

**ESCORT SERVICES IN A BORDER TOWN:
TRANSMISSION DYNAMICS
OF STDS WITHIN AND BETWEEN COMMUNITIES**

**METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES CONDUCTING
RESEARCH RELATED TO SEX WORK
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BASIS OF REPORT

This report outlines some of the methodological issues and challenges of studying issues pertaining to the sex worker and the sex work industry. Research for the report was conducted as part of a project on the escort industry in Windsor, Ontario. Information for this report on methodological challenges was obtained from six sources:

- Interviews were conducted with researchers from Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, South Peel, Calgary, Victoria, Saskatoon. Although these were predominately academic researchers, community workers doing small-scale research projects in connection with their agency's work were also interviewed.
- Interviews with escorts, escort agency owners and agency personnel in Windsor.
- Interviews with exotic dancers in southwestern Ontario, gathered as part of another study.
- Interviews with licensing officers, police, and community agency representatives in Windsor and Calgary.
- Reports, dissertations, and publications based on research in London, Calgary, Toronto and Vancouver.
- Information from sex worker organization websites and participation in a listserv dealing with sex work issues.

MODELS OF RESEARCH

- **The Classical Model:** Research questions and methodologies are determined by researchers. Responsibility for and control of design and implementation of the research rests exclusively with the researcher. The research is driven by the needs and interests of the researcher, the larger research and academic community, and the organizations and agencies that fund research.
- **The Partnership or Collaborative Model:** Sex workers and researchers form partnerships for the purpose of conducting research. The research serves the needs of both groups and each expects to learn from the other. At one extreme are partnerships where the researchers carry the bulk of the authority and responsibility for the research project and sex-worker partners participate in specific aspects of the project. At the other extreme sex workers and researchers jointly establish the research questions and methodology. A clear link between the interests and the needs of the researcher and sex workers is a necessity of this model, as establishing functional trust between sex workers and researcher.
- **The Sex Worker as Researcher Model:** Sex workers are the researchers who hire academically trained researchers as consultants to their projects if they are needed. The agenda and priorities are those of the researcher/sex worker.

In practice the Classical Model is commonly used by researchers studying sex workers and the sex work industry. This tendency has, however, begun to change as some feminist researchers adopt partnership models and as sex workers increasingly question the legitimacy and appropriateness of the Classical Model and research conducted by non-sex workers. An absence of an organized sex worker community or sex worker organizations places limitations on the models researchers can use.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RESEARCH WITH SEX WORKERS

A variety of factors impact on the conduct of research on sex work, including:

- Historical relationships between sex workers and researchers
- Local initiatives and activities that affect sex workers
- International meetings and the internet
- Funding agency priorities and timetables
- Research agendas
- Locating, recruiting and retaining participants
- First projects
- Working with sex worker organizations

ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical issues that exist for researchers studying sex workers and the sex work industry are discussed throughout the report. The two ethical issues that are paramount when doing research in this area are:

- Protecting confidentiality
- The researcher's role and obligations

How each of these issues is dealt with enhance or inhibit the development of *functional trust*.

CONCLUSIONS

Recognition needs to be paid to the needs of those being studied and their knowledge and expertise in the area. Researchers interested in studying sex work should consider modifying their research models in order to involve sex workers more in the research process. This can be achieved through moving to a partnership model and developing working relationships with sex workers and sex worker organizations. By bringing community members onto projects, researchers: facilitate access to study participants and the development of trust; increase the knowledge base of the research team and the learning opportunities for study participants, researchers and sex workers alike; and enhance the sensitivity of researchers, making them more cognizant of the unique ethical issues that may arise in the course of the study and providing advice on ways to deal with these issues in advance. However, such collaborations are difficult.

Funding agencies can help facilitate the formulation of research partnerships and the successful completion of research projects by attending to the recommendations of researchers and community organizations in the area. Strict agency priorities, interests, timetables and rules only serve to bind the hands of researchers. They can limit the type of relationships that can be developed with community members. They can also limit the scope of information that can be gathered, including the ability to pursue important areas of inquiry, and jeopardize relationships/partnerships established with community members by having long grant review processes.

The very nature of living and working on the margins of society requires a state of constant watchfulness, caution and scepticism in order to survive and maintain safety and well-being. The watchfulness and cautious scepticism must be applied not only to agents of the state, such as police, but also to researchers whose work may purposefully or inadvertently jeopardize the safety and well-being of those on the margins. Only when research works to decrease marginalization will it be of obvious benefit to those it studies. This necessitates attention to the needs of those being studied and the consequences of research for them.

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES CONDUCTING RESEARCH RELATED TO SEX WORKERS

INTRODUCTION

Research with marginalized people can pose unique challenges. These challenges are most often presented as relating to the estimation of population size and to locating, accessing and gaining participation of population members. The label *hard to reach* is typically ascribed to populations when researchers are faced with such challenges. In our experience in research with sex workers, we have found that the challenges go beyond those of population identification and sampling to issues that cut to the very epistemological and axiological foundations on which a research methodology is built. Solutions to sampling problems are dependent on how these more foundational issues are addressed.

Sex workers have been included among groups considered *hard to reach*. In discussions related to this project, sex workers (including street prostitutes, escorts and exotic dancers) found such a designation odd. As one former street prostitute said, “We’re on the streets, how much easier can it be to find us?” Street prostitutes and exotic dancers are, in fact, highly visible since they work in a public arena. They should, therefore, be easy to reach. Certain inside sex workers, such as escorts and exotic masseuses, however, are not as visible. Escorts meet clients in private locations on a one-on-one basis; masseuses work on a one-on-one basis with clients who come to their place of employment. This *does* make the latter two groups harder to access. However, it is not only difficulties around initial location and contact that result in the *hard to reach* designation. The reticence of many sex workers to participate in research and the difficulty in estimating the size and characteristics of the population, together with other methodological challenges produce the designation of *hard to reach*.

This report outlines some of the challenges of studying sex work. Research for the report was conducted as part of a project on the escort industry in Windsor, Ontario. Information for this report on methodological challenges was obtained from six sources:

- Interviews were conducted with researchers from Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, South Peel, Calgary, Victoria, Saskatoon. Although these were predominately academic researchers, community workers doing small-scale research projects in connection with their agency’s work were also interviewed.
- Interviews with escorts, escort agency owners and agency personnel in Windsor.
- Interviews with exotic dancers in southwestern Ontario, gathered as part of another study.¹
- Interviews with licensing officers, police, and community agency representatives in Windsor and Calgary.
- Reports, dissertations, and publications based on research in London, Calgary, Toronto and Vancouver.

