the business away. Guys go for youngsters. If I had the ability to do so, I would send them home. It is not right."

Younger girls are also regarded as more attractive because of their sexual inexperience. Rinalda stated that "the guys get a kick that they are younger and tighter and have no experience." In other words, men find the experience of having intercourse with younger girls more stimulating and physically enjoyable (Wojcicki and Malala 2001). Reference was also made to the novelty of a newcomer. As one older prostitute pointed out, "There are lots of young girls. When I see them I think business is going to be bad. I don't tell

them to go home. The guys know all the old girls, so they want to try young ones out. They don't want to eat meat everyday; they want to try some fish." Such statements demonstrate the women's belief that men seek to engage in a variety of sexual activities with multiple partners of varying ages in order to fulfill their sexual needs.

Hence, for various reasons, girls who are young or appear young are more popular in this context, which often leads to competition between adults and adolescents. As one adolescent explained, "Jealousy is the biggest problem. There's lots of girls who are jealous of me. If you make more money it's a problem. I don't know what I've got that they don't have." That youth was a source of friction, a resource over which many actors competed, was evident from numerous accounts. As Emily stated, "They actually don't speak to one another. The one is jealous of the other. Say now you are a small girl, then everybody's *dik bek* [angry] for you because they take it so you stealing their clients."

Thus, to enhance their popularity with clients, both adults and adolescents readily lie about their age. Many adult prostitutes also attempt to appear younger. As one woman stated, "Guys like me because I look younger. It is not good to lie but sometimes you have to do it." Thus adult prostitutes would often exploit their client's preferences for younger girls by altering their own age and appearance. Adolescents, too, would try to look younger, for example, by losing weight.

This strategy was highly situational. Occasionally my respondents would represent themselves as being older. Adult prostitutes testified that adolescent prostitutes sometimes exaggerated their age in their presence. Elly stated that "although some girls are very young, I'll ask them their age and they'll make themselves seem older." This was echoed by another adolescent. "When we see them we ask them how old they are and they make themselves seem older than they are, but we know they are younger." Some adolescents apparently alter their age to fend off interference from others who may try to restrict their freedom on the streets.

Age was redefined in other contexts as well. Emily reported, for example, that when she was arrested by the police she lied about her real identity and address so that she could not be traced. She also told them she was older than her fifteen years, because she did not want to be taken to the children's shelter, preferring instead to pay the R50 (U.S.\$7.10) fine that adult prostitutes were forced to pay. Age was thus readily manipulated not only to increase popularity with clients but also to achieve other outcomes related to autonomy, power, safety, and security. Age was a resource that could be employed or manipulated depending on the situation.

“Being Strong”: Gendered Constraints

Violence, which was described in gendered terms, was a common feature of my respondents’ local communities. Boys and girls, it was believed, have different capabilities, which is reflected in the power and freedom they wield in the realms of violence and sexuality. My respondents claimed that boys are physically stronger than girls and therefore more capable of exercising violence or protecting themselves from it. Although “boys have their own ways of having power and girls got their own ways of having power,” women, it was suggested, have less power than men “because women cannot protect themselves. Men can just punch them.” Sexual violence is not a concern for boys, because “girls can get quickly raped but boys can’t get quickly raped.” This perception, which was repeatedly supported by actual examples of violence, was accompanied by strong feelings of insecurity and fear.

Many girls witnessed intimate partner violence in their homes of origin and were very often subject to rape and physical maltreatment from male peers and other men in their homes, schools, places of recreation, and neighborhood streets. Christeline, for example, stated, “I’ve seen my mother get beaten lots of times. My father beat her blue eyes many times. Then we could do nothing about it.” This violence was related to uneven social, economic, and political change, which was played out in intimate struggles. Violence was also associated with a clash of values and social roles in the domestic domain, particularly regarding the allocation of financial resources: “My father used to hit my mother if he wanted money,” one respondent told me. The resort to violence reflects the stress experienced by some unemployed men whose wives are the sole breadwinners in the house. In some cases, the mothers of my respondents cohabited with a man to benefit from additional income and thereby ensure the economic survival of their household. “Because your mother has no money to look after the children,” another respondent explained, “she takes in a man,” and such men, I was told, were often abusive. Intimate partner violence flared in the presence of alcohol, which in South Africa, as elsewhere, is often related to extreme economic stress. Some respondents protested against such violence; one girl stated, “I started to hate my father. . . . I told my father it’s not fair, my mother does not deserve it.”

Violence also characterized my respondents’ interpersonal relationships. This abuse was related to a range of factors including age and gender. For example, Jenny lost her virginity to an older man and described the experience as forced and painful: “My partner was twenty-two years and I was twelve years when we had sex. I was very sore. I was bleeding. I didn’t know

why, maybe because he had a big thing. I didn't want to do it again." Girls who are younger than their partners or less experienced sexually may be unable to assert themselves or resist violence or pressure to have sex. Emily's first sexual experience was also associated with sexual violence and substance abuse. She stated, "I gave him the mandrax and dagga but I did not smoke with him. I just struck the match because I was too scared. When he was done smoking he held me down on the bed and pinned me down. The next day I had to go to school with a sore body."

