

**MORE THAN CONDOMS AND SANDWICHES:
A FEMINIST INVESTIGATION OF THE CONTRADICTIONARY PROMISES OF
HARM REDUCTION APPROACHES TO PROSTITUTION**

by

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Abstract

This research explores the experiences and perspectives of women providing front-line service in organizations and agencies, both feminist and mainstream, whose mandate includes support for women experiencing violence, particularly women in prostitution. There is significant research into the experiences of women in prostitution, however, little is known about the experiences and perspectives of front-line workers employed in paid and unpaid positions in the social service industry who are providing support to women in prostitution. Their views of prostitution and the policy frameworks that inform their work are the focus of this inquiry drawing attention, in particular, to how policies framed as harm reduction shape what kinds of support women in prostitution are offered. Harm reduction is an approach initially used to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with the use of illicit drugs. Since the 2003 opening of Insite, North America's first supervised injection facility (SIF), tactics called harm reduction have been applied to other social problems, including street-level prostitution. This study argues for an approach that goes beyond mere reduction of harm, and explicates and extends a feminist response to male violence in pursuit of good old-fashioned women's liberation.

Data for this inquiry included in-depth interviews with 16 women providing front line services. This study also examined key governmental reports on prostitution and recent court challenges regarding the legality of prostitution, including the 1985 *Fraser Report on Pornography and Prostitution in Canada*, the 2006 Federal report called *The Challenge of Change: A Study of Canada's Criminal Prostitution Laws*, and affidavits gathered by Pivot Legal Society in 2003 from women engaged in prostitution in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

Using a methodology informed by Dorothy Smith's sociology for women and critical

discourse analysis, the contemporary and historical contexts of Vancouver's response to social inequality as it is expressed in public discourse about prostitution and harm reduction was examined. Smith's approach also informs analysis of the study participants' perspectives. This work challenges the de-politicizing and pathologizing discourses of harm reduction ideology in Vancouver, and provides a forum for women on the front-lines to offer alternatives that may move us to harm elimination.

Preface

This research has been approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H10-02229).

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And Hilla Kerner, my favourite *Tzabra* —I am grateful for our time together, and for what I've learned from and because of you—because of us.

Dedication

To the Women's Liberation Movement, especially the current and former collective of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter, and all the radical feminists who never give up.

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Chapter One: This Story Begins in the Middle

The Problem

Prostitution in Canada is again on the radar of public awareness. Every few years, concern for or about “public women” emerges in the media and public discourse. Vancouver, BC is a flashpoint for this concern, especially in light of such high-profile cases as that of the “missing and murdered women” of the Downtown Eastside, the trial and conviction of Robert (Willie) Pickton for the murders of many of these women, and the resultant Missing Women Commission of Inquiry headed by Justice Wally Oppal.

The purpose of this dissertation is to critically examine the harm reduction approach currently informing provision of services to women in prostitution in order to reveal the ideology behind this policy framework and how it informs the understanding of social problems related to violence against women. Harm reduction is examined in more detail later both in this chapter and in chapter two. Briefly, harm reduction refers to an approach initially developed to reduce the harmful outcomes of drug addictions without requiring the cessation of drug use. The study involved a review of the history of harm reduction and of prostitution in Vancouver, as well as an examination of constitutional challenges and changes with respect to prostitution.

Additionally, interviews were conducted with women who work in front-line women’s services and feminist activism revealing how their practice has been affected by harm reduction policy, or informed by a harm reduction orientation. The contributions of feminist front-line activists, organizers and service providers, whom I regard as social change agents and knowledge producers, can help to illuminate the discursive and practical strategies many of these women employ to counter the harm reduction framework presently found in social services, medical

interventions, or legalization initiatives. We can surely go beyond slender offerings of condoms and sandwiches to women in prostitution. I hope this project can contribute at least a spark of will and vision to do this.

Research Questions and Aims

An overarching goal of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the essential contradictions between harm reduction and feminism (particularly for this project in regard to prostitution). Though not all women who work in women-serving or human services organizations are feminists, it was feminists who founded many of those services as part of the women's liberation movement. These services were part of a political response to what feminists understood was a political problem. A central catalyst for the initial founding of rape crisis centres and transition houses was the model of the consciousness-raising group, wherein women told each other the truth about their lives (Hanisch, 1970). From the time of the first such anti-violence interventions, however, there was an equal and opposite reaction in the form of increasing pressure to abandon an agenda of feminist, pro-woman activism in favour of depoliticized social services delivery (Schechter, 1982; Lehrner & Allen, 2009).

Harm reduction, while initially seeming to hold some promise for the humane treatment of people who were suffering, appears now to be a de-politicizing force. Never explicitly revolutionary, it has become a reformist measure, and often an end in itself—a social services strategy which undermines an activist agenda. Given the above standpoint, my research questions are:

1. In what ways do front-line workers understand and interact with harm reduction policies, popular apprehensions of the meanings of harm reduction, and the promotions of harm reduction by state bodies to which their workplaces may

be accountable?

a) How did women find their way to working in these organizations, and in what ways did their path to that work affect their practices and analysis?

b) What are their experiences of government influences on their workplace policies and practices, particularly their views on the relation between harm reduction and devolution of federal funding to women's services and equality-seeking organizations?

c) What are their views on how harm reduction impacts women in prostitution?

2. How can these understandings and negotiations contribute to feminist action, service provision and the relationships between public discourse and feminist praxis?

Harm Reduction

In order to situate this study, here I briefly describe a definition of harm reduction, and specific policy in use in Vancouver. I provide additional detail about the history of the ascendance of harm reduction policy in the next chapter. Harm reduction was a term initially identified and developed by medical professionals as a set of strategies along the continuum of addiction treatment¹. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (n.d.), “harm reduction is any policy or program designed to reduce drug-related harm without requiring the cessation of drug use” (para 2).

