

Prostitution in Print Media

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Introduction

Street-based sex-workers face a level of marginalization in the United States that is unmatched by almost any other at-risk population. This marginalization continues to function as a means to further segregate sex-workers into unsafe neighborhoods through public nuisance injunctions (Sagar 2009; 2007), as well as normalize the violence in the lives of street-based sex workers (Campbell 2001; Kurtz et al. 2004; Potterat et al. 2004). McNaughton further documents how the marginalization experienced by sex-workers (lack of access to resources, feminization of poverty, homelessness or precarious housing) is correlated with substance abuse and addiction (2007).

Due to the illegal nature of sex-work, women engaged in exchange tend to have additional barriers regarding their legal background. Additional research on social and healthcare services for criminalized women demonstrates that access barriers often are the problems that services are being sought for (homelessness, addiction, and poverty) (Kurtz et al. 2005). Sex-workers, Sanders argues, are then trapped due to the criminalization of sex-work (2007). This in turn creates a distrust of law enforcement. Research attributes this to; the enforcement of criminal laws pertaining to sex work; the lack of prosecution of violence against sex workers; social service providers and the stigma experienced in accessing services creates further access barriers for help-seeking behaviors (Gorry et al. 2010; Thukral & Ditmore 2003). Gorry et al. argues that substance abuse, (which is correlated to forms of marginalization), is an additional barrier which affects sex-workers' ability to follow through with treatment (2010).

The way in which the community, law makers, courts, police, social services providers, healthcare workers, etc. engage with street-based sex-workers is translated through and

influenced by news print media (McCracken 2013). However, there are gaps in literature and news print media regarding sex-workers' situations, from their direct perspective and experience. This creates a biased understanding of these women and the issues that lead them to, and keep them in the sex-industry.

Purpose

This study is working to understand the discursive thematic frameworks that influence the way in which journalists describe sex work and sex workers' lives in news print media. This venue was chosen with the perspective that it is the main venue in which most of the U.S. populace learns about this topic and population. By discerning and examining the themes reported through news print media, I expect to glean how the problems of these women are constructed and how this in turn may influence the processes and solutions in place meant to mitigate them. In addition, looking at the patterns in the language of print media, I hope to gain better understanding about how print media is communicating the conditions that lead women to this lifestyle as well as the situations that prevent them from leaving.

Methods

I am paralleling discourse analysis methods employed by Jill McCracken in her recent book *Street Sex Workers' Discourse: Realizing Material Change Through Agential Choice*. McCracken (2013) uses a single word document from which the corpus analysis is run. I gathered, downloaded, and converted 340 newspaper articles from the Denver Post from 2004-2014 retrieved from the University of Wyoming's database. Differing slightly from the process outlined in McCracken's methods, I searched for these articles using the term prostitut*, which allows for all forms of prostitute to be gathered in the search (prostitution, prostitutes, prostituted etc.). Using McCracken's description of categories (pg 204-207), as well as emergent themes

derived from analysis, I created an Excel file to organize and track the themes of each article. Each theme has a description to help organize and assign to articles. Initial themes include: historical, violence against women who exchange sex for money or drugs, disease, in-depth coverage of street-based sex-work, in-depth coverage of trafficking, legal cases peripherally involving women, arrests, local community, non-street-based-sex-work, other sex work, sex-work art, trafficking minors, trafficking, prostituting minors, entertainment, and peripherally mentions prostitutes. Within the Excel file, I read each article to determine which categorical theme best represents the text. I do not delineate between street-based and non-street-based sex-work within the initial organization, only among the presenting themes. I tracked the number of articles represented under each theme, as well as which of the 340 articles. Within the same Excel document I have listed several terms used by McCracken (2007) to begin the analysis of the news print word corpus analysis.

Over the summer I was able to stay with a group of women transitioning from sex-work into a facility in Denver, Colorado. This experience proved to give particular insight to the challenges that these women face who want to leave the sex-industry. The organization allowed me to work on the weekend at the house where the women live. I participated in group therapy sessions, went to NA and AA meetings, as well as helped at the volunteer outing the women participated in each Saturday afternoon at a local church. During my time at the shelter, I was able to spend time with the women during meals and activities such as watching movies or doing our nails. The women shared their frustrations with the program, the experiences that lead them to their situation, as well as their hopes for the future.

Results

I still have a great deal of analysis to process through. I have completed the theme categorization of approximately thirty of the 340 articles I gathered. Thus far, articles referring to the trafficking and prostituting minors has been the highest accounted for theme, however during the initial process in which files were being converted, I identified several other themes that were prevalent such as violence and crimes against women who participate in sex-work as well as themes regarding entertainment platforms that in some way include prostitution. By mid-spring 2015 I should have the rest of the articles themed, and should also have the word corpus analyzed.

Challenges

This project has had many challenges throughout the semester. Primarily the downloading and converting of the pdfs from the database took an exceptional amount of time. I was able to search and find the articles with quite a bit of ease but when I converted the pdf to Word, the formatting was compromised. This was extremely frustrating. I tried to copy and paste the text every way I could think but in the end, I had to manually remove all the additional spacing. The Word document before I reformatted was over 700 pages and after I reformatted is now 479 pages. This was time consuming and tedious. Another challenge I faced was determining how to best organize and track themes. This process is still under consideration pending my mentor's approval/suggestions. Throughout this entire process my life circumstances have proven to challenge my ability to stay organized and manage my time. Being the single mother of two school-age boys, full-time class schedule, practicum hours, and this project proved

to be a task. However, I believe that I have a better understanding of my limitations and time constraints.

Other challenges had to deal with scheduling the visits to Denver. It was challenging to find time in which all necessary parties were available. Working at the house with the women was challenging because of the intimate nature of some of the things they would disclose during conversations. In addition, women living in this type of transitional housing experienced their own frustrations with other clients. These issues often surfaced during group therapy, and other activities. Dealing with their frustrations in a respectable and acknowledging manner was difficult at times.

Moving Forward

The leg in this journey will center around analysis of themes and the news print word corpus. Since I converted all the articles into a single Word document, I am hopeful that this next process will move much smoother. I will go through each article one by one to categorize themes. The word corpus analysis will be done through word search function. I will tabulate how many times each particular word was used. From this information I can triangulate the findings with the literature and the testimony given by the women interviewed.

The ability to do work that is connected to my major of study as well as one of my passions; supports the development of confidence and assuredness that I am on the right path, and moving closer to where I aspire to be in my life and career. In addition, the work required me to practice accountability not only to myself, and my mentor, but also to the funders. Applying for the funding initially moved me to be clear and concise regarding my understanding

of the project. I think the experience in and of itself was extremely valuable in that proposing research to possible funders is intimidating, but it is possible.

In Fall of 2015, I will be continuing this analysis of this work. I am still planning on interviewing women from the program in Denver. I have some funding left for at least one trip. Now that Dr. Dewey is back in town long-term, I can schedule our final interviews.

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