



Using difference in intersectional research with im/migrant and racialized sex workers

Theoretical Criminology

2020, Vol. 24(4) 551–567

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DOI: 10.1177/1362480618819807

journals.sagepub.com/home/tcr



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Abstract

Intersectionality attends to the interactions between social difference and power, although theoretical models vary in their emphasis on one or the other. Difference-centred models often distinguish between processes of constructing social difference, systems that institutionalize social difference and identities that include social difference. This article discusses the analytical expectations that can emerge in intersectional research that focus on difference, by analysing the use and construction of difference by im/migrant and racialized women in sex work. The first analytical expectation is the distinction between *salience* and *difference* when starting from the lived realities and voices of individuals, groups and communities. The second analytical expectation concerns the interaction between two intersectional methodologies, between identities and lived experiences, and processes of constructing difference.

Keywords

Doing difference, intersectionality, sex industry, sex work, social difference

Introduction

Analysing the use and construction of difference by im/migrant and racialized women in sex work can challenge the analytical expectations that can often emerge in intersectional research that focuses on difference. Intersectionality, or the study of the interactions

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between power and social difference (e.g. Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), has proven a fruitful theoretical framework for sex work research (e.g. Brooks, 2010), given the role of social difference in the sex industry. Social differences (e.g. race, class, gender, etc.) are evident in how one performs sex work, how one markets oneself and how one positions oneself in the industry. Scholars have investigated the diversity of the sex industry with a particular emphasis on how class shapes gendered and racialized expectations for workers (e.g. Bernstein, 2007; Bouclin, 2006; Cabezas, 2004; Hoang, 2015; West and Fenstermaker, 1995). Conversely, sex work is a fruitful site to employ or advance intersectionality as workers routinely construct and use numerous dimensions of various social differences. Intersectional analysis of sex work is not limited to interactions between a racial identity and a class identity (for example), but can involve exploring how multiple racial identities interact with multiple class identities. Intersectionality is also increasingly recognized as a valuable framework for criminological inquiry (e.g. Daly, 2010; Henne and Troshynski, 2013; Paik, 2017; Potter, 2013; Sanchez, 2017), particularly in its potential to counter both criminology's problematic reliance on and erasure of social difference as analytical foci (Bosworth et al., 2008; Parmar, 2017).

The genealogy of intersectionality is rooted in Black feminist theory (e.g. Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Potter, 2013) and attends to the myriad interactions between social difference and power, although various theoretical models may emphasize one or the other. Power-centred models such as Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) 'matrix of domination' and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) conceptualization of structural, political and representational intersectionality centre on analyses of how power is constructed, managed or reconfigured through social difference. Others have conceptualized models that focus on understanding the complexity of social difference. Difference-centred theoretical models highlight various configurations of difference, such as distinguishing between processes of constructing social difference, systems that institutionalize social difference and identities that include social difference (e.g. Choo and Ferree, 2010; Dhamoon, 2011; McCall, 2005). For instance, Lois McCall (2005) proposes three 'intersectional methodologies' that distinguish between an anti-categorical approach or challenging constructions of social difference, an intra-categorical approach which centres identities and lived experiences, and an inter-categorical approach or exploring the interactions between difference and inequality.

Within difference-centred models, identities, subjectivities and lived experiences are a key analytical dimension, such as McCall's (2005) 'intra-categorical' analysis, Dhamoon's (2011) conceptualization of identities as analytical foci and Choo and Ferree's (2010) 'group-centred' methodology. This specific dimension of intersectional inquiry has been recognized as crucial to understanding 'multiply marginalized' groups (Choo and Ferree, 2010) or the voices and experiences of those at the 'neglected points of intersection' (McCall, 2005: 1774). Yet it is critical to reflect on the analytical expectations that may emerge when we start from the voices and experiences of 'multiply marginalized' groups, such as im/migrant and racialized sex workers. The first analytical expectation is the distinction between *salience* and *difference* when we start from the lived realities and voices of individuals, groups and communities. The second analytical expectation concerns the interaction between two intersectional methodologies, between identities and lived experiences, and processes of constructing difference.