¹ See for example the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health website background paper on harm reduction at:
http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about_camh/influencing_public_policy/public_policy_submissions/harm_reduction/Pages/harmreductionbackground.aspx

Some harm reduction strategies for drug users include access to clean needles for injection drug use, methadone maintenance programs, health care providers giving instruction to drug users on “vein care”, and low-barrier or barrier-free² drop-in centres and shelters. Harm reduction, as described in Vancouver’s Four Pillars Drug Policy, was meant to “reduce risk of harm to communities and drug users” (MacPherson, 2001, p. 60). These harms include public disorder, nuisance and litter, as well as morbidity and mortality. Since 2003, when Vancouver’s safe injection site for users of intravenous drugs opened, there have been a number of studies³ conducted that claim Vancouver’s harm reduction strategy is a success in terms of reducing public disorder and preventing overdose deaths at the site itself (for example, see Wood et al., 2007; Small et al., 2006). This research indicates that harm reduction as a medical intervention has achieved its aims. Indeed, harm reduction seems so successful that in the last dozen years, strategies labeled harm reduction have been taken up in other areas of social services, most notably in agencies that serve women.

It is the application of harm reduction principles to front-line work with women in prostitution with which this study is concerned. On the face of it, harm reduction appears to be a set of practices that meet addicts⁴ (the initial targets of this approach) “with dignity and respect”, (MacPherson, 2001). However, it does not seek to get to the roots of harmful practices, to understand and ameliorate the sources of addiction. The aim of harm reduction is not to make deeper social transformations to achieve social inclusion or equality.

² Low barrier and barrier free refer to resources that people can access whether or not they are sober or under the influence of drugs.

³ A number of these studies have come from the BC Center of Excellence on HIV/AIDS research <http://cfenet.ubc.ca/> accessed July 18, 2014.

⁴ Most especially, people who are targets of harm reduction policies use injection drugs in urban areas of poverty and pathology (such as the DTES). As I describe later, one can discern a distinctly classist character to harm reduction interventions.

Harm reduction is now considered a useful approach to problems related to prostitution. Most harm reduction interventions and reforms aim to scrutinize and ‘reform’ activities of women in prostitution. I describe these measures later in this study. Harm reduction measures taken toward women in prostitution were initially meant to address HIV transmission and morbidity related to drug use, but now law reform, access to shelter and other ‘non-medical’ interventions are defined as harm reduction as well. In Canada, proponents of the total decriminalization of prostitution promote harm reduction for women engaged in street-level prostitution and consider legalization to be part of harm reduction. As noted, harm reduction has been taken up by social and medical service agencies, and in this study I address some of the effects of this promotion and women’s engagement with harm reduction.

I argue here that, framed as services for women in prostitution, feminist anti-violence theory and action and harm reduction theory and practice are contradictory and oppositional approaches. Harm reduction was and is a concern of feminist anti-violence organizing, in that transition house workers and rape crisis centre workers will meet women (including prostituted women) where they are, help them assess their situations and plan for immediate safety and eventual escape or resistance against a violent man or men. This type of harm reduction is incremental and aims to eliminate the harms women experience from men’s violence. However, as framed by institutions of governance such as social services and medicine, harm reduction has become central to the establishment of state control of women in prostitution⁵ (particularly street prostitution).

In the next section, I outline the positions taken up in the current debate about how to

⁵ Again, the targets of harm reduction in relation to prostitution are those women engaged in street-level prostitution; women who are clearly impoverished, and often also addicted.

respond to prostitution and then introduce the theoretical framework, methodology, my background experiences, and my standpoint as a researcher.

Three Broad Analyses of Prostitution

There are three main approaches to the issue of prostitution: abolition, decriminalization (and regulation⁶), and criminalization and prohibition. In the fractured feminist movement, these three positions are evident in the (often vitriolic) debate about how best to act in solidarity with women in prostitution. These three frameworks can be found worldwide in various legislative approaches. For example, in 1999 Sweden introduced legislation that criminalized the purchase of sex, but decriminalized the sale of sex. The Swedes built other aspects into this legislation including comprehensive supports to women who wished to leave prostitution. In 2003, New Zealand decriminalized all aspects of prostitution, and introduced regulations in terms of licensing and taxation. In Canada, two recent court cases have challenged the constitutionality of Canada's prostitution laws. In 2010, Judge Susan Himel ruled in favour of the applicants in one of these cases, brought to the Ontario Supreme Court by a legal team headed by Alan Young of Osgood Hall Law School. In *Bedford v. Canada*, (2010 ONSC 4264), she found sections 210, 212(1)(j) and 213(1)(c) of the *Criminal Code* are inconsistent with Section 7⁷ of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the *Charter*) and declared them to be of no force or effect. The case was appealed to the Ontario Court of Appeal in 2012⁸ and then to the Supreme Court of

⁶ Though promoters of decriminalization do not explicitly call for regulation of prostitution and pimping, one of the Pivot Legal Society's reports on prostitution and decriminalization, *Beyond Decriminalization: Sex Work, Human Rights, and a New Framework for Law Reform* (2006), includes many recommendations to reform existing laws in order to specifically regulate aspects of prostitution.

⁷ **Section 7** of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice." (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html> accessed July 25, 2014).

⁸ This court upheld most of Himel J.'s decision, but found that section 213, the communicating law, did not violate the Charter rights of prostitutes and that the living on the avails law could be retained so long as the

Canada, 2013. On December 20, 2013, the panel of nine Supreme Court Justices ruled unanimously that the impugned sections did violate Section 7 of the *Charter* and were invalid (*Canada v. Bedford*, 2013). The Justices then suspended this declaration of invalidity and gave the Federal government one year to craft new legislation.

These legislative actions, including the Ontario case, and reactions to them, bring to the fore conflicting ideologies and rhetoric that infuses the very workings of feminism as it relates to prostitution. Below I summarize the three approaches and their ideological positions and also reflect on some shared perspectives.

Abolition: The goal of the radical feminist approach is the abolition of prostitution, a position that argues that prostitution is not inevitable or natural. In this analysis, prostitution is “the oldest oppression” rather than “the oldest profession”—and does not exist in societies in which women and men are equal⁹. Abolitionists do not believe that the majority of women in prostitution have freely chosen prostitution to make a living, and define it as a practice that men impose upon women, and, like slavery, must not be tolerated (Audet, 2009; Raymond, 2013). Prostitution, in this framework, is an exploitative, degrading, and deeply gendered (MacKinnon, 2010, p. 506) and racialized practice (Pierce, 2009, p. 10; Razack, 1998).