¹ The study of exotic dancers was funded by the National Health Research and Development Program, Health Canada, Grant Number 6606-5688.

- Information from sex worker organization websites² and participation in a listserv dealing with sex work issues.³

MODELS OF RESEARCH

There are several models of research that have been used in the study of sex work, each involving a different form of relationship between the researcher and study participants. We suggest these forms can be understood as: (1) the Classical Model; (2) the Partnership or Collaborative Model; and (3) the Sex Worker as Researcher Model. In the first of these models, sex workers may only be involved to the extent that they are the focus of investigation and the source of data. In the second, both the researcher and sex worker representatives are partners on the project. In the third, the researcher is a current or former sex worker or is hired by sex worker organizations to do research for them.

Classical Model

In the Classical Model, research questions and methodologies are determined by researchers who write grant proposals, obtain and administer funds, conduct the research and write and present reports and academic publications based on their research. The research questions and methodologies may be founded on prior work and consultations with sex workers; however, responsibility for and control of design and implementation rest exclusively with the researcher. Sex workers participate as subjects in the research, but have little influence on the form the research takes or the content of final reports or publications. The goal of a researcher may be to understand a phenomenon of interest from the perspective of the sex worker, attempting to capture the sex worker's voice in final reports. Several methodological approaches may be used to accomplish this (e.g., Guba & Lincoln 1989; Maynard & Purvis 1994). Alternatively, the goal may be to test a series of hypotheses or frameworks based on prior research. Researchers may be cautious that they do not report or publish material that could result in harm to sex workers, or they may consider it their obligation to report or publish what they have found, while protecting the identities of individuals involved in the project. The central characteristic of this model is that the researcher decides not only what will be done but also what will be reported. It is driven by the needs and interests of the researcher, the larger research and academic community, and of organizations and agencies that fund research.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The advantage to the Classical Model for the researcher is its simplicity. The researcher(s)

² See for example: A webring connecting many sex worker web sites at <http://www.webring.org/cgi-bin/webring?ring=prostright;list>;
The Prostitutes Education Network at <http://www.bayswan.org/penet.html>;
The Exotic Dancers Alliance at <http://www.bayswan.org/EDAindex.html>;
The Network of Sex Work Projects at <http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/nswp/index.html>;
The Sex Workers Alliance of Vancouver at <http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/swav>

³ Sex-work forum at sex-work@hivnet.com

carries the responsibility for and authority over the conduct and end product of the work. There is one set of priorities--that of the researcher(s). Mechanisms for accountability to funders are well established and understood by both researcher and funder. There is neither a question of who controls or owns the data or research results, nor one of who is responsible for interpretation. The challenges inherent in this model are primarily related to accessing study participants and developing their trust.

Since the researcher comes as an outsider with her/his own goals and priorities, the first question that is likely to be posed by sex workers is, "What's in it for me?" During the course of this study, sex workers raised several concerns about this model:

- There's no reason for sex workers to trust researchers, in fact there is every reason not to trust them. Why would any sex worker participate in this research?
- This is clearly a case of a researcher concerned only with his or her own career.
- Researchers are good at "getting rich off of" what sex workers tell them.
- Most results that are published "put sex workers in a bad light" and increase police and "social work" pressure on them resulting in threats to their livelihood.

While the Classical Model is well understood by both researchers and funders who feel confident in their evaluations of its potential and in their judgement of its end products, it is a model that produces skepticism among sex workers who may not trust its results and may be skeptical about the goals and products of the research.

Partnership or Collaborative Model

In a Partnership or Collaborative Model, sex workers and researchers form a partnership for the purpose of conducting research. This is the model that is advocated in both the Community University Research Alliances and the new Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) guidelines for Strategic Theme research. The degree of collaboration and the roles played by the partners in the research process may vary. At one extreme are partnerships where researchers carry the bulk of the authority and responsibility for the research project and sex worker-partners participate in specific aspects of the project (e.g., facilitating access, consulting on data collection methods and the content of instruments or interview schedules, consulting on the interpretation of results and on translation of results into community relevant material). At the other extreme is what has been referred to as Participatory Research where sex workers and researcher(s) jointly establish the research questions and methodology. The research serves the needs of both groups and each expects to learn from the other. The expertise of sex workers in the "ways of sex work" is considered on par with the expertise of the researcher in "doing research." Research questions in Participatory Research are likely to be formulated with specific attention to the concerns and needs of sex workers. If the interest of the researcher is to address questions of concern to sex workers, this model is extremely powerful. If, however, there isn't a clear link between the interests of the researcher and those of sex workers, the prior form of partnership or collaboration is more useful to the researcher and the third model (discussed below) is more useful to sex workers.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The benefit to the Partnership Model, in either form, is that it provides a direct link

between researchers and sex workers through the collaborative partnership. A direct link can facilitate access to the study population, design of data collection methodology and instruments, interpretation of data, conducting member and stakeholder checks, and can help to ensure that the voice of sex workers, and the needs and issues of sex workers are represented in the end results. Although there are advantages to this model over the Classical Model, there are situations that would make adopting this model difficult. For example, it would be difficult to establish a partnership in communities where there are neither established sex worker organizations nor strong ties among sex workers in the community. This situation was encountered in Windsor and Calgary while conducting the study of the escort industry (Maticka-Tyndale & Lewis 1999) and in a number of smaller communities in Southwestern Ontario when conducting the study of exotic dancers (Lewis & Maticka-Tyndale 1998).

While it may appear that the issues of trust encountered in the Classical Model would not exist in the Collaborative Model, since sex workers and researchers are partners in a common endeavor, in actuality, trust may have to be re-negotiated and re-established at numerous junctures in the research process. The close contact and collaboration between partners inevitably raises points of tension and disagreement. It is at these junctures that debates about research priorities, methods, and competing interests may become debates about trust. Other challenges that are unique to this model include:

- Setting and balancing the priorities and needs of partners.
- Establishing a method for dealing with disagreements.
- Establishing who speaks for sex workers.
- Dealing with competing factions among sex workers.
- Control of research funds and decision-making relative to the funds.
- Competing interpretations.
- Decisions about and control of end products.
- Ownership of research results.
- Roles in the research process and the production of research results.
- “Veto” power over what is published or reported and in what venues.

