

SPECIAL SYMPOSIUM

Doing It in Public: Dilemmas of Images, Voice, and Constructing Publics in Public Sociology on Sex Work

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This study describes the use of traditional public sociology as a method of recruitment for organic public sociology research with sex workers. Drawing on their grounded research experience, the authors discuss the issues of representation and framing of the research that arise when engaging in public research with multiple stakeholder publics. Specifically, professional publics may act as gatekeepers to subaltern groups and publicly engaged research risks reproducing existing power inequities and marginalization. However, traditional public sociology can be a tool to engage with subaltern groups and to construct a public where one did not exist; here we examine the complexities, the possibilities, and pitfalls of constructing publics.

Keywords: public sociology, sex work, methodology, gatekeepers, recruitment, organic public sociology, traditional public sociology

In his 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Michael Burawoy called for the renewal of public sociology and ignited a hailstorm of debate in the discipline. In his address and writings on the subject, he outlined quadrant typology of sociology, including professional sociology, policy sociology, critical sociology, and public sociology (Burawoy 2005). He then further distinguished between traditional public sociology and organic public sociology. Traditional public sociology positions the sociologist as an expert who constructs sociological knowledge and presents that knowledge to a general, invisible, and passive public (Burawoy 2005). In organic public sociology, the sociologist works closely with an engaged and bounded

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public to generate knowledge for the purposes of social change (Burawoy 2005). This is often, though not always, linked to participatory-action styles of grounded, activist research (Collins 2007; Basok 2002; Horowitz 2009; Noy 2007). Burawoy (2005:8) pointed out that “traditional and organic public sociologies are not antithetical but complementary” and that they should inform one another. He suggested that “in the best circumstances, traditional public sociology frames organic public sociology, while the latter disciplines, grounds, and directs the former” (Burawoy 2005:8).

In this study, we suggest and provide an example of another possible relationship between traditional and organic public sociologies – specifically, the use of traditional public sociology *as a method* for identifying and engaging with relevant publics in the process of organic sociology. In the next section, we briefly discuss the literature on organic and traditional sociology and explore the importance of recognizing the various competing publics who may engage with organic public sociology. We then draw on our own research with sex workers in rural Ontario, Canada to provide a grounded example of the issues raised by doing sociological research in public.

TRADITIONAL AND ORGANIC PUBLIC SOCIOLOGIES AND PUBLIC(S)

Burawoy’s vision of the typology and “division of labor” in sociology has been the subject of much critique and debate (see Calhoun 2005; Christensen 2013; Ericson 2005; McLaughlin, Kowalchuk, and Turcotte 2005; Nickel 2010; Tittle 2004). Some critics have argued that the typology is indistinct and that Burawoy’s delineations between the types of sociology are unhelpful due to significant overlaps in practice (Horowitz 2009); others have questioned the idea that sociology as a discipline is not inherently public (Ericson 2005). Feminist scholars, in particular, argue that the parlance of public sociology is merely a new moniker for the critically engaged work that has always been their endeavor (Collins 2007; Creese, McLaren, and Pulkingham 2009; Hays 2007; Nelund 2014).

Given the sheer breadth of the literature and debates on public sociology, Burawoy’s distinction between traditional and organic public sociologies has been reproduced throughout the literature with surprisingly little critique or engagement¹ (see, e.g. Adjoran 2013; Burawoy 2009; Glenn 2007; Turner 2005). Most use the concepts of traditional and organic public sociologies largely as Burawoy first outlined, making a clear distinction between a unidirectional public sociology in which the sociologist uses a public platform to promote her expert knowledge to a passive general (or specific) public, and more relational, community engaged research aimed at the co-construction of knowledge and social change. The possibilities for useful intersections of these approaches to public sociology have not been explored in any substantive way. One notable exception is Stoecker (N.D.), who argues that traditional and organic public sociologies are fundamentally contradictory. He argues that traditional public sociology continues to invest the sociologist with the power of

knowledge construction, differing from professional sociology only in the location and clarity of its publications and knowledge dissemination.

The relationship between traditional and organic public sociologies becomes salient when one begins to consider the concept of the public and to think about who or what exactly constitutes “the public(s)” in the context of community based research. Explorations of the multiplicity of publics in the literature are primarily theoretical and concentrate on differentiating student publics from general publics and more narrowly defined stakeholder publics (see Gans 2016; Hanemaayer and Schneider 2014b; Nelund 2014). Substantive examples of organic public sociology in which multiple stakeholder groups are evident often do not disentangle the complexities and ethics of simultaneously engaging these publics and the challenges that it poses for the researcher (see Bucklaschuk 2014; Noy 2007). Taking up Stoecker’s (N.D.) critique that traditional public sociology is antithetical to organic public sociology in that it reproduces the researcher’s privilege to lay claim to the production of knowledge, it is important to explore exactly how the process of public sociology might reproduce inequities by catering to publics in power, and how a reflexive organic public sociology could be counter-hegemonic.