Sherene Razack (1998) argues, “the regulation of female bodies in prostitution is as central to white supremacy and capitalism as it is to patriarchy” (p. 339), and this regulation certainly has been and remains central to the colonization of Indigenous women. Alexandra Pierce, in her 2009 study of Indigenous women in prostitution in Minnesota, wrote:

prosecution proved that there was exploitation of the prostitute by the person profiting (*Canada v. Bedford*, ONCA March 26, 2012).

⁹ Indigenous languages of the Gikts’an and Wet’suwet’en, Navajo and Okanagan Nations do not have a word for ‘prostitution’ – the concept was unthinkable prior to European contact (personal communication, members of The Aboriginal Women’s Action Network (AWAN), March, 2009)..

Native women experience sexual assault, prostitution, and sex trafficking as a continuation of the colonization process, in which Native women's sacred selves were routinely exploited for the gratification of a person who claimed the right to do so while ignoring or invalidating the impact on the woman herself. (p. 5)

Using Indigenous women in prostitution is a common practice of colonizers, and this exploitation manifests in both domestic and international trafficking. Women will leave their impoverished homelands, whether they are the over-crowded reservations in the Canadian North or the colonized, heavily mined, and now storm-ravaged cities and towns of the Philippines, and seek ways to better their lot in a "promised land". It is no coincidence that in countries where prostitution is legalized or decriminalized, the proportion of women of colour in prostitution has increased (Cauduro, et al., 2009; Farley et al., 2004).

First Sweden in 1999, followed by Finland in 2006 (a modified version, wherein purchase of sex from trafficked or under-age persons is criminalized), Iceland in 2007, and Norway in 2009, adopted an abolitionist legal framework called "The Nordic Model" of prostitution law. The Nordic model decriminalizes the selling of sex and criminalizes those who purchase it. Sex sellers, almost always women, but also men and transsexuals in prostitution, are provided with comprehensive 'exit' services, including safe housing, addiction treatment if needed, livable income, and educational or job training opportunities. An essential component of the Nordic model is the development and delivery of comprehensive educational programs directed toward law enforcement, social service providers, and the public¹⁰ (Ekberg, 2004, p.

¹⁰ Ekberg notes that police in Sweden initially believed the law would be difficult to enforce, but provision to police of education and training programs to increase competence and knowledge of prostitution and trafficking in human beings was effective to dispel these reservations. One year after the beginning of this training program, arrests increased by 300% (Ekberg, 2004, p. 1195).

1195). Other countries, including Scotland, Bulgaria, and South Korea have adopted aspects of this model.

Decriminalization: The ‘harm reduction’ approach to prostitution promotes a decriminalization and regulation scheme. The analysis of proponents of harm reduction tends to be informed by the work of such thinkers as Foucault, Derrida, and others generally regarded as post-structuralist and post-modern theorists (Phoenix, 1999; Ross, 2010; Brewis & Linstead, 2000). Acknowledging that women in prostitution give contradictory yet truthful accounts of their lives in prostitution (Phoenix, 1999), promoters of decriminalization advance arguments for prostituted women to maintain involvement in prostitution such that aspects they value¹¹ are enhanced, while advising that regulations be implemented to ameliorate the more degrading and harmful features¹². This approach, then, is inclined to frame prostitution as a service, the women thereby employed as health professionals and educators (Sanders, 2006); or as a form of labour that affords women autonomy over their working hours and better income than they could earn doing “straight” jobs and/or an expression of women’s sexuality (Ross, 2010; Weitzer, 2010; Brewis & Linstead, 2000).

A number of these authors and others who promote decriminalization, including the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW), argue that stigmatization is one of the more harmful phenomenon associated with prostitution. Radical feminist abolitionists are viewed as contributing to this harmful stigma (Weitzer, 2005, 2010; Lowman, 2011, as are

¹¹ In prostitution, unless under the control of a pimp, those engaged in prostitution say they enjoy the ability to choose the hours they work, they can make more money, tax-free, and in a shorter time than at the kind of low-level service jobs for which their education and experience usually qualifies them, and there is often a sense of both excitement and belonging afforded by the “outlaw” lifestyle (Brents & Hausbeck, 2001; Phoenix, 1999; Høigård & Finstad, 1992).

¹² These harms include physical assault (up to and including murder), rape, theft or refusal of the john to pay, diseases such as Hepatitis and HIV, and criminalization.

religious conservatives and others whom anthropologist Laura Agustin (2013) refers to as “the rescue industry”. A decriminalization approach argues that if prostitution was legitimated as a form of labour, and women who sold sex would be able to freely migrate to work (as many other workers must do in the globalized economy¹³), they would no longer need to hide or take chances without supports such as the presence of workplace security guards, health care and other benefits.

Making a distinction between “survival sex work” and “sex work” as a job, decriminalization proponents argue for a regulated, legitimized framework where neither the seller nor the buyer are criminalized. Such schemes are meant to reduce stigma for the prostituted people and institute working conditions that ensure safety. Nevertheless, they also argue that unemployed women in jurisdictions with legal prostitution should not be denied benefits if they refuse to engage in prostitution, indicating some recognition that prostitution is not like other work (Pivot, 2006, p. 31). Countries that have adopted a decriminalized or legalized framework include Germany, parts of Holland, New Zealand and parts of the United States and Australia.

Regulation: The third approach is one usually associated with the (particularly Christian) religious right. Proponents of this approach would seek to criminalize all aspects of prostitution. Such a view, which certainly complicates the arguments for radical feminists, is foregrounded by a moral argument for a law-and-order approach: “The [impugned] laws are a reflection of society’s views, soundly rooted in interfaith morality, which is that prostitution is an act that offends the conscience of ordinary Canadian citizens” (Christian Legal Fellowship et al., 2013,

¹³ Agustin and other promoters of prostitution argue that while women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation, a significant number of “women who sell sex” cross borders for the purpose of selling sex, and are not trafficked (Agustin, 2013; Scambler, 2007).

para. 2).