It is common for agreements on these and other issues to have to be re-negotiated at various points in the research process.

The responsibility for ensuring that the partnership works and that the research progresses is felt more by researchers than community partners. Researchers are held accountable by ethics committees, employers and funders for problems encountered in the research process. Community partners generally are freer to “walk away” from a project if they feel it no longer serves their needs or interests, since they are not accountable to funders, ethics committees, or employers for this action. In fact, if community partners leave a project, it may be their accountability to community members and organizations that leads them to leave research projects. Just as the researcher’s accountability to funders, ethics committees, and employers influences the decisions they make, so does the accountability of sex worker-partners to other sex workers and their organizations influence decisions made by sex workers collaborating on research projects. For example, sex worker-partners may withdraw from projects if they feel the project or their participation is viewed negatively by others in their community.

Collaborative partnerships require considerably more time and a different skill set than

most researchers have acquired in their training. For this type of project to work, researchers must learn how to *do* community work, not merely how to do research on individuals and communities. Given the complexity and challenges of collaborative partnerships, it is not surprising that these types of research partnerships are rare.

Sex Worker As Researcher

A model of research that is advocated by the National Sex Work Projects is one where sex workers themselves are the researchers, hiring academically trained researchers as consultants to their projects, if they are needed. This model is represented in the work completed under the auspices of the International Labour Organization in producing the report *Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda* (Bindman & Doezema 1997) and in the research done to produce the documents *Making Sex Work Safe* (Overs & Longo 1997) and *Trials of the Trade* (http://www.walnet.org/csis/legal_tips/trials/). Sex workers who are trained as researchers can also be considered under this model. Here the agenda and priorities are clearly those of the researcher/sex worker.

At the time of this study, there were sex worker initiated projects taking place in Montreal, Victoria and Saskatoon. In Victoria a collaborative research project involving an organization of sex workers (PEERS) and Dr. Cecilia Benoit, a university-based researcher was under funding review. The project was initiated by representatives of PEERS who contacted Dr. Benoit. In Saskatoon, Dr. Pamela Downes, a university-based researcher, was involved in a participatory action research project that arose from concerns of sex workers. In Montreal, sex worker initiated projects grew out of contacts established between sex workers, researchers (Dr. Catherine Hankins and students working with her) and community workers in drop-in and service providing centres (CACTUS Montreal), which were created in conjunction with earlier researcher-initiated projects.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The prime benefits of the Sex Worker as Researcher model are the relevance of the questions and the end products to the needs of sex workers and the sex worker community. For communities of sex workers it is the simplest of the models since design, control and production of relevant results rests with them and does not require negotiation with anyone outside their community. This model also has the added advantage of the researchers having established relationships within the community, which can facilitate the completion of the research investigation. The prime drawback to this model is that funding agencies are generally unwilling to provide research funding to sex worker organizations. This was the experience, for example, in researching and producing *Trials of the Trade* when funding was only made available for a portion of the project.

The Sex Worker as Researcher model only works in organizations and regions where there are sex worker-researchers or organizations with the capacity and interest to undertake a research project. While researchers working under this model may have the skills to conduct research, they, or the sex worker organizations that employ them, face several challenges:

- The need to gain the trust and willingness of funders to support a project that rests solely within the sex worker community.

- The need to become familiar with the procedures of obtaining, managing and accounting for grants.
- The problem of maintaining commitment to the research project in the face of competing priorities and time demands. This is particularly problematic since few projects include direct funding for research investigators.
- Finding ways to disseminate research results within communities of researchers.
- Establishing the trustworthiness of results (Guba & Lincoln 1989) within researcher and other non-sex worker communities.
- For sex workers with only limited training in research methods, learning about research methodology and methods of reporting research results.

Disadvantages of this model to funders include:

- Working with a group that may not be familiar with the expectations, timelines, accountability and reporting requirements of funding agencies.
- The mobility of sex workers that may result in changes in the groups of individuals working on the project.
- Establishing the trustworthiness and credibility of the research results (Guba & Lincoln 1989) with other agencies, funding boards, and research communities.
- Dealing with “public image” concerns relating to releasing funds to sex workers.

Use of Models in Practice

The Classical Model is commonly used by researchers studying sex workers and the sex work industry. Some researchers interviewed for this study stressed that this model did not preclude taking the needs and concerns of sex workers into consideration and establishing ways to consult and involve sex workers in the research. Others saw such consultation as potentially introducing bias into the research process. Some researchers produced research reports specifically for sex worker groups or individuals based on the study results, most, however, did not.

Although sex work research has typically followed the Classical Model (e.g., Lewis & Maticka-Tyndale 1998a; Lowman 1986; Shaver 1997, 1998), this has begun to change. Some feminist researchers, for example, have adopted more participatory methods such as those described in Reinharz (1992) and Maynard and Purvis (1994). In addition, representatives of the sex worker community have increasingly questioned the legitimacy and appropriateness of the Classical Model and the validity of research conducted by non-sex workers. Movement in the direction of the Sex Worker as Researcher and Partnership Models was advocated at the International Conference on Prostitution held in Van Neys, California, March 1996. In addition, various forms of the Partnership Model have been used by the researchers who were consulted as part of this project. These models only work, however, when there are either sex worker researchers or organizations of sex workers in particular regions, or when there are strong ties between community members.

The two research projects that formed the basis of our experience studying sex work faced the problem of an absence of sex worker organizations in the regions where the studies were conducted. During the course of the exotic dancer study an organization, the Exotic Dancers’

Alliance (EDA), did begin to form in the South Peel region. The EDA brought together public health workers, nurses, police, and former dancers. Ties were established with the organization during this project and their insights into some of our research interpretations were incorporated into final reports. The EDA has become a partner in a newly funded project begun in the spring of 2000. There were no such organizations in the other areas where we conducted research. As a result, we had minimal assistance or guidance from community members in this project. We had a similar experience with the escort study. While a coalition of community organizations had begun to meet just prior to this research project, escorts and escort agency owners had declined to participate in the coalition. As a result, while we maintained contact with the coalition, its composition did not make it possible to form a research partnership with escorts. In both studies we used the Classical Model and spent time developing relationships with community members.