The politics of organic public sociology are often more complex than what Bura-woy (2004, 2005) has called “professional sociology,” conducted at arms’ length from interest groups and stakeholders. It is not a given that the public(s) with whom the sociologist wishes to engage will be interested or invested in sociological concerns; the sociologist’s desire to conduct anti-oppressive and collaborative research does not guarantee that she will be successful in accessing and gaining the buy-in of the group (see Basok 2002; Bosworth, Hoyle, and Dempsey 2011). Increasingly, members of such groups resist involvement in research that does not appear to offer a direct or immediate benefit (Basok 2002; Mesny 2014), but participation may also be deterred by privacy concerns and possible stigmatization, or by professional gatekeepers who do not see the value of the proposed research (Bosworth, Hoyle, and Dempsey 2011). As Bucklaschuk (2014) argues, marginalized publics who might benefit from involvement in organic public sociology may also, by virtue of their marginalized status, be most difficult for the public sociologist to engage. She points out that there are “mechanisms of social control that contribute to the continued marginalization of [such groups], which keeps them in precarious circumstances and impacts how they are able to act to change the conditions of their lives...” (Bucklaschuk 2014:110). These same mechanisms of social control also constrain researchers’ abilities to connect and involve marginalized groups in action-oriented research. The literature to date has addressed little to do with the dilemmas of navigating organic public sociology with marginalized groups in a context with competing frames and interests.

In this study, we discuss our experiences using traditional public sociology to recruit participants for a needs assessment of sex workers in a semi-urban and rural county of southern Ontario. Traditional public sociology engagement with media and community, broadly defined, provides opportunity to frame social issues of

concern and raise local awareness of the experiences of subaltern groups. It may also prove to be an effective tool for the sociologist who wishes to access a less cohesive, marginalized public for the purposes of a more organic public sociology. In short, we would argue that we used traditional public sociology and engagement with the general public to assist in identifying and constituting a local public of sex workers in our community, where none previously existed. In recounting responses to our research, primarily from social and health service providers, we provide a grounded example of stakeholder publics and unpack the complexities of doing public sociology in a milieu with competing claims about the nature of the issue and multiple publics with varying access to social capital.

GOING PUBLIC — CHOOSING PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

We did not begin our community-based research with the intent to use traditional public sociology as a method of recruitment; rather, we drew on this approach to solve a methodological problem. In 2014, Hannem was approached by REAL (Resources, Education, Advocacy for Local Sex Work),² an inter-agency working group whose mandate is to educate social service and health professionals about the realities of the sex industry and to work toward more inclusive and respectful community services. REAL serves a small city (population 95,000) in southwestern Ontario and the surrounding, sparsely populated, rural counties. While REAL is a progressive feminist voice in a conservative community, it is also a “top-down” organization comprising social and health service professionals and, at the time, no active or former sex workers were involved. The sex industry in this region is highly stigmatized, largely invisible, and there is no collective voice to advocate for sex workers’ needs and rights. REAL ascertained that they needed input from people doing sex work in the region to determine what was required to improve conditions for people in the local sex industry — enter the sociologist. We obtained research funding and set about trying to figure out how to identify and connect to local sex workers.

From the beginning of the research, we were aware that the biggest challenge would be convincing sex workers in the community to participate. Without a sex worker rights organization (like Maggie’s, Stella, or POWER in the urban Canadian centers), or an established outreach program as a point of contact, recruiting sex workers to participate in interviews posed a methodological dilemma (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Shaver 2005). This research is not a participatory action project in the sense that it is not driven by sex workers themselves; such an approach would have been impossible, given the lack of established network or self-identified community of sex workers in the region. However, we support the position of the international sex worker rights community with respect to research, which encourages awareness of researcher privilege and emphasizes that sex workers should be at the center of all research on their community. We committed to involving sex workers in the project and consulting the participants on the findings. Like Ruth Horowitz’s (2009, 2011) work with medical licensing boards, this research sits at the uneasy intersection of

professional sociology and community-engaged advocacy work. We characterize this research as organic public sociology for its strong ties to a community (in this case, to a number of engaged, feminist, social service providers and sex worker rights activists) and explicit concern with using sociological research to direct and promote social change. Indeed, the impetus for the project came from REAL's concern about the needs of individuals doing sex work in our community.