Feminist abolitionists will agree that prostitution “perpetuates a fundamentally offensive and abusive gender imbalance” (Christian Legal Fellowship et al., 2013, para. 5). Similarly, they may agree with the view of the Federal Conservative party when, in *The Challenge of Change* (2006), they dissented from the other federal political parties, stating: “the commodification and invasive exploitation of a woman’s body...violates the dignity of women and undermines efforts to build a society in which all members are respected equally, regardless of gender” (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 90). However, these arguments are rooted in a patriarchal Christian ideal which often defines women, (particularly those women classed and racialized as middle- or upper-class and white), as defenders of men’s morality, even as they must be protected by men. This view does not depend upon an analysis that considers the current state of women’s substantive inequality with men, and they cannot reconcile an abolitionist argument with other claims rooted in women’s autonomy and equality (right to abortion, for example, or to lesbianism).

Shared Beliefs: Critics of the abolitionist position often conflate the radical feminist abolition argument with a conservative, usually religious argument for across-the-board criminalization. In Chapter 2 I will address this criticism in more depth. At this juncture, I will suggest that those who argue for a harm reduction and decriminalizing approach may in fact share more views in common with the conservative and religious right than they will admit. In advancing the argument that women in prostitution operate with agency within often constrained circumstances, proponents of total decriminalization demonstrate a somewhat cynical and essentialist view of human sexuality. Instead of addressing the agency of men who purchase sexual access, and questioning the power imbalances operating within the institution of

prostitution, harm reduction proponents call for women in prostitution to consider themselves ‘professionals’ who make choices that must be respected. In a parallel analysis, conservatives who would criminalize both the purchaser and the prostituted argue that such an approach would punish the perpetrator (the pimp and the john) and protect the victim (the prostituted woman). In the case of both those who argue for harm reduction and those who argue for criminalization, the central argument is that the best that can be hoped for, for those engaged in prostitution, is some form of regulation or protection from the worst harms meted out to them by men who buy sex. There is a sense of hopelessness in both the decriminalization stance and the criminalization stances on prostitution.

An example of parallel arguments from these seemingly opposing sides centres on the discomfort or nuisance presented by street-level or public prostitution. The Christian Legal Fellowship et al. (2013) argued to the Supreme Court of Canada in the most recent (and final) appeal in the case of *Bedford v. Canada*: “[The Intervenors] seek to ensure that prostitution is not a legitimate business...It may still exist, but nobody should be obliged to be confronted or exposed to it” (para. 6). The appellants in *Bedford* argued that prostitution is an occupation at risk”, but quotes several affiants who state that they were safer when they were prostituting indoors (Factum of Appellants, *Bedford, Scott & Lebovitch. Bedford v. Canada*, 2013, para. 25-35). Not *safe*, mind you, but *safer*¹⁴. When practiced indoors, their factum states, prostitution is less of a nuisance to the public (Factum of Appellants on cross-appeal, *Bedford v. Canada*, June, 2013, para. 8, 9), which seems to agree with the factum of the Christian Legal Fellowship.

The Christian Legal Fellowship also argued in their factum that if prostitution laws are

¹⁴ Women who have exited prostitution, and who experienced prostitution in a wide range of venues including hotels, brothels, cars, parks, the street, or apartments say they were no safer inside. I know many women personally who have told me this (also see Jeffreys, 2009; Rachel Moran in Murphy, 2013; Raymond, 2013).

struck down, “it will send a signal to the vulnerable in society, particularly youth, that as a last resort, they can always make a living by selling their bodies” (para. 7). It appears that they accurately depict the argument of *Bedford* and others who argue for harm reduction measures in regard to prostitution. Bedford, Scott and Lebovitch state in their case that decriminalizing prostitution will enable those with limited options to make a living legally without fear of criminal sanction or stigma. The relevant question the courts should address, they assert, is not whether the woman in prostitution has chosen a “dangerous profession”, rather, “the relevant question for constitutional analysis is whether the sex worker's legal choice has been constrained and limited by state action (legislation) in a manner which affects her right to liberty and security” (Factum of Appellants on cross-appeal, *Bedford v. Canada*, June, 2013, p. 4, para 11). The appellants argue therefore that prostitution is one of a number of choices to which women might have access, and the main limitations imposed upon women who choose prostitution are those state actions that criminalize her. Left unspoken but implied by both those who argue for complete decriminalization and those who argue for increased criminalization, is that no matter what legal or regulatory framework emerges, options for women in prostitution, or at risk of prostitution cannot be expanded.

Through this discussion of the different positions that fuel the debates regarding which might be the best approach to prostitution, I have sketched the political landscape within which this study is located. In the next section, I discuss my position and view of the problem.

Research Problem and Perspective

When I began my doctoral work, my intention was to engage in an ethnographic case study of one women’s organization as a site of political organizing, activism and education about feminist anti-violence politics. Initially, my goal for this research was twofold: In the first place,

I wanted to simply record the history of feminist anti-violence work since the 1970s by way of stories of women working within one of the oldest, continuously collectively organized, rape crisis centres in Canada. Canadian feminists have a rich and proud history of activism and organizing over the course of now five decades of the women's liberation movement. Secondly, I wished to extend the critique of harm reduction I had begun in my MA thesis (Graham, 2007), and examine how harm reduction has been applied and promoted as an appropriate response to prostitution. I merged these broad interests and eventually focused my investigation on the (often conflicted) relationship between front-line feminist activism, social services provision, and harm reduction policies and practices in relation to prostitution. As my research proceeded, tactics and policies called *harm reduction* which include legal challenges that aim to decriminalize prostitution (including decriminalizing buying sex, "living off the avails" of prostitution, and aspects of procuring for the purposes of prostitution) gathered steam in Canada. In response to these developments, and as my questions and thinking became more sophisticated, my focus broadened from the work of one anti-violence organization to interrogating the ways in which a wider array of women in front-line work understood and engaged with harm reduction policies in relation to their work with women in prostitution. Eventually, I decided to politicize this investigation further by using the research data I gathered to address the parallels and contradictions between harm reduction and feminist anti-violence work, including the fundamental disjunctures facing practitioners as they meet the women with whom they work, and help them to navigate "the system". I began to see that, although all of the interviewees practiced some form of harm reduction, for most of them, their analysis of formal, or institutional harm reduction policy was a critical one.