Organization within the exotic dancer and escort communities where we did our research was hindered by the occupational mobility of both dancers and escorts and their preference for minimizing contacts with others in the same occupation. This was especially the case for escort workers. In the exotic dancer study we were, however, able to develop a researcher/guide relationship with two university students who worked as a bartender and a shooter girl in clubs we were studying and with another student who was a former club 'bouncer' who knew a number of club owners, dancers and other club employees. All three were hired as research assistants and served as guides in the field, providing introductions, arranging interviews, and vouching for us and our study.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RESEARCH WITH SEX WORKERS

A variety of factors have an impact on the conduct of research on sex work. Some are external to the research process and outside the control of researchers such as: the historical relationship between sex workers and researchers, local initiatives and activities that affect sex workers, the growth in the number of sex worker advocacy organizations, with networking and contacts facilitated through international meetings and conferences and especially through the internet, and funding agency priorities and timetables. Others are more within the researcher's control, such as setting research agendas, negotiating working relationships with sex workers and sex worker organizations.

Factors External to the Research Process

Historical Relationships between Sex Workers and Researchers

Historically, research has often pathologized and patronized sex workers, disclosed "trade secrets," and made information publicly available that facilitates further state control of the work and lives of sex workers.⁴ As a result, sex work may become more difficult. For example, a documentary on American television (ABC's *20/20 Sex, Drugs, and Consenting Adults*, 1998) that included a brief reference to the municipal licensing of escorts in Windsor, Ontario and to the absence of federal statutes that make prostitution illegal, provided motivation for a brutal attack on an escort by an American client and for a police crackdown and raid of escort agencies.

⁴ For a recent example, see: Farley & Barkan 1998 and the listserv discussion about this work recorded at <http://www.hivnet.ch:8000/topics/sex-work/> entries 84,87,89,95 and 99.

The portrayal of sex work and sex workers and the consequences of such portrayal for their work and lives has resulted in a distrust of researchers (including academic, organizationally based, and journalist researchers) and a reticence on the part of many sex workers to participate in research. Even among sex workers who have not themselves experienced such consequences, there is little incentive to participate in research. Sex workers know that the way they conduct their work may bring them into conflict with police, municipal regulations, or federal criminal statutes. They also know that they are generally unwelcome in the cities and communities in which they work. Together these factors make them reluctant to increase either their visibility or public awareness of their work places and practices. Obviously, sex workers are also reluctant to participate in research that might contribute to the generally negative way in which they and their work are viewed or increase their rejection and stigmatization by local communities.

Local Initiatives and Activities that Affect Sex Workers

Local events can improve or damage existing and potential relationships between sex workers and researchers. Police raids and arrests, public harassment, and negative media portrayals make sex workers suspicious of contacts with anyone outside their profession. Good, or at least neutral, relationships with police, agencies and the public may have the opposite effect. For example, when licencing of escorts was initiated in Windsor, many escorts and agency owners felt their recognition as legitimate business people would reduce police harassment, raids and arrests. In the atmosphere of trust and anticipated respect experienced during the early months of licencing, escorts and agency personnel were willing to participate in our research project. This is contrary to the experience of researchers in Calgary and London who found that escorts and agency owners were the least willing of all groups of sex workers to participate in research (Hancock 1998; Williams 1998).

International Meetings and the Internet

The internet and wide-scale access to electronic mail and the world-wide web has also had an effect on research with sex workers. Local, national and international associations of sex workers maintain websites⁵ and manage and participate in listservs.⁶ Both are used to disseminate information about events and issues that affect sex workers and to share experiences, including those with law enforcement officials, state agencies, and researchers. During the course of the escort study there were a variety of warnings, discussions, etc. that occurred via the internet pertaining to researchers. Three of these stand out as illustrations. The first was an e-mail that was

⁵ See for example: A webring connecting many sex worker web sites
<http://www.webring.org/cgi-bin/webring?ring=prostright;list>;
The Prostitutes Education Network: <http://www.bayswan.org/penet.html>;
The Exotic Dancers Alliance: <http://www.bayswan.org/EDAindex.html>;
The Network of Sex Work Projects: <http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/nswp/index.html>;
The Sex Workers Alliance of Vancouver: <http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/swav>

⁶ See, for example, the listserv discussions recorded at
<http://www.hivnet.ch:8000/topics/sex-work/>

sent to everyone who attended the 1997 International Conference on Prostitution (ICOP). The e-mail complained of the “unethical behaviour” of the conference organizers, a group of academics. The complaint revolved around the organizers’ failure to ensure the destruction of the database containing the names and addresses of sex workers who had participated in the conference. The existence of this database posed a threat of exposure and potential public or police harassment. Incidents such as this do little to help academics earn the trust that is necessary for successful completion of research projects, or for organizing conferences and symposia involving both sex workers and academics.

The second internet based issue was in direct response to a conference presentation and publication reporting results of a study of sex workers in several countries (Farley & Barkan 1998). A brief summary of the study’s findings and responses to it were shared across websites and on listservs within days of the presentation and publication. Sex workers viewed the interpretation of the data and the conclusions of the research as pathologizing. Ensuing discussions on several sex work listservs produced a litany of complaints about researchers in general and advice to treat all research and researchers with suspicion.

Another listserv discussion, leading up to meetings among sex work representatives in conjunction with the 1999 International Conference on AIDS, produced extensive dialogue and exchanges between sex workers and a small number of researchers about research methods, interpretation of results, dissemination of results, and the role of sex workers in research. The tone was one of suspicion of researchers, resulting in some researchers participating for only a brief exchange. These websites, listservs and electronic links between sex workers, sex worker organizations, and, at times, researchers and/or community workers, have resulted in a sharing of views, information and experiences, raising the awareness of both sex workers and researchers of the issues that are relevant to this area of study.

The historical foundation of distrust, together with local events that may have a negative impact on sex workers, and the heightened awareness of sex workers resulting from contacts and information facilitated through the internet, may lead to the repeated questioning of the intentions and plans of researchers by study participants. Questions often include:

- What’s in this for us? (i.e., How will this benefit sex workers?)
- How will the research be used?
- Whose agenda (i.e., theoretical and methodological frameworks), interpretations and perceptions will guide the work?
- Whose and what issues will be addressed in this research?

Sex workers, through their own experiences and through participation in organizations, listservs, and advocacy groups, establish insights into the dynamics of their work, its relationship to the communities in which they live and work, to the state, to regulatory authorities, and to the work of researchers. Researchers who approach them with “fixed agendas” and with preset research questions and hypotheses may be seen as outsiders who know little about what “really matters” and who care little about sex workers except as subjects in a study that will benefit the researchers. Those researchers who are most successful in conducting research on and with sex workers are those who are seen as knowledgeable about the realities of sex work from the perspective of sex workers, as working for and with sex workers, and as concerned with their needs and interests.