The first analytical expectation concerns which and how social differences should be centred. In countries such as Australia and Canada, there is still a need to be critical of the role Whiteness plays in determining what experiences can be discussed. In my own research, this has often involved a strong expectation that the experiences of im/migrant and racialized sex workers should (1) primarily be understood through the lens of race and ethnicity and (2) that the experiences that ‘matter’ are those that stand in stark contrast to White sex workers. Race and ethnicity are of course important when understanding the experiences of im/migrant and racialized sex workers and are dimensions I have explored in greater depth elsewhere (e.g. Ham, 2017). Yet an insistence on only attending to the differences from majority or ‘default’ categories limits the potential of intersectional inquiry. I would argue that scholars should be troubled when it is suggested that the experiences and voices of those who occupy sites of social difference are only valuable when they speak to that difference. Doing so risks erasing issues that are *salient* for those who occupy sites of social difference even if they do not appear to *differ* from those who occupy ‘default’ social locations. The first difference that will be discussed, language, can relate to race or ethnicity and can be different from workers who occupy the default racial space in Australia and Canada, that is, Whiteness. However, the second difference discussed is the construction of industry-specific difference, or sector differences, and how these are employed and managed by workers. This discussion of industry-specific difference is not exclusive to im/migrant and racialized workers, yet there is value in examining the use of industry-specific difference in structuring power and knowledge for this particular group.

A focus on these two analytical sites—language and industry-specific difference—illustrates the link between two intersectional methodologies often referenced in difference-centred models. As stated above, one key intersectional methodology centres the lived realities of those with multiply marginalized identities. Another important intersectional methodology concerns the processes through which social difference is constructed and managed. This article aims to link these two methodologies by investigating how social difference is managed as an advantage or disadvantage by those who occupy multiple social locations. Social differences, such as race and class, have often grounded analyses of those who fall into the category of the ‘migrant sex worker’. Likewise, the ‘migrant sex worker’ category has often been used as a shorthand to communicate a range of social difference in immigration, sex work and anti-trafficking discourses (Ham, 2017). These research, policy and public discourses have typically focused on linkages between social difference, vulnerability and risk. However, the construction and use of social difference *by* im/migrant and racialized women sex workers remains relatively unexamined compared to the social construction *of* im/migrant and racialized women sex workers.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2012–2014 with 65 im/migrant and racialized women in the sex industry in Melbourne, Australia ($n = 30$) and Vancouver, Canada ($n = 35$). Participants were women in indoor sex work including brothel workers ($n = 27$), ‘massage shop’ workers¹ ($n = 25$) and independent escorts ($n = 13$). Inclusive recruitment criteria were employed in order to capture a range of definitions and understandings of the

'migrant sex worker' category. Women in the sex industry were recruited for participation if they fit one or more of the following criteria: workers legally identified as im/migrant; self-identified as im/migrant; were often assumed to be migrants (e.g. racialized workers); or performed exoticized ethnic identities as sex workers. Participants were recruited through the dissemination of project information in online sex work spaces, and 'door to door' visits to commercial establishments.

This project was grounded in a sex worker rights approach and focused on women's work-related decision making and perspectives on best work practices, interactions with law enforcement and other systems, opinions about the sex industry and interactions with co-workers. Participants were offered an honoraria (40 AUD or 40 CDN). To reduce the potential for social desirability bias, participants were given the honoraria after the consent form was signed or verbal consent was given, and before the interview began. This reflects guidance provided by PACE Society (or Providing Alternatives, Counselling & Education), a Vancouver-based sex worker organization, to think of honoraria as similar to a 'booking fee' to ensure that research participants retain the right to terminate an interview if they experience discomfort (Bowen et al., 2006).

This sample included a wide diversity of participants, including naturalized citizens ($n = 28$), permanent residents ($n = 14$), temporary migrants ($n = 9$), Australian/Canadian-born racialized women ($n = 6$) and participants with undeclared status ($n = 8$). The majority of participants were of Asian descent ($n = 49$). Other participants included women of European, Middle Eastern, Latin American or mixed descent ($n = 16$). In this article, comments from participants are identified with a pseudonym, residency/migrant status, race or ethnicity and workplace site. These descriptors are included to acknowledge the diversity among sex workers but I should note that, for the purposes of this article, differences in experiences and perspectives are not always or necessarily located in racial, ethnic or status differences. My aim here is to centre the analyses and knowledge developed by workers without requiring that such knowledge hinge on or be explained through race, ethnicity or migrant status. My hope is that identifying a worker speaking in the article as Asian or as a temporary migrant still permits a space where her comments do not necessarily have to speak back to her race or legal status (for example), but can refer to other aspects of her experience or analyses. Similarly, I have chosen to retain grammatical errors or idiosyncrasies in participants' quotes, in order to accurately represent the range of fluency and 'accents' that one would hear on a day to day basis in the Canadian and Australian sex industry.