As noted, my standpoint is that feminist anti-violence theory and action and harm

reduction theory and practice are deeply contradictory concepts. Harm reduction actually emerged as part of feminist anti-violence interventions, but it has been appropriated by law enforcement, medicalization and social services to assert state control of women in prostitution (particularly street prostitution).

Medical professionals or public health researchers have conducted a significant body of recent local research about harm reduction approaches to women in prostitution. Topics of investigation include: conducting HIV research with “indoor sex workers” (Remple, Johnston, Patrick, Thyndall, & Jolly, 2007); environmental and structural barriers to condom use negotiation (Shannon et al., 2009a); and negotiating safety in indoor prostitution (Krüsi et al., 2012). For example, Krüsi et al. described as ‘harm reduction’ the practice of allowing men into women’s residences in order to buy sex during ‘guest hours’. Agency staff members provide some protection by registering “clients” as they come in (Krüsi et al, 2012, p. 1155).

On the other hand, there is comparatively little research that addresses the experience, analysis and practices of women who provide services to women in prostitution and other women escaping violence (Lakeman, 2005; Pence, 2001; Lehrner & Allen, 2009; Beres, Crow, & Gotell, 2009). There is almost none that specifically discusses the experiences these workers have of harm reduction approaches to prostitution.

Why Front Line Workers? The “jumping off” point of my research is my own work and activist experience, informed and extended through the experiences and understanding of women who provide front-line anti-violence interventions, advocacy, support and health care to women. The agents who develop policy for social and medical services to women in prostitution are, in general, not the same people who implement these policies. In the debate about what to do

about Vancouver's sex industry, the voices of "experiential women"¹⁵ are sought by activists, politicians, bureaucrats and journalists (Pivot, 2004; 2006; Hanger & Maloney, 2006). I sought the voices of another group of experiential women—those women who work in rape crisis centres, drop-in and resource centres for women, transition houses or health care centres. These are women who regularly provide support services, advocacy and organizing opportunities to women living in poverty, and women escaping violence, including prostitution. Their experiences of providing these interventions, and of collaborating with colleagues and allies to improve the chances of women in prostitution offer a layer of analysis and understanding to what we know about the conditions of women's lives, and in turn can point to expanding horizons of opportunities for women.

Women who work in front-line services are often in a position of implementing policies created by someone else, either government or funding bodies concerned with establishing professional standards which have the effect of reinforcing hegemonic power structures. In order to understand the political intentions and effects of social policies about women on women's lives and opportunities, it is important that the thought and praxis developed by these front-line workers and activists is present in public discourse. Therefore it is helpful to explore disjunctures between the institutionalization of harm reduction and the actual practices and attendant analysis of women who provide anti-violence interventions, advocacy, health care, and other services to women.

I have described what I mean by "front-line" in practice, but it is important at this point to note that this is also a politicized term that first came into use in the 1970s as feminists founded

¹⁵ "Experiential women" are women who are or have been engaged in prostitution or another aspect of the sex industry.

rape crisis centres and transition houses for battered women. The term “front-line” locates the work within a political frame of women’s activism against male violence, which is crucial to maintaining women in positions of subordination to men.

In the decades between the heady activism of the 1970s and the neoliberal atomizing of social movements in the early 21st century, the term ‘front-line’ has been depoliticized and taken up to describe the work, not only of feminists or activists in social change movements, but that of social workers, medical practitioners and providers of charity. Some of the women who participated in my study did not claim to be feminists, or activists. Though they regarded their work as important and necessary including being respectful of and compassionate for the women to whom they provided support, they did not engage in systemic advocacy or activism in that sense. Nevertheless, it is in the spirit of resistance and in acknowledgment of the foundational work of the women who opened their homes and phone lines to women escaping male violence, and strategized together a vibrant feminist movement, that I use the term “front-line worker”.

Conceptual and Methodological Framework

Fundamentally, my theoretical framework is built upon a radical feminist politic which derives from front-line anti-violence and anti-poverty work and activism. For a fuller elaboration of this study’s conceptual framework see chapter three. Radical feminism is a branch of feminism which proposes that male domination of women is the root of oppression, from which stem other oppressions (class, race). That is to say, “the middle class [and White] studied from the same book as the men”¹⁶, and these systems of domination intertwine and uphold each other. All other conditions being equal, men in every political category dominate women who share their racialized and classed circumstances, with white, middle-and-upper class men at the

¹⁶ Bonnie Agnew, front-line anti-violence worker and feminist activist, personal communication, 1993.

pinnacle of dominion.

Radical feminism began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s in North America as women formed “consciousness-raising” groups in which they told each other about their lives. The phrase “the personal is political” became one of the foundational insights of the mid-late-twentieth century feminist movement (Hanisch, 1970). Through these discussions, women realized together that their individual problems were more often structural and based upon patriarchy (the normalized and structurally reinforced dominance of men as a class over women as a class). They rejected the idea that such groups were therapy, and instead used them to inform and plan feminist political actions – including rape crisis lines and transition houses. Though some academic researchers identify “male violence” rather than the more commonly used euphemism, “domestic violence”, and develop a gendered analysis of men’s violence against women and its effects, they often name the anti-violence sector of the women’s liberation movement “the battered women’s movement” (Dobash & Dobash, 1992), or the “domestic violence movement” (Lehrner & Allen, 2009). This separation of anti-violence activism and services from other feminist political work feeds into circulating populist ideals (and influences the analysis and practices of women who work in transition houses and women’s services) that this work is social service and therapeutic rather than political action (Beris, Crow & Gotell, 2009; Lehrner & Allen, 2009).

The notion of *praxis* is central to feminist organizing and anti-violence work, as well as a fundamental component of the political and sociological thought of the theorists to whom I have turned to make meaning of my research. Paulo Freire called praxis “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 33). I first learned the term when I was working in a feminist rape crisis centre. The women who trained me and beside whom I worked

described it as follows: When we do the work [of crisis intervention] with women who call us, the practice informs the theory, which in turn improves the practice.

Early second-wave feminists built feminist theory from the stories women told of their experiences, and then put those theories into practice by advocating, demonstrating, organizing and educating themselves in a continual dialectical process of learning, acting, reflecting, revising, theorizing, and acting some more.