Through existing contacts, the first author hired the second author, a sex worker rights activist and graduate student, and we set about brainstorming ideas to connect with local sex workers and draw their attention to the research. Tigchelaar specializes in creative arts activism, runs her own alternative theater company, and has been involved in many creative projects, including research. Playing on the sex worker rights slogan "Sex Work is Real Work," she designed a poster campaign featuring photos of sex workers and allies dressed as sex working characters from films. The poster featured five Hollywood characters, the slogan, a description of the research, and contact information (see Figure 1).³ The individual characters also appeared on postcards — on the back of each was a brief description of the character's (fictional) story followed by the tagline "what's your REAL experience ... ?" For example, a card featuring a dark-haired woman in lingerie and a fur coat, holding a glass of champagne described: "In the film *Butterfield 8*, a Manhattan call girl (Elizabeth Taylor) has a tragic affair with a rich married man (Lawrence Harvey): What's your REAL experience being an indoor sex worker?" (see Figure 2). Urban sex workers and allies volunteered to pose for this campaign, costumed and professionally photographed to reproduce Hollywood images of sex workers in an intentionally ironic way. We were pleased with the resulting images, but did not anticipate the reactions that this campaign would draw.

We made the choice to engage in a highly visible participant recruitment campaign incorporating public education events, media interviews, and social media, in addition to the posters/postcards. The purpose of this was threefold: first, to attract the attention of individuals doing sex work in the community who might not otherwise hear of the research or notice the posters; second, to introduce ourselves and the idea of the research to potential participants by positioning our team as nonjudgmental allies; and third, to open a conversation among the general public about sex work in the local community, priming the community, and particularly social service and health professionals, to receive and engage with the research findings. Drawing on Gans' (2016:4) definition of public sociology as "any sociological writing or other product created by sociologists that obtains the attention of some of the publics that make up the general public," we characterize the totality of our recruitment strategies as a form of public sociology.

The timing of the research was fortuitous, coming on the heels of a very public debate and controversy over changes to Canada's prostitution laws, creating space for attention to these issues in our community. We used public events to discuss the legal changes to prostitution in Canada and to promote the research initiative. Drawing on findings of previous qualitative research and her analysis of the changing



FIGURE 1. Recruitment Poster Depicting Real Sex Workers and Allies Costumed as Hollywood Images of Sex Workers



FIGURE 2. Example of Recruitment Postcard, Front and Back

prostitution laws (see Bruckert and Hannem 2013), Hannem engaged in traditional public sociology; she gave public talks about sex work in Canada and highlighted the research at the annual general meeting of the local Sexual Assault Crisis Centre, and at the annual Take Back the Night rally. We staffed a booth at the local Pride festivities, educating people about the changes to Canada's prostitution laws, talking about sex work in our community, and sharing information about the research. Tigchelaar organized two free public performances of live theater on the topic of sex work — one hosted at the university and the other at a local bar — followed by discussion of the legal changes and our research. We were fortunate to connect with a reporter who was keenly interested in the research; he covered the initial publicity when REAL was awarded research funding and he responded to our requests to cover the public events. His interest and the spin-off attention to the issue of sex work in our community resulted in three different news articles in local media about the research (see Brantford Expositor 2015; Gray 2015; Marion 2015). Five of the participants mentioned that they first heard about the research because they or a friend saw an article in the newspaper.

The first indication that the recruitment campaign might be unexpectedly controversial came through interaction with a UPS delivery person. The posters and postcards were ordered from an internet print service and delivered to Hannem's home; the company affixes a copy of the item ordered to the outside of the shipping

box so the customer can determine the contents of the box and accept delivery of the correct shipment. The first author's partner was at home when the posters were delivered; he answered the door and the middle-aged UPS delivery man thrust the boxes at him, demanding, "what the hell is this?! This is stupid." Having neither the patience nor the comfort to educate the man about our research, he responded, "I don't suppose it's any of your business," and signed for the boxes. The delivery-person left, muttering under his breath and shaking his head. We are uncertain whether the source of his concern was the slogan, *Sex Work is Real Work*, or the concept of the research itself, but the incident resulted in a complaint to UPS, and alerted us that some people might react strongly to the posters.

Two days later, we unveiled the recruitment campaign at the local Pride celebration to an overwhelmingly positive response. People who dropped by our table admired the posters and postcards and talked to the team about the research. One young woman gushed, "These postcards are so beautiful! Can I have one of each?!" We dismissed the UPS guy as a one-off and started to deliver posters and postcards around town and to the surrounding villages; the people with whom we spoke (nurses, doctors, receptionists, pharmacists, and counselors) appeared to agree that the research was a good idea. However, two days after the initial distribution of posters, Hannem received a lengthy email with the subject line "Sex work is real work??" The anonymous author stated that the health clinic where she worked had received one of our posters. She wrote that the campaign appeared to be "advertising prostitution" and that no one would bother to read the fine print and find out about the research. She suggested, "Personally, I think it would be more effective if the poster said 'Sex work is REAL' (implying it exists, rather than it is an appropriate and recognized job as your current slogan suggests)." She went on to reveal her own biases about the 'kind of people' who do sex work:

The other thing I did not understand about the advertisement is that the people are dressed like go-go dancers and cowboys. Most sex workers look nothing like the people on your website and flyer. They are usually below poverty line, homeless; and more than likely have a substance abuse problems (*sic*). They cannot afford fancy dresses or cowboy outfits; it's completely unrealistic ... Needless to say I believe you should approach the subject 100% differently. I don't think this will be effective at all, especially with the crowd you are trying to target. (Anonymous, personal communication, July 9, 2015)

When the research assistants returned to the health clinics not a single poster was visible. Receptionists and front-line staff told the research assistants that the posters "did not send the right message" and that because they served many clients (most of whom are not sex workers), the posters were not appropriate to display in their waiting rooms or offices. Several mentioned that they had shown the poster to their clients (who were not sex workers) and that these individuals agreed that the posters were "offensive."

A member of REAL took posters to an inter-agency roundtable to request assistance in publicizing the research. The director of an outreach center serving street-involved and marginal youths remarked that she would be uncomfortable displaying the poster; she asked if she could “add a question mark after the slogan? As in, ‘Sex Work is Real Work? Or maybe not?’ Because it’s questionable, and we don’t want to promote it.” As we continued to hear stories like this from the research team and members of REAL, we began to question our approach to recruitment. On one hand, the campaign originated with sex workers and clearly did appeal to them. Although the campaign reflected an urban, activist sensibility toward sex work, many sex workers who participated in the research commented how much they liked the poster and postcards. On the other hand, there was clear resistance from the professional community to the narrative that “Sex Work is Real Work” and to the representations of sex workers (all irony aside). We considered creating what we jokingly referred to as an alternative “classy” poster, without images, and offering agencies their choice of posters. Although creating another poster was a reasonable option for the research, we recognized that by capitulating to the professionals’ critiques of the images we would be privileging their perceptions of sex workers *at the expense of sex workers’ own self-representations*. In effect, the sex workers who imagined and participated in the creation of that poster campaign were being silenced by the professionals’ refusal to approve of their own representations. The professionals couched their censorship in the guise of being helpful to the research, arguing that the posters would not resonate with the drug-addicted and homeless sex workers they served.

Representation in Sex Work Research and Constituting Publics

The professional response to our research recruitment materials is a microcosm of the kinds of feminist politics that play out globally around sex work every day. There is a clear bifurcation between those who view sex work as a form of labor, recognizing that individuals experience their engagement with the industry in diverse, and often contradictory ways, and those who view all sex work (prostitution) as violence against women and all sex workers as victims, regardless of their personal definition of the situation (Hannem and Bruckert 2014). Any research on sex work must contend with these competing claims. However, the use of media and public sociology to frame research initiatives makes attention to these narratives even more imperative. Specifically, the political and ideological framing of the issue shapes how individuals will respond to the research and whether or not they will identify with the issue and choose to participate.

In defining publics as “people who are themselves involved in conversation,” Burawoy (2005:7) himself notes that “we [sociologists] can participate in their creation as well as their transformation” (p. 8). Bucklaschuk (2014) takes up the ethics of engaging with marginalized groups who “cannot constitute publics that are visible, thick, active, and already involved in conversation” due to a lack of “social or

economic resources” (p. 115). She cautions that there are like to be consequences to engaging in organic public sociology with marginalized groups and thereby “making invisible groups visible” (Bucklaschuk 2014:109), and we agree. The consequences may be positive or negative, but what is clear is that the process of constituting public(s) and drawing individuals into conversation about their private troubles to define a social issue is not a neutral process.

We used traditional public sociology and public recruitment to draw people into conversation about sex work in our community, thereby constituting the public(s) who would engage with our research and shape the representation of the issue of sex work. The framing of the research played an important role in shaping the eventual contours of those public(s) — and particularly the local sex-working public who participated in the study and contributed their voices to our research. The framing of “sex work is real work” would likely exclude individuals who, while engaged in prostitution, defined themselves as victims or as trafficked. As REAL defines sex work as distinct from human trafficking (which implies coercion), this deliberate framing focuses on individuals who view their activities as labor — *a voluntary means of providing for him/herself*. This choice reflects REAL’s perspective that individuals who define their experience as trafficking or coerced sexual exploitation face very different challenges than those who consider themselves to be engaged in sex work. However, this should not be taken to mean that understanding sex work as a form of labor frames it as necessarily empowering or positive, any more than work as, for example, a barista or housecleaner should be understood as empowering. Many individuals in low-status occupations have ambivalent attitudes toward their employment — they may not like their job, but they do it because they have considered their (limited) options and decided that this is the best option available to them. This understanding of sex work resonated with the experiences of many of our participants.