Women in this study were aware that working in the sex industry would likely exclude them from a range of legal and social protections and therefore, sought to arm themselves with as much knowledge as possible to ensure that they could work safely, strategically and profitably. In interviews, discussions about social difference often emerged when participants reflected on their learning curves within the industry and the process of gaining experiential knowledge that would maximize their success and ensure their safety in sex work. Sex work remains a stigmatized and criminalized industry in both cities. In Canada, sex work is not illegal under the federal Canadian Criminal Code, but activities related to sex work, including advertising and communication, procurement, purchase of sexual services and receipt of financial or material benefit, are deemed criminal offences.² In Vancouver, the criminalization of sex work under federal law operates

in tension with local bylaws, which appear to function as a quasi-legalization of sex work. Sex work-related businesses must adhere to numerous bylaws that regulate, among other aspects, dress code for staff, lighting in establishments, signage and door locks. In Melbourne, sex work is legalized for licensed brothels who must adhere to extensive administrative requirements, and individual sex workers under the Sex Work Act 1994.³ The legalization of sex work does provide spaces where workers are recognized as lawful workers (Ham, 2017) but it has also resulted in both legalized and criminalized spaces (e.g. licensed and unlicensed brothels, respectively).

Language, difference and power

Language or linguistic difference shapes power, safety and business in the sex industry. In public and policy discourses about sex work in Australia and Canada, there is a general assumption that limited fluency in the English language can be a disadvantage for sex workers (as it is perceived to be for im/migrants more generally), as this may prevent workers from understanding English-speaking clients, co-workers and law enforcement. For instance, the contradictions and ambiguities within anti-prostitution law in the Canadian Criminal Code can be difficult to navigate even for workers raised in Canada or for those with English as a primary language. Yet there is still an opportunity to analyse *when* linguistic difference is a risk, how power is shaped through language and the linkages made between language and other social differences.

Intersectionality is emerging as a useful theoretical framework for sociolinguistic study (Johansson and Šliwa, 2016) or what Levon (2015: 295) calls ‘identity-linked’ speech. Yet intersectional analysis is also aided by the extensive labour literature on linguistic difference and employment. This includes research on the consequences of accents on hiring or professional advancement (e.g. Harrison, 2013), and assessments of competence or credibility (e.g. Lev-Ari and Keysar, 2010). Scholars have conceptualized the distinctions between accent and fluency, although the conflation of accent and fluency in workplace settings remains under-examined (with the exception of Hanna and Allen, 2013). If language discrimination has been documented for workers in mainstream employment, what specific consequences might it have for a criminalized and stigmatized industry such as the sex industry? Sex work research has primarily analysed linguistic difference in relation to risk or vulnerability (e.g. Deering et al., 2015; Goldenberg et al., 2017; Handlovsky et al., 2012), yet there is an opportunity to question the use of linguistic difference as a static risk factor. An intersectional analysis of language can offer a more precise understanding of the risks and vulnerabilities that are often associated with those who are slotted into the ‘im/migrant sex worker’ category. In this study, assumptions about linguistic difference as a vulnerability contrasted with workers’ understanding of language or linguistic difference as an element that shapes power in any given interaction or relation (between the client and the worker, between workers, between the worker and the workplace). Workers’ analyses highlight the importance of research that begins with individuals with intersectional identities—namely, that starting at social locations can illuminate the *relational* nature of social difference. Rather than employing linguistic difference as a calculable risk factor, it may be more useful to examine what linguistic difference may enable or disable in any given interaction or context.

In this study, the English language did not automatically enable workers' learning or knowledge. For instance, a predominantly English-speaking workplace was perceived to stymie non-English-speaking workers' accumulation of knowledge about sex work. This was perhaps most clearly identified by Ruby,⁴ an Asian permanent resident working in a licensed brothel in Melbourne. She explained how she deliberately sought out an Asian workplace where English was not the dominant language, as an English-speaking workplace would have slowed down her learning curve about clients and sex work. This is all the more crucial as other workers may be one of the few accessible resources for occupational knowledge, in a stigmatized and criminalized industry.

[A]lways Asian [workplace] cause it's more comfortable for me because at the start my English wasn't that good. And I didn't know about this business. I think if the boss or girls, most girls they are my nationality, or Asian, it's more easy for me to get comfortable.