Key Thinkers

I rely primarily upon the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu and Hannah Arendt to analyze the research data and answer the key questions raised in this work. Both Bourdieu and Arendt offer concepts that provide me with a bigger picture and wide landscape for understanding the data collected in this study. They also help to open the space to consider in tandem conflicting or contradictory ideas (such as, for example, harm reduction and abolition). Of course radical feminist scholars and activists such as Andrea Dworkin (1998), Catherine MacKinnon (1993, 2010) and Sheila Jeffreys (1997, 2009) inform much of my own worldview and practice, and the legacy of ‘Second Wave’ feminists who revived the robust movement for women’s liberation continues to provide inspiration. Although the tide is out (the so-called ‘Third Wave’ is actually more like an undertow), I have no doubt we will rise again. I turn as well to contemporary scholars such as Nancy Fraser (1987, 2003), Beverley Skeggs (1997), Seyla Benhabib (1993), and Susan Bickford (1996), each of whom gracefully applies the original and imaginative ideas of Arendt and/or Bourdieu to contemporary political and sociological issues.

Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus*, *positional suffering* and *cultural or political capital* and the reproduction thereof (Bourdieu, 1984, 1999, 2000) have provided the necessary concepts to examine the structures of society which shape us and our relations to each other and

to institutions and social constructs. This is particularly so in relation to power relations and the state.

The agent engaged in practice knows the world...too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he [*sic*] is caught up in it, bound up within it; he [*sic*] inhabits it like a garment...he [*sic*] feels at home in the world because the world is also in him [*sic*], in the form of the habitus. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 216)

Hannah Arendt's work contributes to this study important insights about political action "in the public space of appearance" and the nature and problematics of the concept of freedom (Arendt, 1954, 1958/1998). Her writing on the rise of totalitarianism, the state creation of "superfluous people" (Arendt, 1948/1994), and her concerns about responsibility and judgment (2003) are particularly trenchant in discussing the conditions of women's lives and women's resistance in the contemporary moment.

Dorothy Smith's (1987, 2005) ground breaking explorations of women's lived experience and feminist discourse has informed the conceptualization as well as the methodological approach for this study. Smith draws attention to the particular ways in which women negotiate with "relations of ruling" and also describes how women's discourses are erased or suffocated, even as they emerge (Smith, 1987). Feminist discourse, she writes, has been inexorably "integrated and quietly suffocated within the institutions"¹⁷. Much of my research data came from women doing work that is at once *feminist* (work that women take up and that interrogates the structures of power that shape and constrain opportunities and expectations of and for women) and *feminine* (that is, gendered and socially imposed as 'natural' dispositions of females—"women's work") in both paid and volunteer work. Research participants, and women

¹⁷ Teresa D. Lauretis (1986), quoted in Smith (1987, p. 220).

like them, have historically engaged in negotiation or struggle with the “relations of ruling” as represented by government-funded and produced discourses about women. Women’s work of providing physical and emotional support which seeks to alleviate suffering is a by-product of feminist anti-violence work, though it has, I argue, eclipsed the initial goals of women’s liberation. Front-line *feminist* work, on the other hand, while often incorporating aspects of support, necessarily includes developing collaborative systems of women’s self-organizing while at the same time seeking to reform or replace male-dominated or patriarchal structures and systems.

Smith refers to policy documents, reports, and “action plans” as “boss texts” which reveal the dominant discourses of the time, and show at least some of the effects of policy, discourse, and the political climate and actions of the times in which they were produced. This study assumes that most women in front-line service work are acting in relation to the constraints or guidance of the boss texts of their workplaces, some of which they create together in collaboration with colleagues, others which are introduced or imposed in response to outside forces acting upon their organizations.

Smith, Arendt and Bourdieu together show how individuals are caught up in webs of relations and structures of domination that are not of their own making. Taken together, and with a strong supporting cast, these thinkers provide a window of understanding into the dilemmas related to how individuals, acting in concert within these complex webs of relation, both accommodate and resist the conforming influences of the taken for granted social arrangements of power in contemporary times.

Words About Wording

Prostituted Women? Sex Workers? Throughout this dissertation, unless directly

quoting another source, I use the terms “women in prostitution” or “prostituted women”. The terms presently in common usage among some service providers and media, that is, “sex work” and “sex worker”, are meant to reduce stigma and frame prostitution as a form of labour. The primary function of such terms, however, serves to de-stigmatize the sex industry and exploiters of women, rather than the women themselves (Bindel & Adkins, 2008, p. 6). The terminology of sexwork/er hides systemic inequalities between women and men. “Prostitution” (though by no means an adequate term), names something that men demand of women—it is a form of exploitation and coercion, and a reflection of a patriarchal version of women’s sexuality. So to use the phrase, “prostituted woman” indicates that it is a condition of her life that is not of her choosing—though there are those who claim that “sex work” is a *choice*, even when at best it is a *decision* made under duress. I made the same criticism of this language in my Master’s thesis, an investigation and analysis of Vancouver’s drug policy (Graham, 2007). In her paper, *Nothing less than Heroic*, Betsy Alkenbrack (2007) confronts my criticism:

I think Graham is making a very good point on one hand, but missing the point on the other. It is not university-based academics or social service workers who chose to call the women at WISH sex trade workers, but the women themselves. While I fully agree that their lives are full of contradictions, inequality and danger, they deserve to be able to name their own work. Using the word “prostitute” will not improve the situation and it doesn’t seem respectful – and respect is a foundation of both good Harm Reduction and good literacy work. (p. 31)

The problem of naming or categorizing others is one that faces frontline workers and researchers (Alcoff, 1991) The words we use and the meanings we ascribe to the people with whom we work, who participate in our research or whom we serve, and how we frame our

research and practices, have effects upon our relationships with the people, the problem and the frame we use. As Alcoff argues, *who* is speaking matters, as well as the words spoken: “a speaker's location ... has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims” (Alcoff, 1991, p. 7). In eschewing the use of the terminology “sex worker”, I do not then propose the label “prostitute” as a better concept, as Alkenbrack here assumes. I along with other abolitionists agree that using the word ‘prostitute’ as a categorizing term is problematic. I use the somewhat unwieldy term “women in prostitution” or “prostituted woman” to interrupt how prostitution has been assigned as a singular identity marker of women. Prostitution is, rather, an institution or system constructed and reinforced by other systems of domination. It is an institution that men have developed, and one that reproduces the longstanding colonial position of men’s political and social domination over women.