Funding Agency Priorities and Timetables

The priorities, interests, and timetables of funding agencies can impede research with sex workers. Most funding agencies have specific, limited priorities, interests and agendas. These may require researchers to strictly delimit the scope of their work in order to successfully compete for funding. The result is the segmentation or compartmentalization of sex work in a way that reflects neither how sex work is done nor the issues of concern to sex workers. For example, the proliferation of funding available for research related to HIV transmission and prevention can limit inquiry to condom use by sex workers, ignoring other factors and contexts of sex work that relate to vulnerability to HIV. Such emphasis also ignores other, more imminent, health risks for sex workers such as those associated with conditions of work or the workplace (Bindman and Doezema 1997; Maticka-Tyndale and Lewis 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al. in press; Pheterson 1993) including lack of protection from sexual assault, costuming requirements that either strain parts of the body (e.g. high heel shoes: Coughlin 1998; *Nursing Times* 1998) or inhibit the worker from carrying condoms (Hancock 1998; Holsopple 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al. 1999). In addition, sex workers may resist participating in a study of HIV transmission and/or condom use, because they feel they are being “scapegoated” for the spread of HIV.

The requirements of funded research include clearance by ethics committees that rarely include representation from study participants and adherence to accounting and reporting procedures and timelines that are set by funding agencies. Both of these requirements may work against maintaining the interest and participation of sex workers or sex worker organizations in a research project. The expectations and procedures of ethics committees may, in fact, impose requirements that work against the interests of sex workers. For example, the requirements for signed consent forms creates a file that identifies participants which can be subpoenaed. The requirement that restricts most research funding to incorporated organizations with a research mandate denies many sex worker organizations the right to design and control research on their own community and ignores the capacity for research that exists in some sex worker organizations. In addition, timetable requirements of funders may interfere with the active participation of sex workers in funded research projects. Specific problems arise with respect to the time required to prepare proposals; the time required for proposal review and feedback (with a potential requirement to rewrite and resubmit the proposal); timelines for reports and project completion which may not coincide with the natural rhythms of sex work (e.g., seasonality); the common requirement of re-application for funds and repeated cycles of proposal preparation and review between phases for multi-phase projects. All of these impose lengthy waiting periods and periods of uncertainty that interfere with maintaining relationships with sex workers and their organizations. To sex workers these can reflect a lack of understanding and concern for their lives and livelihood.

It is common for sex workers to experience major changes in their life circumstances on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Many are highly geographically mobile, moving to where work is available or shifting residence or work based on circumstance. The priorities and membership of community organizations may shift over the course of a few months. When individuals or organizations become involved in a research project it is because they feel the results will benefit them. When a project takes months to design, many months to move through the review

processes, months or years to complete, and involves what seem to be useless periodic reports to funders, it appears that funders and researchers are far more concerned with their own bureaucratic and academic requirements and rhythms than producing results that can speak to the needs of the communities they study.

Another issue pertaining to funders has to do with remuneration. It is important to let participants know that researchers realize that participants' time is valuable, that time spent on research represents lost income, and that they have a base of knowledge and expertise without which the project could not move forward. Financial remuneration helps to demonstrate this and may also provide an incentive to participate. When working with marginalized populations, such as sex workers, it is especially important to provide remuneration. Shaver, for example, has consistently paid her participants the going rate on the street for their time. In our studies of exotic dancers and escorts we paid sex workers between thirty-five and fifty dollars per interview. When participants indicated that they did not want to be interviewed in their homes, we also offered to pick them up and return them home at the end of the interview. Such expenses, however, are often difficult to rationalize to funders, who expect that research participation should be undertaken for the intrinsic value of contributing to knowledge. Ethics committees also express concerns that payment for contribution to research may compromise the requirement for *voluntary* participation.

Factors Internal to the Research Process

Research Agendas

When conducting research with marginalized people, one issue that can be paramount is whose agenda takes precedence. For researchers, the dominant goals (or agendas) are to complete the research in a methodologically rigorous manner, and to contribute to knowledge, with the researcher recognized for this contribution. Contributing to the knowledge that dominant institutions in society have about marginalized populations is rarely a priority for members of those populations. Their interests and agendas more often centre on survival. For those on the margins of society, survival and maintaining a livelihood may depend on keeping their strategies secret from dominant institutions. Thus, information that the researcher seeks may be that which people on the margins wish to keep secret. This raises the issue of whose agenda and needs, that of the researcher or that of the research participants, takes priority.

Sex workers and most researchers consulted in this project insisted that protecting participants from harm must take precedence over everything else. This requires careful consideration before releasing any information obtained in research and establishing methods to ensure that information or data will not be used in ways that could harm either study participants or members of the population they represent. Researchers must consider the possibility that they or their data could be subpoenaed or that publication of information about the activities of their research subjects could be used in a way that harms the population they represent. These possibilities must be taken into account when designing research. It is essential that records of names and other identifying information are not retained and that such information is removed from interview transcripts. Tapes of interviews should also be destroyed in order to avoid voice print identification. In addition, researchers must be prepared for the possibility that they may have to avoid publishing some of their research results, if the results would reveal information that

could harm participants. Several researchers interviewed for this project reported instances where they did not publish or disclose research findings because they could jeopardize the livelihood or well-being of sex workers.

When working in partnership with community representatives, the issue of whose agenda takes precedence becomes more complicated. With team research there is a very good likelihood that academics and community members may disagree on a number of research issues including: the goals of the study, how it should be carried out, who should do the research, if the data should be made public and if so, in what form and venue. These are issues that need to be discussed and agreed upon in advance in order to minimize conflict as the project progresses and to avoid the possibility of the team dissolving. The specific community partners, the nature of the study, and the history and nature of the relationship between the partner(s) all have an impact on the ability to come to a mutually satisfying agreement. As more funding agencies require research teams to include community partners, techniques for merging potentially competing agendas will need to be developed.