(Ruby, permanent resident, Asian, Melbourne, licensed brothel worker)

Language was a means of learning about the sex industry—not only in terms of accessing information, but also in learning about the social locations that individuals were expected to occupy. Limited fluency in English or accented English is not necessarily a barrier in the workplace among co-workers, but these could shape power dynamics between workers and clients, with implications for income and safety. Workers raised dimensions of risk that are typically under-acknowledged in sex work research and in community discourses, which may focus on how a lack of English can impede integration. Instead, workers explained how non-English language speakers or basic-English language speakers are positioned by English-speaking Canadians and Australians. First, a lack of fluency in English or speaking English with a non-western accent signalled a perceived lack of power to abusive or disrespectful clients, as Ellie explains:

[T]hey think you'll take nonsense. Sometimes, my accent is used against me, clients saying 'I can't understand what you say', or [they] think you don't have friends or family, they think you're vulnerable, they think you don't know the resources here as an immigrant, they think they can scare you, think you have nowhere to go ... I had one client offer \$100 for two hours. I said no. He called me and left a nasty message, 'go back to this country if you don't want my money' ... I've been bashed on review boards—clients blaming my behaviour on my upbringing, on my country, [saying] 'that's not how we do things here'.

(Ellie, naturalized citizen, Eastern European, Vancouver, independent worker)

The quote above provides a clear example of disrespectful clients attempting to enforce an inequitable power dynamic with a worker. In the example above, a worker's accent is remembered as the signal or cue to reinforce expectations about workers' compliance based on assumptions about vulnerability. The enduring association between vulnerability and language is mirrored in public and policy discourses around sex work, such as the use of linguistic difference as an indicator of trafficking (e.g. DHS, 2010; OCTIP, n.d.; UNODC/UN.GIFT, n.d.). However, the above demonstrates that the relationship between linguistic difference and vulnerability is not limited to workers with limited fluency in English, but extends to workers who speak English with a non-western accent.

Safety is integral to good business, or in other words, the business of sex work cannot be separated from workplace safety issues. When asked about the differences between Asian workers and ‘Aussie’ workers (i.e. White workers), Amanda explained how the use of English enabled workers to minimize risk without jeopardizing future business:

Aussie girls do, can communicate better with customers ... like if a customer want to touch pussy down there. But because girl can't speak English, like she will straight way just say 'no!', that's only thing she can say. But maybe Aussie girls can say 'oh yeah' [comforting tone], like muck around, and be more friendly, and—still same thing, the customer can't get it, but it, it's delivered in different way ... because Aussie girl muck around and talk bullshit and like that. Like, still he didn't touch pussy but he maybe happy...

(Amanda, international student, Asian, licensed brothel worker, Melbourne)

As Amanda explains, sex workers lacking fluency in English may be limited to using much more blunt language, a sharp tone of voice and stern body language to assert themselves—strategies which may elicit anger or frustration from clients, which can pose a risk of escalating into abuse, violence or non-payment. By contrast, fluency in English can allow workers to exercise power more surreptitiously, by protecting their own boundaries without overtly challenging clients. Amanda's quote about the use of English speaks to safety as well as business. In other words, ensuring client satisfaction and protecting one's safety, even if the client has not received what he has asked for. When asked ‘how do you protect yourself?’, Bebe, an Asian Canadian citizen and massage shop worker in Vancouver, simply stated ‘speak English with the customer’.

Although safety is a key concern for sex workers, language also has serious implications for business. In contrast to research and public discourses that associate limited or accented English with vulnerability and risk, workers interviewed were very keenly aware of the implications language had on the money they could earn, the number of clients they could see or the particular types of clients they could see. While English is not necessary to work in the Australian or Canadian sex industry, language still shapes how sex work is practised. English-language fluency can expand one's options in the sex industry, for example, in the workplaces one can choose from (e.g. predominantly English-speaking establishments, Asian-language establishments), as well as the types of clients one could work with. Emma explained how a lack of English-language fluency could prevent some workers from working with clients who wanted more companionable or emotionally intimate services:

['Aussie' workers] can speak good English with the customers. Because some customer come over here, maybe he just feel lonely, they just want talk. But if they meet the Asian girl, if the Asian girl even pretty but not much talk English, the customer doesn't know how to communicate with the Asian girl.

(Emma, international student, Asian, Melbourne, licensed brothel worker)

The English language was central to interactions with clients, in terms of both *safety* such as dealing with clients who perceived non-western accents as a vulnerability to exploit and *business* such as clients seeking out workers for companionable or

emotionally intimate services. Workers' nuanced analysis of the implications that language has on their work, their income and their safety reveals dimensions that are often not considered in public and policy discourses. The association between limited or accented language and diminished power is present in discourses around the 'im/migrant sex worker', which may often result in locating vulnerability and risk in the bodies and voices of racialized, immigrant and migrant women. Yet there is an opportunity for greater precision in analysing how vulnerability and risk are constructed. Language does make a difference, yet the diversity of advantages and disadvantages expressed by workers prevents a convenient conflation between English and power in Australian and Canadian sex industries.