Alkenbrack said that respect is a foundation of harm reduction. Implied in her paper is the notion that if front-line workers are to demonstrate respect for women in prostitution, we should use the words women in prostitution use to describe themselves. Though some women in prostitution refer to themselves as “sex workers”, I argue here that to follow this example is in fact to demonstrate a *failure* to listen. Bickford (1996) extends Arendt’s concept of political equality and respect to encompass the embodied and messy process of listening and “the exercise of common sense” (Bickford, 1996, p. 88).

“Common sense”, writes Bickford, “allows me not merely to see from another’s location, but to evaluate my own judgments through considering the judgments of others, and then to make a decision that I can live with” (Bickford, 1996, p. 88). Both listening and speaking constitute action, or *doing*. When speaking about prostitution, then, to say “sex workers” instead of “prostituted women” hides the perpetrators and profiteers of prostitution, blames the victim

for her own exploitation and indicates a lack of the kind of common sense evaluation and consideration of judgments that Bickford describes.

Speaking of “Choice”: Much of harm reduction and pro-decriminalization discourse about prostitution concerns the idea of choice: the choices women make, often “under constrained circumstances” and the importance of respecting the agency of the women making these choices (Pivot, 2004, p. 6). Choice is certainly an important component of feminist analysis and activism—feminists have agitated for more than a century for women to have choices in terms of educational opportunities, paid work, and (perhaps most politically contentious), reproductive capacities – the choices of whether and when to bear children. Women must, feminists argue, have bodily autonomy, including freedom to choose our lovers as well as how many babies we do or do not have. Radical feminists, however, go further than making a case for women’s ability to choose; this perspective calls for larger structural and societal transformation such that the options facing women in their act of choosing all contribute to respect for and fundamental freedom of women.

In regard to prostitution, the concept of choice becomes more complicated. Choice is a noun—it describes a thing composed of other things or materials, which we could call opportunities or conditions. When men demand sexual access to women’s bodies in exchange for money, shelter, drugs, or other goods, the woman’s choices are more constrained than the choices made by the men. Of course women in prostitution make choices, but the key point here is that those who seek to act in solidarity with women in prostitution must consider the material conditions within which women make these decisions.

I often encountered the words ‘choice’ and ‘agency’ in research articles, conversations and interviews. “Autonomy” may be a more accurate term to use in regard to capacity to choose.

Autonomy is the capacity of the rational being to make independent and un-coerced choice—self-governance (Mautner, 2000, p. 53). Autonomy is also used to refer to the self-governance of communities or nations. One may argue whether there is, for individual actors, such a thing as truly unfettered autonomy. Indeed, if a condition of absolute autonomy is an absence of constraint, then there can be no such thing. We are guided by our base physical needs, and shaped by social/political structures to which we are born and within which we are continually in negotiation. Autonomy, as well, is contradictory to a positive notion of freedom or the freedom to be connected to others (e.g., Hannah Arendt’s notion of *inter-esse*¹⁸) in ways that are supportive. Positive freedom of this sort is comprised of relations between actors, in the interests of each other’s well-being and contributions to the good of the whole. Negative freedom is referred to as such because it is free of interference or pressure from without (Mautner, 2000: 418¹⁹). Chapter three further explores the concepts of autonomy, will, action, and freedom, using the work of Hannah Arendt, Pierre Bourdieu, and Nancy Fraser, among others.

Locating the Researcher

During the years between my undergraduate degree and my PhD, I had quite a few jobs: treeplanter, roofer’s helper, short-order cook, waitress, general dogsbody—then I landed in Vancouver and found the feminists. From the late 1980s, I worked (paid and volunteer) at a rape crisis center and transition houses. I was an active feminist, contributing labour, time, ideas and money to anti-violence work, including activism, though primarily my paid employment was in the field of mental health as a drop-in centre staff member, outreach worker and advocate.

I arrived at graduate school with over 15 years experience working in front line services.

¹⁸ “The reality of the world is its “being common”, its being between, literally, its *interest (inter esse)* for all those who, through their common sense, hold it in common” (Kohn, 2000, p 125).

¹⁹ Isaiah Berlin described negative liberty as “freedom from”, and positive liberty as “freedom to” in his

I wanted to step back from that work and try to figure out “the big picture”, to learn about methods and theories that could make sense of what I had experienced, and then to find a way to improve those practices. In most of my work places it felt like we were doing little more than stomping out fires and slapping on Band-Aids. We knew we were in a system that depended on classes of people dominating other classes, but we couldn’t figure out a way out.

In both my feminist anti-violence work and “psychosocial rehabilitation” work, the learning curve was steep and the opportunities were many. Many women taught me, and we worked together, debated, made a million mistakes and tried to keep together a shared vision of women’s liberation. There were always a few women who were my colleagues in the feminist work who had also engaged in prostitution. Often, they came to the rape crisis centre to work already politicized by their experiences in prostitution. Others became politicized through providing support and opportunities to other women, and thereby developed a political analysis of prostitution as a form of male violence. My own analysis was formed in this way, from working with, beside and on behalf of many women who have been involved in the prostitution industry²⁰.

I am a feminist abolitionist. This standpoint is reflected in my thesis, and was integrated into the research design, archival investigations and interviews. I consulted other feminist standpoint theorists, most notably Dorothy Smith, as I further explain in the methodology chapter, and derive much of my theoretical views from colleagues and mentors such as the women I interviewed, among others. Certainly my political stance and lived experience

²⁰ I use the term “prostitution industry” here and “sex industry” elsewhere because it is an industry that commodifies and markets women’s bodies in response to men’s demand for sexual access to women’s bodies. Industries also shape and create demand for commodities for consumption, as the sex industry does to women. This terminology includes other aspects of the commodification of women’s bodies such as pornographic movies and images, “exotic dancing”, massage, or women bought as escorts or for a “girlfriend experience” (GFE).

influenced my analysis and writing, as they do any researcher. This is not to say that I did not ask for, listen to, or consider other viewpoints or ways of considering these issues in the course of this research. My experience as a local activist and front-line worker may have worked equally in my favour and as well as against me as I sought participants. I describe these tensions more fully in subsequent chapters.