Ultimately, we recruited and interviewed twenty-eight current and former sex workers; twenty-four were women and four were men (all cisgender). Eighteen participants were active sex workers at the time of the interview; ten were inactive or were in the process of moving into mainstream employment or alternative sources of income. The participants’ ages ranged from nineteen to fifty-three with an average age of thirty-two years. They had experience with a variety of different types of sex work including REAL-based work (nine), indoor (in-call/out-call) escorting (seventeen), massage parlor (three), and erotic dancing (three).⁴

In total, our research relied on thirty semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in local sex work (twenty-eight current and former sex workers and two third-party managers), as well as twelve interviews with social service and health professionals in the community. The interviews, lasting between forty-five minutes and three hours each, were transcribed, anonymized, and subjected to line-by-line thematic coding. We began with a predetermined thematic coding scheme that drew from the themes in the interview guide and but also created emergent codes as salient concept or themes were discovered in the data. We recoded to ensure that emergent

themes were captured across the data and to collapse and expand related categories. Our final analysis presented our participants' experiences entering the industry and the diversity of their locations within the industry with respect to class, sector, and intersections of marginality. We discussed the everyday experiences of parenting, the complex intersections of drug use and sex work, the potential and experiences of violence and abuse in the industry, and the unique concerns of sex workers involved in transient work in rural communities. We also presented sex workers' positive and negative experiences with police and with social service and health professionals, describing the gaps in service and needs in our community.

Although nearly all of the twenty-eight sex worker participants in our research acknowledged significant structural constraints on their employment options, including drug use, lack of education, lack of mainstream work experience, criminal records, or a soft job market, they all defined sex work as a means of providing for themselves or augmenting their income. None reported that they were currently in a coercive situation (although five had previously been). Only three participants defined sex work as a positive, empowering experience (for more information on the methodology and findings, see Hannem 2016). We suspect that had we advertised to interview victims of sex trafficking, we would have recruited a very different group of people with very different experiences (and we may attempt this in the future). However, as REAL's goal is to improve services for people engaged in sex work, our constituted public met the methodological need of the research. We have no way of knowing how many individuals saw the research recruitment posters but did not respond because the "sex work is real work" slogan did not reflect their experience and they did not feel part of our target group.

Becker (1967) admonished sociologists to make transparent "the limits of what we have studied" (p. 247) by acknowledging "whose side we are on." The use of public sociology and public recruitment methods can make the political leanings and limitations of research very clear, opening up space for critique. Like Grauerholz and Baker-Sperry (2007) (following Becker 1967), we have noticed a troubling phenomenon whereby research which supports status-quo and "common sense" beliefs about society is not criticized as ideological or biased, regardless of the methodological rigour of the study (or lack thereof). Conversely, research which challenges the dominant paradigm is often framed as "advocacy research" and may be dismissed as ideologically driven⁵ (Becker 1967; Grauerholz and Baker-Sperry 2007), even if the data collection and analysis conform to the standards of "professional sociology."⁶

Beyond these challenges to legitimacy, which are common to much critical, counter-hegemonic research, studying sex work through public sociology raises its own unique issues and requires careful balancing of the concerns of participants, relevant professional publics, and the researcher's own ethics and commitments. Pertinent to this discussion are questions of voice and privilege; the impact of research framing on access to participant publics; and concerns about the impact of research visibility on public perceptions of sociological legitimacy.

Voice, Privilege, and Multiple Publics

A first concern is the question of voice and privilege and who is able to define perspectives on sex work in our community. Our research had three key and distinct publics: (1) the REAL committee, who initiated the project; (2) local sex workers, whose experiences and realities we wished to document; and (3) social service and health professionals and police, who we hope will use the knowledge created by the project to improve their responsivity to sex workers. REAL initiated the project in consultation with Hannem; however, we were jointly committed to involve active sex workers in shaping the direction of the research. In the absence of a local, politically-active sex work community, our research team drew on the perspectives of urban sex workers and sex worker rights organizations and research in other Canadian contexts to frame our representation of sex work and our approach to engaging local sex workers. In designing the research and recruitment methods, we did not consult with social service and other professionals in our community who serve sex workers among their clients. Even REAL, itself comprising local social service and health professionals, was not involved in the creation of recruitment materials, except to provide tacit approval of the approach.

We decided not to solicit feedback from professionals because, first, we were concerned that their understandings of the local sex industry might be limited to the most visible sector (i.e. street-based prostitution) and the most marginalized workers. Second, the workers' perceptions of their interactions with professionals were of interest in our research. This methodological choice was not, in itself, an error, but our failure to consider the ability of these professionals to stand as *de facto* gatekeepers to recruitment meant that we would be confronted with their concerns and required to respond to justify our strategy.