The girls argued vehemently that incest is wrong and "disgusting." A father who has sex with his child was described as a "dog" because "it's his own child" and "he brought her into the world." They emphasized that a "father should respect the child's body." From their accounts, however, such respect had clearly broken down, since a significant number of the girls had been sexually abused by their fathers and by other male members of their immediate or extended families. Most of my respondents who were sexually abused had no one to counsel them. They told me, for example, that "I just kept everything to myself" or "we had to find our own solution to our problem" or "you just had to cope with it."

Some emphasized that it was difficult to approach their parents to talk about sexual abuse. As Susanna argued, "The men just do [it] and then they say it's the child's fault." Lerato stated that when she told her mother that she was being sexually abused by her mother's live-in boyfriend, she was blamed for the abuse. As Grace put it: "One could not talk about it because it would be said that you are keeping yourself big [acting too mature], that is why you waited till you older then you would talk about these things." Grace's comment suggests that, in some communities, children's concerns are ignored because they are believed to be too young to recognize abuse and are either fabricating it to get attention or are responsible for encouraging or initiating it. The girls complained that little action was taken against perpetrators, because their mothers were too inebriated, dependent, or scared of their male partners. Relatives did not provide the kind of support that they might have and instead often contributed to the violence and deteriorating conditions in the household.

Practitioners such as schoolteachers or social workers also failed to provide support to these girls. One girl stated, for instance, "I told the social worker that my mother was not taking care of us but my mother said I lied. The social worker doesn't care and leaves you with your family when she knows they are not looking after you. So I ran away from Kyelitcha to Cape Town."

This underscores the fact that when a child's word is measured against a parent's, the latter is often given more weight. Combined with the physical act of sexual abuse, this is likely to have a detrimental effect on children's self-esteem and their options. With few people to turn to for assistance, many children may decide to take matters into their own hands. For most of the girls in my study, running away was one of the few options at their disposal. As one girl told me, "Some children have problems at home, they can't solve the problems at home, they run away from home, and come onto the streets." After weighing all options, self-preservation could only be achieved by escaping.

Escaping to the streets, however, failed to provide the desired reprieve from violence. Even when "you are like strong, you don't know if you like safe because you can just be raped or so. You can't just walk anywhere. You don't know what is going to happen." Hence the threat of violence must be considered in their decision to run away. To overcome their low sense of self-efficacy, many girls decide to exercise their agency collectively with their peers. It was suggested that children who have more friends are stronger, because "if you lots, you are more strong; if there are only two of you, you more scared." As a result, many girls living on the streets would join groups of "strollers" for protection and material security. The group would allocate specific duties to each girl such as begging or parking cars, but for many the duty was prostitution.

Alternatively the girls joined gangs for physical protection. In other words, "you have people to sort things out for you." The unintended consequence of this attachment, however, was the greater risk of violence from gang members, as well as pressure to engage in prostitution. Boys in gangs generally have physical and financial power over the girls. As one girl stated, "To be in a gang you have to have a boyfriend in that gang. If you have a boyfriend, that boyfriend makes you have sex nonstop." Girls in the gangs are required to follow the boys' instructions, which include involvement in prostitution; the income from these encounters goes to the gang and their criminal activities. Girls are also used as decoys or "bait" so that they can lure clients, who are then attacked. In many cases they are instructed to do so by the gang's leader. As one respondent explained, "Maybe I am the leader of the gang ne, ok I need money, ne, I can just change my mind and tell you, ok, you gonna go stand on the road for me for money." Sara also referred to her friend's engagement in prostitution:

Christy likes living on the street because she is a number 28 [the name of a gang]. They stop cars and rob men. The boss is a grownup and tells them

what to do . . . He orders them to do things. They all wear black clothes. Sometimes he tells girls to stand in the street and lift their dress and do stuff to buy drugs.

Many of my respondents' attach themselves to men, whom they describe as boyfriends, for physical security. As Christy put it:

You run away from the shelter because you are used to the street where no one tells you what to do, where to sleep, what to drink . . . when your boyfriend goes to jail you don't know how to survive without a boyfriend. So you get another boyfriend. The girls fight over guys . . . If you don't have a boyfriend, other boys will take a chance with you.

Attachment to one man means protection from many others. But the girls' economic dependency on men also increases their vulnerability for abuse and exploitation. As one girl reported, "they [boys] sleep with you or beat you because they bought you food. You have to do what they want. You never know if he loves you." Another girl said that she doesn't like to ask her boyfriend for money "because I will become a slave." Given the importance of having a boyfriend, many girls submit to coercion and are pressured to engage in prostitution. As another girl stated, "The boyfriend is going to tell the girl to stand on the road for him for money."