Part of the issue of whose agenda takes precedence has to do with who will benefit from the research. Academics are motivated to do research by both interest and job requirements. Most academics engage in research in fields they are interested in and thus, their agenda is to do research and contribute to knowledge in their area of interest. Doing research, getting research grants, and publishing results are also part of the expectations of their employers and requirements of their job. When working with marginalized populations, however, research needs to be about more than promoting academic careers, especially if the problem of choosing between publishing research findings in the name of career advancement and not publishing research findings because of the potential harm that could be incurred by research participants must be considered. Part of this issue is tied to the question of the purpose of research and the appropriate audience for research findings. Is research solely or primarily for the purpose of amassing knowledge that can be accessed and used by society's elites (e.g., academic researchers, policy makers, government leaders)? Or is the purpose of research to benefit communities or foster social change or social justice? The problem for academics is that it is the former purpose that universities and academic institutions have traditionally expected and rewarded. Only recently have we begun to see acknowledgement of the role of research in social change and social justice and a move toward recognizing such research as a legitimate academic endeavour.

Locating, Recruiting and Retaining Participants

Locating, recruiting, and retaining participation of sex workers in a research project are the issues that most directly lead to the label of *hard to reach*. The specific requirements for locating sex workers and gaining their agreement to participate in a research project vary depending on the research design and population of sex workers addressed in the project. Some research designs (e.g., epidemiological and survey research that quantify results) require a statistically representative sample that reflects both the diversity and relative size of different types of individuals in the population. Various methods for estimating the size of the population of sex workers or specific types of sex workers have been developed. These include counting the number of street prostitutes in sample locations over a period of time (McKeganey, et al. 1994), gathering information from municipalities that license certain sex work occupations (e.g., exotic

dancers, escorts, exotic masseuses), using police and agency estimates, estimating based on advertisements in newspapers, phone books, the internet and specialty publications (Allman 1999). However, since the demographic profile of sex workers, or types of sex workers, is only partially known, it is impossible to fully meet the requirements of representative sampling or even to assess the representativeness of a sample in a particular research project. Thus, research designs that are dependent on representative sampling face difficulties, with any research project of this type subject to queries about its external validity.

Other research designs require samples to reflect the diversity of the population or of a sub-population, but do not require quantitative parallels between the study sample and the population (e.g., many designs using qualitative, textual-based analysis, using purposive or theoretical sampling). This type of sample can be obtained if the researcher is able to expand sampling beyond a fixed network of sex workers. It requires an ever-growing network of contacts and awareness of the diversity of forms and locations of sex work and sex workers relevant to the topic of inquiry.

Whichever model is followed, locating a sample of sex workers and gaining their agreement to participate in research is the first challenge faced in any project. While outside sex workers can be located on streets and some inside workers at their place of employment (e.g., brothels, massage parlors, strip clubs), others, such as escorts or call girls, do not have a fixed place of employment. Each of these population subgroups presents its own challenge for access. Most research has involved outside workers with potential study participants located on the streets or in other locations that they are known to frequent. In Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, for example, contacts were made on streets known as high or low tracks (differentiated by the amount charged for different sex acts and the demographic profile of the women who work these locations), lobbies of low cost hotels, and in laundromats and coffee shops in the area of prostitute strolls (Shaver 1998). In Halifax, Montreal, and Calgary, contacts were made in drop-in centres and in street vans that cater to the needs of sex workers (e.g., Jackson 1998; Paquin 1998).

These strategies are useful in accessing outside sex workers, but are not effective in locating inside workers such as exotic dancers or escorts. To access inside workers who work in fixed locations, such as massage parlors or strip clubs, it may be necessary to have the approval of the owner or manager of the establishment in order to approach workers. The need for such approval is less likely to be required for entry to clubs and locations that are open to the public, where researchers can enter as part of the public.

In two studies of exotic dancers in southwestern Ontario (Lewis & Maticka-Tyndale 1998a; Orton 1997) researchers spent time in strip clubs talking to dancers and other club personnel as a way of establishing contact with potential study participants. When studying escorts, some researchers have attempted to contact escorts and agencies through their advertisements in the local media and through referrals from police and other escorts (Hancock 1998; Williams 1991). Whatever the strategy for initially locating study participants, in all studies, sample size grows as a result of referrals from participants or other community members (e.g., community nurses, drop-in centre workers, police) who “vouch” for the trustworthiness of the researchers and the relevance of the study. Such referrals only work to the benefit of the study if these contacts are trusted by sex workers. “Referral” from sources that are not trusted can

seriously damage newly forming relationships between researchers and sex workers.

Locating an initial core of participants and gaining their trust is the most important task in the early stages of a research project. The importance of and potential difficulty in finding this core can be seen in the experiences in a Calgary study (Williams 1991) and in an attempt to gather information and obtain involvement from escorts in a coalition of community agency in Windsor (Greene-Potomski 1998). The main recruitment strategy, in both cases, was relying on a single contact (in Calgary this was an agency owner, in Windsor a police representative) to provide referrals to agency owners and workers. In both cases, recruitment of participants was difficult and participation was less than originally planned and hoped for. While trust appeared to have been established with one or two workers, the samples in both studies never grew from this initial core. The researchers felt that the invisibility of escort work, with client contacts made by telephone and the work conducted in private locations, and the minimal contact that escorts had with each other, made it difficult to locate and build the trust of a sample of participants.

Despite the fact that exotic dancing is conducted in a public location, the difficulties in building a sample in our own study of exotic dancers were similar to the studies described above. The research team spent considerable time in clubs engaging in informal conversation with workers and had several club employees who “vouched” for the project and introduced team members to dancers. The sample, however, grew slowly and the data collection phase had to be extended beyond the original timeline by several months, in order to complete the sample.

Although we expected a similar experience in our escort study, especially since this population is less visible, our expectations were not realized. Three factors help account for the ease of sample recruitment for this study. First, our entry into the community was facilitated by the trust established with the local sex worker community. One escort in particular played an integral role in the project by agreeing to be interviewed and to vouch for the study team to other escorts. The first referral this woman made was to an escort agency owner. This owner took an interest in the project and vouched for the study to both escorts and other agency owners and involved the research team in a variety of community meetings, including meetings between the escort agency owners and the licensing officers, meetings of escort agency owners, and meetings of agency personnel. This owner’s actions facilitated the development of trust, eager community participation in the project, and a diverse sample. In addition, the degree of trust and interest we had established with exotic dancers in our earlier research and the number of dancers who either worked as escorts or had friends who worked as escorts also contributed to completing the sample. Women from the exotic dancer study not only volunteered to participate in the escort study, but distributed information about the study and referred friends and coworkers to the project. This snowballing of trust extended beyond the end of both the exotic dancer and escort studies as sex workers from outside the geographical region of the research continue to contact team members as they hear about the research.