The anonymous e-mail writer from the health clinic was partly correct in her stereotypes – our analysis of the data shows that the sex industry in our region is comparably more working-class and the number of respondents who connected their sex work to drug use is proportionally greater than data from many urban centers in Canada. However, this did not appear to prevent sex workers from appreciating and connecting to the recruitment material. A gay male escort, who reported that he did sex work to support his drug use and who lived with precarious housing and poverty, told the researcher, “I saw that poster and just loved it!! It’s so beautiful and it caught my attention immediately! Do you have an extra one I can have??” It appears that sex workers, like everyone else, find appeal in stylized (and even idealized) images which present the “best side” of how they see themselves. Just as no one hangs family portraits depicting domestic disputes or children’s tantrums, sex workers do not want to see images of the negative aspects of their job and experiences. Presenting this perspective to those who cling to stereotypes requires confronting unidimensional and stigmatized views of people engaged in sex work.

Nelund (2014) critiques the erasure of power relations by a public criminology/sociology which assumes that all members of the public (including academics

and their subjects) are equal in a democratic sense. In fact, hierarchies of power carry over into sites of organic public sociology and sociologists who engage with marginalized stakeholder groups must take care not to speak for or over the community whose interests we are researching (Nelund 2014; Noy 2007). This requires the preservation of space for self-representation and refusing to allow their voices to be dismissed by other stakeholder groups. As the excerpt below illustrates, our response to the anonymous email-writer's description of her substance-abusing clients was an attempt to disrupt her stereotypes and to position even those who appear to fit the stereotype as complex and reflexive agents:

While there are, as in many marginal labor markets, certainly individuals who are in the industry because they do not have access to a range of other choices, it is important for those who advocate for sex worker rights to recognize the diversity of situations and choices that may lead an individual to sex work. The campaign is designed to attract the attention of those who see what they do as work — as a means of providing for themselves, whatever their circumstances [...] As to the images — this also was a stylistic choice intended to represent the stereotypes of sex work in our society. Each of the models is a real sex worker or ally who is costumed as a character from a movie about sex work. Each of them would be appalled to be seen as a victim or the practitioner of an illegitimate and inappropriate form of labor. Each of them would be reluctant to use any social service where they were being framed in such a way, or viewed as not "real" prostitutes because their experience doesn't correspond to someone's vision of what sex work is. They all feel it is an appropriate form of labor for them, as does the woman who created the campaign. The reality is that sex work has many faces in our community. (Author, personal communication, July 9, 2015)

Continued difficulties with professional stakeholders and gatekeepers who refused to display our posters eventually resulted in the decision to create a nondescript poster which conformed to standard expectations of a research recruitment ad. The "classy" poster, as we called it, had no bold images or representations of sex work, only the shadow of a red umbrella⁷ behind the text. We did, however, maintain the Sex Work is Real Work slogan across the top. This poster was deemed more acceptable by most of the social and health service agencies we approached; when we offered professionals a choice of either poster for their offices they always chose the text-only poster. Only a few continued to object to the framing of "sex work is real work." Thus, we were able to continue recruitment and gain greater buy-in from local professionals.

Creating a second poster was, methodologically and ideologically, a double-edged sword. On one hand, we were complicit in permitting professionals to silence some sex workers' representations of themselves, but on the other hand, the imageless poster enabled the research to be more widely publicized and to reach more sex workers, who shared their stories with us. We chose to prioritize access to the stories of workers' everyday experiences over the political/activist voice of the sex worker rights movement and our desire to respect the autonomy of sex workers to represent themselves as they choose.

Research Framing and Access to Publics

A second concern raised by our use of traditional public sociology as method was the impact of media representation and publicity on access to our critical reference group (local sex workers), and also on perceptions of the research/researchers in the sex working community, writ large. Shortly after launching the research, Tigchelaar staged a public performance of activist theater focused on representations of sex workers, which was attended by members of the public and local media. Hannem gave several media interviews about the project and discussed issues of the changing laws around sex work in Canada; the researchers' contact information was provided at the end the articles, which appeared in local papers (print and online).

As discussed in the literature on public sociology, engaging media to publicize sociological research is often a gamble; despite carefully crafted sound bites and prepared messaging, the researcher ultimately cedes control of the representation to the journalist (see Grauerholz and Baker-Sperry 2007). In attempting to make complex social issues accessible to the general public, key nuances may be lost in translation (Sprague and Laube 2009).