Many girls therefore prefer working alone in order to exercise greater control and power over their lives. Even then, violence is a common feature of their working relationships. A number of the adolescent and adult prostitutes working in metropolitan Cape Town had been "dropped," or stranded, penniless and often naked in outlying areas in Tableview, Bothasig, Salt River, and even on top of Table Mountain. This was frequently the case after they had been assaulted and raped. A client of one of my respondents tried to push her out of his moving vehicle on a freeway, and another respondent was gang-raped. Even those who choose not to travel with the client are still at risk of violence. Many of the prostitutes working in the Van Schoorsdrift neighborhood were taken into the nearby park and assaulted. Because the area is off the main road and concealed by trees, the girls are less likely to be targeted by the police but more likely to be attacked by clients.

My respondents did not passively accept or acquiesce to this gender-based violence. Many stated that they would develop positive relationships with other female prostitutes to exercise their agency collectively; in this way they could take note of vehicle registration details, safeguard their money,

and keep an eye out for one another's physical safety. My respondents also used violence against aggressive clients as a survival strategy. Jenny maintained that first she would attempt to reason with the client: "I tell clients I am a prostitute, but I am also a woman." If this failed, she would then resort to force, even though she was not physically strong: "I have power only from my mouth to say stop. If they beat me then I will do it. But I will also fight. If I am in the car I will hit him." Another adolescent made a similar point, "If a client hits me I kick him back. Even if he is big I am not scared." Many girls would throw stones at the windshields of abusive clients' cars, aware that such clients would be unlikely to risk being implicated in illegal activities by approaching the police.

Some girls resisted these tactics by exercising violence over other girls. Reference was made, for instance, to an all-female gang called the "Dollar Signs." One member explained that she joined the gang with her friends when she was eleven years old but complained that "you choose to be in the gang, when you are in the gang you can't make your own decision, you have to go the way they going." She was ordered by the twenty-one-year-old female gang leader (the *inchiswa*) to murder another girl who wanted to leave the gang: "Like the *inchiswa* says you must go kill that one. You must go rob that one. You just have to go do it and if you don't want to do it, she is going to tell the group to beat the person that doesn't want to do it."

Some would ask their boyfriends to exercise violence against other girls with whom they were in competition. The relationship between adult and adolescent prostitutes was generally characterized by violence, given the competitive nature of the industry and the attention that young prostitutes drew. As one adolescent prostitute complained, "Sometimes they [adult prostitutes] are nice to you when a guy chooses them, but they get mad when a guy chooses you." Some women complained that girls would "send their boyfriends to interfere with the older girls." In Van Schoorsdrift, adults and adolescents alike constantly recounted Linda's story: she had been murdered by another younger prostitute's boyfriend for poaching her clients.

At times the girls benefit from exploitative arrangements by acting as "middle men" and introducing other girls to so-called pimps in exchange for a fee. Sara explained that in such relationships the third party "tells you that they [the group] sell their bodies on the streets for money and now you got to do the same thing they do." Alternatively they introduce other newcomers to clients and demonstrate how to engage in sexual activities for a fee. Jenny,

for example, went with a friend to Van Schoorsdrift “and saw how fast the girls make money. I went with her a second time and the third time I did it by myself.” Adolescent girls even employ coercion to force their peers to engage in prostitution. As Sara stated,

I enjoyed Friday night on the street but not Saturday night. A man tried to take me with him; he had a knife. Christy said that I must go with him because Christy will get money. I said no and spent the night at the police station. On Sunday I came back to Ons Plek [a Cape Town shelter]. I am cross with Christy, but I am also scared of her.

Clearly certain norms support the use of violence against women in general, and adolescent girls in particular, both in their homes of origin and on the streets. My respondents did not simply accept this victimization but actively tried to resist it by seeking the protection of other actors or by using violence and coercion against other men, women, and children.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that adolescents who engage in prostitution are “bounded” by strategic agents. On the one hand, their decisions and activities are informed by social structures that have been shaped by discriminatory and oppressive discourses, norms, institutions, and the inequitable distribution of resources in relation to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and age. This social structure has an impact upon adolescents’ relationships with others, which in turn influences their identity, self-efficacy, decision-making ability, and actions.

These adolescents do not simply acquiesce to given notions but actively interpret and challenge these norms and institutions by heatedly resisting what they perceive to be an unjust distribution of power in relationships. In these power struggles they develop various strategies using the resources they perceive to be available. These may include their peers, boyfriends, clients, and other sex workers with whom and through whom they exercise their agency. Alternatively they may make use of their gender, age, and other personal characteristics. This chapter has shown how adolescents use these resources to protect themselves from violence and abuse, survive in the face of poverty, fulfill their duty-bearing roles, and earn respect in their homes,

in shelters, and on the streets. In asserting their power over others, some adolescent prostitutes perpetrate violence against other children. The binaries “powerful and powerless” and “perpetrator and victim” do not hold true when conceptualizing the lived reality of adolescent prostitutes, who possess multiple identities, assume diverse roles, and act with intentionality to exercise power and control over their lives and others. Even in the context of prostitution, they have “their own way of having power.”