The second factor that contributed to a high level of willingness on the part of escorts to participate in the study was the recent licencing of escorts and escort agencies in the City of Windsor. As a result of licencing, workers and agency owners gained a sense of legitimacy for their business. Some no longer felt a need to hide their work since, as one woman said, “it’s a legitimate business now. Why would the city license it if it weren’t?”

The final factor was the police investigations and raids on local agencies that occurred

several months after the start of our project. These raids resulted in the arrest and charging of several agency owners and their personnel. Escorts and agency owners were caught totally unaware by the raids. They did not understand how they could obtain a municipal license for their work and then be arrested for that same work. Some of the individuals who had already participated in our project contacted one of the researchers about the raid and arrests. We were invited to attend meetings of agency personnel, escort owners, and between owners and municipal licensing officers, where police tactics, arrests and charges were discussed. We were asked for help in understanding the laws and regulations that applied to this area of work. Information from the Sex Workers Alliance that helped clarify laws and jurisdictions was provided and attempts were made to facilitate contact with advocacy groups in other jurisdictions. Such sharing of knowledge demonstrated the trustworthiness of the researchers in a concrete way, further building the relationship with potential study participants.

Pamela Downes, a University of Saskatchewan researcher who is currently participating in a project with sex workers in Saskatoon, refers to the trust required to conduct research as *functional trust*--trust within the framework and purpose of the study. Functional trust is maximized through several strategies:

- Maintaining informant confidentiality.
- Demonstrating that the researcher “stands up for” sex workers and their interests to the authorities.
- Exhibiting reciprocity through doing things for the women such as looking after their children or assisting with some daily tasks.
- Using a participatory methodology where women are engaged in and invested in the project.
- Being prepared to make compromises and to face difficult issues in open discussion and collaboration with the women.
- Finding ways to ensure that ill-will (e.g., from police and local communities) is not transmitted through the researcher.
- Providing access to resources or acting as an advocate.
- Listening to the women.
- Sharing responsibility for the research with the participants. For example, by asking the women how to resolve various obstacles faced in the research process (Downes 1998).

Importance of First Projects

Researcher initiated projects are most successful when they are built on already existing relationships, often established as part of earlier projects and maintained after project completion. This type of research has been done in Windsor, Toronto and Montreal. Since later projects are built on the trust and rapport that are established in earlier work, it is essential that the usefulness of the research and its sensitivity to the needs and concerns of sex workers be clearly demonstrated in “first” projects. One of the key ingredients of researcher-initiated projects is a willingness on the part of researchers to represent the interests of sex workers whenever they are in contact with the media, police, city officials, and community representatives. In speaking or writing about sex work, researchers must be cautious to not only maintain the confidentiality of

individuals, but also the confidentiality of the sex worker community, by not revealing information that might expose individuals or the community to increased danger, state regulation or control, or harassment. Researchers who maintain their contacts with sex workers beyond the duration of specific projects and turn to sex workers to update their knowledge about what is happening on the streets, in the clubs, massage parlors, and in the hotels and motels when called on to speak publicly about sex work, clearly demonstrate their on-going interest and concern with the well-being of community members. They also demonstrate their recognition that the expertise about sex work and sex workers rests with the workers. Those researchers who fulfill these requirements are able to build on their earlier work. They are also more likely to be the ones contacted by sex workers and sex worker organizations for collaboration or advice when these organizations wish to initiate their own research.

Working with Sex Worker Organizations

Sex worker organizations exist in most large cities such as Montreal (e.g., Cactus Montreal, Stella), Toronto (e.g., Exotic Dancers' Alliance, Maggie's) and Vancouver (e.g., PEERS, Sex Workers' Alliance of Vancouver) and in some smaller cities, such as Victoria (e.g., PEERS) and Saskatoon. Some organizations, such as The Sex Worker's Alliance, are well networked nationally and internationally with contacts with other groups maintained primarily through websites, listservs, and the internet. Others, such as Exotic Dancers Alliance (EDA) are local organizations with limited contact outside their geographical region. Some organizations have produced resources, such as print media and websites, for sex workers. Examples include *Trials of the Trade*,⁷ which provides advice to Canadian sex workers about how to do their job without violating federal statutes, and *Making Sex Work Safe* (Network of Sex Work Projects 1997), which covers key issues related to sex work and the development of policies and strategies pertaining to sex work. These organizations play a variety of roles including advocacy, provision of services and education of both the public and workers. Some of the organizations consist exclusively or primarily of sex workers, with sex workers determining membership criteria and the direction of the organization. Others are composed of coalitions between sex workers and others (e.g., academics, community workers, public health or community nurses) with the collective determining membership and direction. As with any community organization, tensions and conflicts arise both between organizations when several exist in one location, and within organizations. Such conflicts often focus on membership criteria, the "politic" of an organization, its programmatic direction and/or its relationship with the larger community or community partners.

The question for researchers is whether to work *with* sex worker organizations, and if so, what the relationship will be between the organization(s) and researcher(s). In some locations, organizations perform the function of gatekeepers, making access to sex workers virtually impossible unless a researcher is working with the local organization. Working with sex worker organizations facilitates contact with and access to potential participants since the organization can speak for the trustworthiness of the researchers and the relevance of the project and can also provide contact with sex worker members. It can provide partners who are able to assist in

⁷ This document can be found at http://www.walnet.org/csis/legal_tips/trials/

interpreting results and developing insights into the broader context and history of sex work in a particular location. Sex worker organizations also provide guidance in producing and disseminating results in a form that is relevant and useful to sex workers.

Difficulties may, however, arise when working with organizations. Similar to the potential problems associated with using “gatekeepers” and “stars” to gain access (Neuman, 2000), aligning with a particular organization automatically aligns the research and researcher with the particular politics of that organization. While contacts and access to some sex workers is facilitated, contact and access may also be impeded where there are workers who do not subscribe to the political orientation of an organization. Where there are several organizations in a region, aligning with one may close the door to contact with workers who affiliate with the others. Researchers interviewed for this project recommended either avoiding forming alliances with any organizations, working with all organizations in a particular locale, or using methods to access study participants who are not part of the organizations in a particular region.