Analysing language can also offer a fruitful lens for understanding the evolving uses of race, ethnicity and nationality by clients, workers and stakeholders that purport to assist sex workers. Hancock (2007) proposes intersectionality as a theoretical advancement from 'unitary approaches' that stress one static social dimension (e.g. race *or* gender), and multiple approaches that analyse multiple but separate social dimensions (e.g. race *and* gender). By contrast, intersectional approaches examine the 'explanatory power' (Hancock, 2007: 67) of more than one social differentiation *process* (e.g. how race *produces* gender, such as how race can diminish or amplify perceptions of femininity or masculinity). An examination of language offers an opportunity to extend the possibilities for intersectional analysis, from how types of social difference inform and shape one another, to how they may be understood *as* another, or the use of social differences that may operate as code for other social differences. As Aliverti (2018) argues, the racialization of victims and offenders in the criminal justice system occurs through a range of social difference, including nationality, ethnicity and 'culture'. In Melbourne, the term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' or CaLD is a commonly used term in the non-profit sector (Colic-Peisker and Hlavac, 2014) that can be used at times to include racial difference without perhaps having to name them. In cities that pride themselves on their diversity and their commitment to multiculturalism, such as Melbourne and Vancouver, stakeholders working on sex work issues should consider when and where language may function as a proxy or code for racial and ethnic differences, to shape power in the sex industry.

Industry-specific difference, knowledge and power

Just as language shapes the labour that workers can or are expected to do, different sectors—such as brothels, massage parlours or massage 'shops', escort agencies and apartment-based work—also shape expectations about labour in sex work. Although intersectionality concerns the interactions between *social* difference and power, both *social* difference and *industry-specific* difference were employed by workers to indicate a range of meanings about capability (e.g. in ensuring one's safety and success in the industry), character (e.g. trustworthiness, working ethically), legitimacy in sex work (or one's 'fit' within the industry) and safety (e.g. risk, vulnerability). In terms of social difference, workplaces in both countries can often be gendered or racialized, where the worker may come to be seen as representative of a certain space (Ham, 2017). The most common dichotomy employed in Vancouver and Melbourne was

Asian and ‘western’/White, which categorized particular establishments or spaces. The gendering and racialization of sex work spaces carries implications for stigma and surveillance. This is perhaps most noticeable in the greater scrutiny of Asian workers and Asian establishments in the Canadian and Australian sex industry under the guise of anti-trafficking (Ham, 2017). The gendered, racialized and classed meanings assigned to sectors have implications for client expectations, rates and service. For example, Melissa, an independent escort in Melbourne, spoke about the challenges of addressing client expectations concerning where Asian women do or should work:

There are clients who think that as an Asian, Asians should not be upmarket, they’re not considered upmarket. And if you try to do position yourself with a rate higher than what people usually pay for Asians in a parlour, in a brothel, then you have to be really, really outstanding, you have to work much harder to make a name for yourself and to be able to command higher rates than anyone else.

(Melissa, visa holder, Asian, Melbourne, independent worker)

Racialized expectations over where im/migrant and racialized workers should work do shape how women are positioned in the sex industry, in addition to workers’ personal and professional boundaries and how they understand the construction and exercise of power across different sectors. Workers’ analyses of power across different sectors not only has practical implications for those working in the sex industry, but also has significant implications for the ongoing theoretical debate about whether sex work constitutes a form of exploitation (as in radical feminism) or as labour (as within a sex worker rights framework). Conceptualizing sex work as wholly exploitative erases the variations in power and agency between different sectors, workplaces and workers. This contrasts with workers’ precise, detailed explanations of the varying levels of autonomy, power, risk and profit across sectors. This section also aims to prompt reflection on the analytical expectations that can emerge when scholars work with intersectional identities. This is not to suggest that the experiences and perspectives of im/migrant and racialized workers in this section always differ or do not differ from those of White or non-im/migrant workers. The perspectives and concerns discussed here are important because they are *salient* for the workers in this study, not necessarily because the issues speak solely to *difference*. The following discussion centres on a group that is often identified by their racial, cultural and linguistic differences, but centres on their analyses and understanding of power and industry-specific difference in the sex industry, rather than on how they embody social difference.