In this respect, the use of traditional public sociology as method is risky when the sociologist engages the media to present the framing for her research to the public and to her potential participants. We were fortunate to connect with one journalist who provided excellent coverage that was true to our desired framing. However, although the first author was careful in all her communications with journalists, one article by another journalist did not quite capture the destigmatizing labor frame of the research. The article referred to the sex workers' clients as "johns" and emphasized the need for specific social services and counseling for sex workers (as opposed to the messaging of reducing stigma and a more general improvement of conditions for people doing sex work) (Gray 2015).

The media coverage certainly provided a means of engaging local sex workers — almost half of the participants told the researchers that they (or a friend or family member) had seen an article about the research in the paper or online. Although Hannem was concerned about the tone of the article mentioned above, it did not appear to bother participants or local individuals. It did, however, raise the eyebrows of more politically engaged sex work activists in other communities who saw the article posted on social media. One individual commented "Do people really want counseling and support, or a tax number and no judgement?" Hannem responded to clarify her position and the emphasis on inclusive community; the commenter ultimately accepted our position. However, this exchange made clear the possible dangers of media spin to the researcher's credibility with the sex work community. The same article was, conversely, well received by local social service and health professionals, positioning the research in a frame that many found more palatable. Members of the general public, including Hannem's

neighbors, also gave positive feedback on the news article and the idea of the research.

Exchanges with various stakeholder publics underscored the importance of the research framing and the dilemma of simultaneously engaging multiple publics with contradictory perspectives. The reflexive sociologist finds herself carefully treading the line so as not to wholly alienate either group — aware that stakeholder perspectives on the research/researcher affect the ability to access and engage participants, and also the eventual community response to the findings and the likelihood of impacting policy and practice. However, as Glenn (2009) argued, “a good public sociologist must be willing, when necessary, to disagree with, and thus incur the disapproval of, persons who share his or her goals” (p. 140). Thus, a public sociologist working with a marginalized community must be willing to risk relationships with other, more powerful, stakeholder groups to remain true to the voices she seeks to represent and the findings that the data offer (see Noy 2007). Our continued use of the Sex Work is Real Work slogan in the face of professional resistance demonstrated our commitment to the sex work community and to the destigmatization of sexual labor.

If a good public sociologist is willing to jeopardize her standing with powerful stakeholder groups for the sake of research integrity, she must also be willing to recognize the heterogeneity of experiences and to accurately reflect the data, even if it troubles the ideological or political claims of the critical reference group. For example, many sex worker rights activists have been very critical of exit-based outreach programs which provide services to individuals who wish to leave the sex industry. This “rescue industry” is viewed as highly stigmatizing and dismissive of the experiences of active sex workers who choose to remain in the industry (Agustín 2007). However, the data from our research indicate that many apolitical, everyday sex workers see the need for support services and resources to assist those seeking to transition into mainstream employment or to find alternative income sources; these services are not currently available in our community. Indeed, many participants told us that they would choose to leave sex work if they had support and other viable opportunities. Thus, one recommendation of our research is the development of a program with specific assistance for individuals who wish to transition out of sex work into mainstream work — recognizing that many sex workers in our community find themselves with few choices (see Hannem 2016). However, understanding the widespread discomfort with exit-based services in the sex working community positions us to, at the same time, urge that services and resources for sex workers not be restricted to those who wish to leave the industry. The resulting message is one that carefully balances the often competing needs of the most marginal workers with the desire for autonomy and agency. However, ultimately it is local policy makers and professionals who will determine how and if they will implement these recommendations. This leads us to a third and final concern — how does the practice of public sociology affect responses to the research findings?

Public Visibility and Sociological Legitimacy

Those who support the notion of public sociology and public engagement argue that it increases the relevance of sociology in the social world. As Sprague and Laube (2009) put it, "... being engaged in more public discourse will increase the public's awareness of the importance of the work we do, thus bolstering their willingness to continue public support for it (Sprague 1998). If sociology is to have relevance in the social world, sociologists must demonstrate that they have something interesting and important to say" (p. 253). Our experience with public sociology finds that relevance is in the eye of the beholder and that stakeholder attitudes to the research frame can have a significant impact on how relevant they believe it to be. We may "demonstrate that [we] have something interesting and important to say" (Sprague and Laube 2009:253), but, ultimately, researchers are not the arbiters of their work's importance to the public(s) they seek to affect (see also Gans 2016).

One possible danger of using traditional public sociology for research recruitment is that stakeholders who do not agree with the research framing may dismiss the findings out of hand as irrelevant and biased. Using traditional public sociology as method unavoidably opens the framing and process of the research to public scrutiny in a way that is less obvious with participatory action research, or professional sociology conducted out of the public eye. Sociological research that is conducted with more distance from the stakeholders may be more easily viewed as objective and, therefore, the findings may be seen as more credible and relevant to their practice.