Even when formal organizations do not exist in a particular region, there are often informal networks of sex workers that function in similar ways to those described above. These networks may establish territorial boundaries and control certain regions of a city or informally provide services to and contacts with women along ethnic or work lines (e.g., aboriginal women, Black women, women originally from a particular region of the country, women who work only as exotic dancers). The researcher faces the same challenges in deciding how and whether to align with these informal networks as with formal organizations.

Some of the questions faced by researchers when working with sex worker organizations include:

- Which organization to work with.
- If working with several organizations that compete with each other, how to handle the pressures to align with only one.
- How to balance the tension between organizational desires to recruit more women and include women in the study who do not (and do not wish to) belong to an organization.
- Whether to be an advocate for a particular organization.
- How to handle the question of who speaks for sex workers, particularly when organizations “speak in different tongues.”

ETHICAL ISSUES

In addition to some of the ethical issues touched on above (e.g., problems with ethics committees’ requirements, decisions regarding whether to publish or not, etc.), when studying sex workers and the sex work industry two issues are paramount: protecting confidentiality and the roles and obligations of the researcher. How each of these issues is dealt with can enhance or inhibit the development of *functional trust*.

Confidentiality

Research with sex workers involves questions of confidentiality not only with respect to individuals and what they disclose in the course of research, but also with respect to the community of sex workers. At times, disclosure of information obtained in the course of research may have an effect on sex workers in a particular city or region. For example, sex workers use a variety of strategies to pass as non-sex workers. Such strategies make it possible for them to avoid police detection or harassment as well as harassment or stigmatization by members of the community in which they live or work. Disclosing such strategies could “blow the cover” of sex workers, making the strategies useless. Similarly, in a small city or locale it is difficult to hide the identity of business establishments. Consequently, discussing how business is conducted in a particular strip club, escort agency, or massage parlor could expose the identity of those working in a particular location.

Almost all researchers interviewed for this project have faced situations where police demanded that they disclose information obtained in the course of their research. One researcher told of being interviewed for 5 hours by the local police about her work. Journalists are also interested in research findings, often looking for the most sensational information and declining to place the issues addressed within the broader social and policy context in which sex work takes place. For example, the newspaper headlines following the release of our report *Escort Services in a Border Town: Literature and Policy Summary*, had less to do with the findings than with grabbing readers’ attention and selling papers.⁸

The researchers interviewed as part of this project reported several strategies for maintaining confidentiality of participants and of the sex worker community:

- Selective exclusion of findings from reports (verbal or published) and publications (popular or academic) that could impinge on or jeopardize the ability of sex workers to do their jobs or remain free of police involvement or community harassment.
- Consultation with sex workers who participated in the research on what and how to report research findings.
- Insisting that any media reports be previewed by the researcher prior to release.
- Purposefully restricting researcher knowledge of names and identities of research participants (e.g., knowing only street or stage names and retaining telephone numbers only long enough to make contact for research purposes).

The Researcher’s Role and Obligations

One issue that typically arises when conducting qualitative research is the researcher’s role in terms of providing information to participants beyond that which is mandated for conducting the study (e.g., their rights as research participants, the nature of the study, etc.). Researchers are often perceived as experts by those they study, as a result they are often turned to for information or advice. When this happens a variety of questions arise, such as:

- What is the role of the researcher?

⁸ See for example: “Influx of U.S. visitors risk to escorts” *Windsor Star*, October 4, 1999

- Should researchers solely collect and analyze data, or can they provide information to their participants or act as political agents for them?

These issues are paramount when conducting research with sex workers. In our study of exotic dancers we were often asked how dancers could protect themselves from health risks, especially sexually transmitted infections, what their legal rights were, how to avoid being the target of police actions, etc. As noted above, in the escort study we were asked to provide information to agency employees regarding the laws pertaining to sex work. In an effort to meet the needs of the community and to further enhance trust and rapport, we researched these questions and provided the requested information. The legal information we gave was obtained primarily from the project's legal consultant and legal information made available in the *Trials of the Trade* pamphlets available on the Commercial Sex Information Service website (http://www.walnet.org/csis/legal_tips/trials/). The health information was based on consultations with sex worker organizations, clinicians and health educators and the publication *Making Sex Work Safe* (Overs & Longo 1997).

In addition to being directly asked for advice, another issue that can present itself is whether the researcher should offer unsolicited advice to research participants, particularly in cases where it is clear that the information could protect them from harm. In the area of police-sex worker relationships this issue may arise when a researcher becomes aware of certain police practices that could impinge on the work and lives of sex workers, or the way police use certain information in court. In the area of health this may involve information about specific health risks and health maintenance strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

Although sex workers have often been defined as hard to reach for the purposes of research, the experiences of some researchers illustrate that it is possible to develop relationships of trust between researchers and sex workers that can facilitate data collection and the successful completion of research projects. Recognition needs to be paid to the needs of those being studied and their knowledge and expertise in the area. Researchers interested in studying sex work should consider modifying their research models in order to involve sex workers more in the research process (including deciding on the goals of the project, the design of research instruments, the interpretation of research findings, and the content of research products). This can be achieved through moving to a partnership model and developing working relationships with sex workers and sex worker organizations. By bringing community members onto projects, researchers facilitate access and trust, increase the knowledge base of the research team and the learning opportunities for study participants, researchers and sex workers alike. Bringing community members onto the team can also enhance the sensitivity of researchers, making them more cognizant of the unique ethical issues that may arise in the course of the study and providing advice on ways to deal with these issues in advance. However, such collaborations are difficult.

Funding agencies can help facilitate the formulation of research partnerships and the successful completion of research projects by attending to the recommendations of researchers in the area. Strict agency priorities, interests, timetables and rules only serve to bind the hands of researchers. They can limit the type of relationships that can be developed with community members. They can also limit the scope of information that can be gathered, including the ability

to pursue important areas of inquiry, and jeopardize relationships/partnerships established with community members by having long grant review processes.

Sex workers and other marginalized people *are* hard to reach, and of necessity must continue to be so. The very nature of living and working on the margins of society requires a state of constant watchfulness, caution and scepticism in order to survive and maintain safety and well-being. The watchfulness and cautious scepticism must be applied not only to agents of the state, such as police, but also to researchers whose work may purposefully or inadvertently jeopardize the safety and well-being of those on the margins. Only when research works to decrease marginalization will it be of obvious benefit to those it studies. This necessitates attention to the consequences of research for those who are the focus of investigation.

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