Four main sectors were discussed by interviewees—massage shops, licensed brothels, escort agencies and independent work. These spaces are governed differently in Melbourne and Vancouver. Brothels may operate legally and openly in Melbourne, provided they are licensed.⁵ In Vancouver, the operation of brothels is obstructed by federal criminal laws.⁶ Instead, many massage shops operate in an ambiguous legalized/illegalized environment, and may provide massage services or cosmetic treatments in addition to sexual services which may or may not include intercourse. In Melbourne, licensed brothels may operate legally, while independent workers are prohibited from in-call work, or working from one’s own home or apartment.

Industry-specific difference functioned as a site for producing experiential knowledge in the sex industry. Decisions on where to work intersected with assessments about safety and profitability. These in turn were shaped by assessments of the spaces available in which one could determine and exercise one's boundaries. The choice between a collective versus an individualized work environment was a key difference. For example, working in a sector where women commute between home and the workplace may allow a more manageable boundary between work and life, as Melody explains:

I've done independent before and we can get paid good money but ... you meet older gentlemen that will be like, 'oh, let's go out' and like, classy little places, take you out for dinner and wine and dine you, but I won't ... that's too personal. When I'm here [in a massage shop], it's like you come in and you're one person and when you leave, you leave behind everything when you walk out this door. And you're back to who you are when you're at home.

(Melody, Canadian-born citizen, passes as Southeast Asian at work, Vancouver, massage shop worker)

The boundary between one's work and one's personal life was not the only one that Melody maintained. She identified herself in the interview as a Canadian-born citizen, of Indigenous descent, but presented herself as Southeast Asian at work. This included preparing an 'immigration story' to share with clients about her family's history in Canada, in order to answer any potential questions from clients about her familiarity (or lack of) with language or culture. The use of constructed work identities and collective workspaces, such as massage shops, permitted workers to exercise boundaries with clients more readily and were also perceived to confer more legitimacy as a recognizable business, albeit a stigmatized or criminalized one. Even in contexts where advertising of sex work may be criminalized or heavily restricted, signifiers of commercial business establishment (e.g. shopfront facility, reception area, signage) still remained one important sign that what one was doing was recognizable labour. Dana felt that the ambiguous but sufficient signalling of the massage shop she worked in as a clear place of business distinguished it from what she called 'prostitution', which she perceived to be riskier and stigmatizing. The fact that the massage shop she worked in did provide sexual services for male clients, but was also licensed to provide cosmetic and spa treatments to a small number of female clients offered some comfort. She felt there was a reduced risk that her workplace would be criminalized but on a personal level, the workplace environment also permitted her to maintain personal boundaries between the work she did and 'prostitution':

There is no, like, sexual contact or anything involved. Whereas where I see sex, I just think of prostitutes and, it's basically like prostitution, it's just you come in for sex and that's it ... But here, I mean, with the sensual massages or erotic massages, it's like you do give a client a really good massage ... I mean, when I do it, I think of myself as a therapist and I'm trying to, you know, give them the most relaxing session to my client as possible. Whereas sex is a totally different thing.

(Dana, Canadian-born, Asian, Vancouver, massage spa worker)

In contrast to collective work environments, independent work or apartment-based work elicited the most heated and diverse opinions. The terms independent work or apartment-based work are used here to denote indoor sex work outside of explicitly commercial establishments, such as residential spaces used solely for work purposes or working from one's home. The term 'independent' here refers to self-employed workers in primarily residential settings, whether they work with others (e.g. sharing rent expenses) or not. There were some workers who expressed a strong preference for independent work and stated they would not work any other way, and those who expressed strong suspicions about independent work and stated they would never work independently. Divergent perspectives regarding independent work focused on the benefits, risks and additional labour that come with greater flexibility in setting rates and determining working conditions. Independent or self-employed work was perceived to permit greater inclusion of diversity. For example, Anita discussed her initial concerns when entering the industry. She revealed her uncertainty about her employability as she felt her body size would not fit employers' notions of what a sex worker should look. However, she quickly found success and a high demand for her 'type' when once she started advertising and working independently:

I didn't really know about massage parlours when I started ... and because I'm a bigger girl, I didn't even know if there was space for bigger girls in the industry. I just kind of started off and I started seeing that I was getting a lot of calls, and there is a demand. So you could say I was a bit shy to actually call up an agency and go like, 'hey, I want to do this'. I thought they wouldn't want me.