CONCLUSION

Public sociology, as a concept, encourages sociologists to take seriously the question of for whom they produce knowledge and to what ends (see, e.g. Burawoy 2004, 2005; Hanemaayer and Schneider 2014a; Scheiring 2007; Tittle 2004). The ethics of doing research that matters to the group under study are perhaps nowhere more important than in work with individuals whose experiences and voices are marginalized in mainstream discourse (Noy 2007). While organic public sociology, using collaborative engagement with narrowly identified local publics, is most aligned with these kinds of feminist and antioppressive sensibilities, it is not immune to the dilemmas of power and privilege which plague other approaches. As Noy (2007), drawing on Gramsci (1971) suggests, organic public sociology is not necessarily a counter-hegemonic sociology, but researchers can take deliberate steps to ensure that their research protects the interests of their subjects, remaining aware that our research and privilege may just as easily reproduce structures of domination and repression.

Our experience employing traditional public sociology as method for organic public sociology raises a number of issues related to the privileging of voice and the

importance of balancing stakeholder interests and perspectives. The maintenance of sociological integrity is always of utmost importance; public outreach and engagement must be, first and foremost, backed by rigorous data collection and analysis. Shoddy or ideological research serves neither the public(s), nor the discipline effectively, and a good public sociologist must be unafraid to present her stakeholders with controversial or unwelcome findings that emerge from the data. Beginning from the perspective that one's research should benefit the participants does not necessitate the censorship of data or findings, as some would suggest; however, sociologists who study within communities need to engage those publics in dialogue about research findings which may be perceived as problematic, and understand the impact of those findings for the participants. Public sociologists entering the field should consider the range of stakeholders and their perspectives, attending to possible conflicts and making conscious decisions where choices must be made between stakeholder priorities and positions. These choices should be made with the primary research questions and goals in mind, and decisions should reflect the researcher's prioritization of research integrity and the best interests of participants. Based on our experience, it is clear that in situations where the marginal perspective of the critical reference group contradicts the mainstream framing of the issue, the researcher may find herself forced to defend her methodological choices and the perspective of her participants, moving the research even further from the realm of so-called "professional" sociology. This situation is further complicated when key gatekeepers disagree with the research framing and/or its potential utility to their work.

The decision to engage public sociology as method is not one to be taken lightly — it raises many considerations that impact the researcher's ability to conduct the research and the reception of the research and its findings by stakeholders and community members. However, our experience has also shown that this approach may offer benefits as well. Research which uses broad public and media engagement in recruitment efforts may be able to access hidden or difficult to reach populations and a wider range of participant experiences than more targeted recruitment efforts, enabling more diverse input into community conversations about social issues. Our public recruitment efforts resulted in a broad sample of individuals, both women and men, engaged in formal sex work and informal sex trade, representing a cross-section of the local industry. Given the community context, we would be unlikely to reach this group of people through other means. Essentially, our public recruitment strategy was able to construct a public of engaged local sex workers where one had not previously existed. While our recruitment approach raised eyebrows in the local professional community, ultimately it was successful in accessing the people to whom we wished to speak. Shortly, In June 2016 the findings of the research were presented to the community in a public forum, bringing our research full-circle from its public beginnings. We hope that both the research process and the findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of sex work in our community and will inform the practice of social service and health professionals to the benefit of our research participants and others.

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NOTES

1. The division of traditional and organic public sociologies has also been exported to other disciplines, such as geography, without any critique (see Fuller 2008).
2. Originally called STREET (Sex Trade Resource Empowerment Education Team), the committee changed names as this article was going to press because some research participants thought that STREET focused on only street-based sex work. The research helped to uncover that the original acronym was not perceived as inclusive of all sectors of the sex industry.
3. The recruitment material was approved by Wilfrid Laurier University's Research Ethics Board, along with the research protocol.
4. The total adds to more than the sample of 28 because some participants had experience in multiple sectors.
5. While Grauerholz and Baker-Sperry (2007) level charges of biased research reporting at the media, our reading of the academic debates on public sociology suggests that this misattribution is common among professional sociologists who wish to maintain strict apolitical boundaries around the discipline; these critics do not nuance the difference between the *politically-driven* sociology of ideologues and the *sociologically driven* politics of the longstanding pragmatist tradition, but that is a matter for another article. We agree with Horowitz (2011:7) who said, "My involvement with organizations educating public members thrust me into the role of organic public sociologist, but to do my part well, I needed to collect data as a professional sociologist." Glenn (2009) also helpfully distinguishes between "good" and "bad" public sociology.
6. Ericson (2005) takes issue with Burawoy's (2004) insinuation that "critical" sociology is not "professional" sociology.
7. The red umbrella is the symbol of the sex worker rights movement.

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