(Anita, international student, South Asian, Vancouver, independent worker)

Similarly, Ava suggested that independent work could be more profitable depending on how one wanted to work. Independent work could be a better fit for workers who wanted to focus more on service. She contrasted the competitive nature of working in a licensed brothel with the more inclusive nature of independent work:

If you're organized enough, I would say go private. Depends on what kind of service you can provide as well. This is kind of vague, but if you're good in bed (laughs), like if you can provide good service, private is the way to go. But ... like some girls ... they don't want be intimate with the client, they just want to be intimate with their partners—then parlours may be the better idea. So it really depends on individual personality, individual management skill. But money-wise, if you're motivated enough ... private is the best way to make money.

(Ava, permanent resident, Asian, Melbourne, independent worker)

However, there were also concerns about whether the greater flexibility of independent work might also shift client expectations in ways that could increase risk for the worker, by confusing boundaries about client-worker interactions. Boundaries referred to what would or would not be provided or tolerated, but it also referred to 'risky' gendered dynamics that clients may be inclined to reproduce. For instance, Ella was very clear about her choice to work in massage shops. Collective workspaces (e.g. massage shops,

licensed brothels) may often have established norms that are communicated explicitly or implicitly to clients. Although she had not worked in apartments, Ella surmised that client expectations may become more challenging to manage in an environment that may not signal particular parameters to clients:

I won't work at apartments. Because it's crazy. Like, it's dangerous, it's so unsafe. And the customers there, definitely, it's GFE [Girlfriend Experience]. You know, like here, you can be like 'oh, sorry, I don't do that but if you like ... there's other girls here [who will]'. But at the apartment, it's usually just you or another girl and they [clients] all want it.

(Ella, naturalized citizen, Asian, Vancouver, massage shop worker)

Client expectations was one of the key characteristics that distinguished sectors. This was not only in terms of what services could be expected, but also concerned how different sectors shaped norms about what clients could expect and how clients could behave. Lara identified herself primarily as a dominatrix but worked in other sectors. She noted the differences in the respect she felt from clients who responded to her Bondage and Discipline, Sadism and Masochism (BDSM) advertisements and those that responded to her individual escort advertisements:

I do have clients that get escorts normally ... But I find they're very different. They treat women very differently and they're often very misogynistic and I just cannot, cannot deal with that. Whereas the BDSM clients seem to be more the guys that are well-off, they're, they don't mind shelling out \$250 or 500 for 2 hours. Like, they are a different kind of person and I can deal with that a lot more.

(Lara, naturalized citizen, European, Vancouver, apartment-based worker)

It was striking to see how interviewees positioned sectors in relation to each other. No clear hierarchy of preferable workplaces emerged across interviews, but an implicit concept of a hierarchy was still suggested by individual workers. This was particularly evident in discussions about escort agencies. Escort agencies can be perceived as a hybrid between massage shops, licensed brothels and independent work. Similar to massage shops and licensed brothels, escort agencies employ a number of workers as well as staff to deal with administrative tasks. Similar to independent workers, agency workers may mostly work alone or may not know other workers at the same agency, and are more likely to see clients in a residential setting such as the clients' home. Although escort agencies share characteristics with independent workers, massage shop workers and brothel workers, Ava explained that workers may perceive power differences across sectors that may not reflect actual power dynamics in the workplace:

Lot of ... escort agency girls think they're, like, better than parlour girls ... But the reality is ... because you don't have direct contact with the client and you don't so-called hustle with the client, you don't have any control over picking the clients and dealing with the clients. So all the control they have, sending you to a booking is on the agency ... on the girl's side, if you don't take the cheap booking, they don't give you expensive bookings. So you have to be really

good girl for them and do whatever they want you to do, otherwise you just don't get booking ... And they take cuts for everything. So for example, in parlours, the general idea is whatever you do extra, for example, anal sex, that sort of stuff—the girls take everything. But in escort agency, they want [to] take half of that as well. Which is in my opinion ridiculous.

(Ava, permanent resident, Asian, Melbourne, independent worker)

Many workers stated a strong preference for the sector they were working in and felt that the sector they were working in offered greater space for autonomy and power, although Ava's comment suggests that some of these assumptions can be challenged. Discussions with workers on their choice of sector and establishment revealed complex interactions between personal preferences and perceptions about power, but also about one's individual plans in the industry. Ava acknowledged that each sector had different advantages which may intersect with workers' own trajectories in sex work:

There's part of me thinking that I'm glad I been to parlours first [before working as an independent escort]. Because there's just some things you can't learn unless you see a [larger] number of clients. And in private [independent work], the risk is if you build a bad reputation from the start which is hard to build the good reputation again, that kind of thing ... Maybe the parlour first or escort agency first, for first six months and then venture out private. But eventually, I think private is the way to go.

(Ava, permanent resident, Asian, Melbourne, independent worker)

Although workplaces in both countries can be gendered or racialized, as previously mentioned, the sectors where women chose to work were shaped by a range of factors that also included personal boundaries, and assessments about which sectors afforded greater autonomy, income or respect. Workers' reflections suggest that an intersectional analysis may be fruitful not only for understanding how power is shaped through social difference, but also in revealing other types of differences that are employed similarly, such as industry-specific differences. Both types of difference were important in shaping power, gaining knowledge about the sex industry and finding one's 'place' in the industry. Analysis of intersectional identities does not need to be restricted to examining how power is assigned to those who occupy certain social locations in terms of race or migrant/citizenship status. Analysis can also include inquiring how those with particular intersectional identities understand and employ difference and power. Indeed, it may be that by starting with the voices and perspectives of those at intersectional social locations reveals how power is structured across different work environments rather than embodied in particular gendered and racialized bodies.

Conclusion

Intersectionality offers an opportunity to think about social difference and power in the sex industry beyond risk and vulnerability. Research on risk and vulnerability for im/migrant and racialized sex workers is important, but it may be more fruitful to consider how social difference shifts power in the sex industry, rather than assuming that it reduces

power. In addition, it is important to analyse what types of difference are employed to produce power or knowledge in the sex industry. In this study, the differences that mattered included social differences such as language, as well as industry-specific differences, such as the sector one works in. Workers' use and construction of social difference was at times, strikingly different from the meanings that are often attached to social difference in public and policy discourses about sex work, where social difference may be associated with gendered or racialized risks and vulnerabilities. However, interviews with workers emphasized the economic and business implications of social difference in sex work, such as how social difference enables or hinders one's ability to make money, to market oneself and to work strategically in the industry.

The two types of difference analysed in this article offer insights for intersectional research. First, language is a difference that can shape power in various ways, yet care must be taken to avoid conflating non-standard English with risk or vulnerability. Analyses of social differences such as language also present an opportunity for intersectional scholars to consider differences that may be used to signal other differences or as Hunter and Hachimi (2012: 551) argue, 'the importance of language in the changing intersectionality of race and class'. In cities such as Vancouver and Melbourne, the linguistic differences of im/migrant and racialized sex workers may function as a euphemism for race, ethnicity or migrant status. This offers an opportunity for intersectional scholars to investigate not only the interactions between social differences, but how and when certain differences stand in for others (e.g. language as race or language as migration status).

The analysis of industry-specific difference and how it shapes power in the sex industry addresses another question for intersectional inquiry. It cannot be definitively concluded whether the opinions and perspectives presented by im/migrant and racialized sex workers vary significantly from those by White workers, but this does not render them any less valuable. It is crucial to heed the distinctions between *salience* and *difference*, or the distinction between issues that are deemed to be salient by those who occupy multiple marginalized social locations and those issues that stand in stark contrast to the unspoken default. The call to centre the voices of those 'at neglected points of intersection' (McCall, 2005: 1774) is not only an ethical or political issue. In this study, starting from what McCall (2005) calls an 'intra-categorical' methodology leads to an 'inter-categorical' analysis. That is, starting from the voices and experiences of im/migrant and racialized women in the sex industry (an 'intra-categorical' methodology) reveals detailed discussion of how difference is employed to shape power in the sex industry (an 'inter-categorical' analysis). The intersectional methodologies that make a distinction between identities and processes are not mutually exclusive; they also interact or intersect. Workers' use and construction of social difference and industry-specific difference also suggest interesting questions for fostering solidarity among diverse groups of workers in the sex worker rights movement. Scholars (e.g. Chun et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991) have pointed out that any social movement is intersectional and that solidarity does not require homogeneity. Yet the findings here suggest complex interactions in the construction or use of difference as a means to produce knowledge and power, two important resources in an often stigmatized and criminalized profession. One question that emerges is how difference might be used as a means to foster solidarity between diverse groups

of workers. Intersectionality offers a valuable framework in revealing the construction of differences in experiential knowledge production by sex workers, but it may also be a tool for working with difference within rights-based movements.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Most participants used the term ‘massage shop’ rather than ‘massage parlour’.
2. http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/Bills/412/Government/C-36/C-36_4/C-36_4.PDF.
3. http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/swa1994129/.
4. Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees.
5. <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/businesses/licensed-businesses/sex-work-service-providers/licensing>.
6. http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/Bills/412/Government/C-36/C-36_4/C-36_4.PDF.

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