Significance of this Study

I offer this investigation about the troubled relationship between feminist anti-violence activism and harm reduction practices at a time when harm reduction ideology gains ascendance in social policy responses to women's inequality, and at a crucial moment in the Canadian feminist movement. Feminists around the world are now debating and deciding how best to stand in solidarity and in collaboration with women in prostitution and other aspects of the sex industry (Gangoli & Westmarland, 2006; Audet, 2009; Graham, Gullion, & Piovesan, 2012). Within a feminist context of resistance against violence against women, this study offers an alternative way to historicize the anti-violence arm of the women's liberation movement, and to promote the theoretical frameworks developed by these women through their work of providing day-to-day front-line support, intervention and resistance against male violence.

I know that many people believe that prostitution is "the oldest profession", and use this position in an attempt to reduce stigma against and improve safety for prostituted women without considering whether and how to decrease or end this practice. Most front-line workers, including proponents of harm reduction, want to provide the best service possible to women in difficult circumstances, and often they do good work. My ultimate aim for this project is to describe a broader horizon of expectations for women in general, and women in prostitution in particular, and to develop and strengthen potential alliances. Harm reduction approaches to street-

entrenched drug users, and to women in (mostly, again, street-level) prostitution, may have potential as part of a constellation of services, opportunities and approaches. Women who provide services, including the women who agreed to be interviewed for this project, are in an excellent position to offer education and recommendations for action. Though not all of the women who participated in this study would call themselves radical feminists, the work they do is historically located in feminism—the origins of these services were developed as a result of front-line feminist work. So far, it does not appear that their contributions are often recognized or taken up in social policy. My hope for this project is to contribute to the leadership of feminist anti-violence activists and workers to gain recognition and have influence in the public sphere in the interest of achieving women’s substantive equality including an end to prostitution.

Summary and What Lies Ahead

This introductory chapter outlined the problem, research questions, some background to the different political positions with respect to women in prostitution, my theoretical and methodological approach and provided clarification about my standpoint as a researcher. Chapter Two is a ‘map of the terrain’ of the last thirty years of harm reduction and prostitution research and discourse in Vancouver and includes a review of research literature as well as an historical tracing of the shifting geography of prostitution analysis, social services, and political reactions and interventions. It offers definitions and descriptions of harm reduction, prostitution, and legal, medical and social service research, as well as activist engagements regarding prostitution. Chapter Three outlines my conceptual framework, providing a detailed account of the contributions of the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, Hannah Arendt, Nancy Fraser, and Dorothy Smith which contributed to the analysis of the research data. These thinkers, and others, bring important concepts which were invaluable in “making meaning” of the rich, complex stories

which emerged from the research. Chapter Four describes the methodology I used and discusses the meaning and conditions of voice, listening, choice, freedom, and autonomy and some of the ethical dilemmas I encountered throughout the research process.

Data from interviews with sixteen women who worked in front-line women's services and/or feminist organizations provide a main source of information and point of departure for my analysis developed in Chapters Five and Six. In Chapter Seven, I engage in an alternative reading of 90 affidavits gathered by Pivot Legal Society from prostituted people in Vancouver. Pivot Legal Society gathered these affidavits in 2003-2004 for use as evidence in their Charter challenge case. Together, the interviews and affidavits form a kind of conversation between women inhabiting different locations in the same space. These chapters serve as a comparative study of the influences and structures within which women live, and reveal both convergent and divergent themes in the lives of women who could be allies and comrades. These parallel stories, I suggest, also show the forces that keep women apart from each other, and hide our shared interests. These examples of women's experiences in relation to the patriarchal state, and each other, are supplemented with information from government reports, policy documents and other archival materials. Finally, in Chapter Eight I provide a summary of this study and offer ideas for further research and possible alternatives to the impasse in which we find ourselves in this noisy and painful debate about prostitution.

Chapter Two: Prostitution in Vancouver and Harm Reduction

The key purpose of this chapter is to provide a context within which to interpret the narratives from women providing front-line services to women in prostitution and the affidavits of women involved in prostitution gathered by Pivot Legal Society in their challenge to the constitutionality of prostitution laws. There are four main sections in this chapter. The first part provides an historical overview of prostitution activities in Vancouver including key prostitution-related legislative reforms and the appearance of “prostitutes rights” and women’s advocacy groups, alongside an analysis of ‘stigma discourse’ as this is articulated in current research. In the second part of this chapter, I provide a comparative analysis of two Government-sponsored research reports on prostitution: that had significant impact on laws and provision of services. Those two reports are the Fraser Commission *Report on Pornography and Prostitution in Canada* (1985) and the Special Subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Human Rights report on Canada’s Prostitution Laws, *The Challenge of Change* (2006). These documents illustrate shifts in Canadian governance, public discourse and policy about prostitution and women in prostitution. I give attention to them as they signal significant moments in the history of prostitution and related policies and laws. Furthermore, these reforms also illustrate an important period in the history of feminism, anti-poverty action, and political shifts toward neo-liberalism in Vancouver and Canada.

In the third section, I turn my attention to the emergence of harm reduction as a key policy informing social and health services including services provided to women in prostitution. In this section I also discuss harm-reduction research into the matter of

prostitution from the fields of medicine, law, feminist theory, and cultural theory. In the fourth and final part of this chapter I locate this discussion of prostitution and related services and legislation within a broader neo-liberal framework.

Part 1 -- A Brief History of Prostitution in Vancouver and Canada

In what follows I begin with an overview of the history of prostitution in Vancouver from its incorporation as a city in 1886 to the contemporary moment. For the purpose of this chapter, I have organized this review into different sections, recognizing, of course, that the ongoing debate and discussion about prostitution is not so easily divided, and that community related initiatives and legislative reforms are intricately intertwined.. In the section entitled “Public Women in the Colonial City”, I sketch an early history of prostitution in Vancouver. After this historical mapping, I turn my attention to the emergence from second-wave feminist anti-violence organizations of so-called “prostitutes’ rights” groups, exploring some of the ways in which these and other women’s groups influenced and were influenced by social and political forces up to the present time.

1.1 Public Women in the Colonial City: Vancouver was born as a colonial outpost of the British Empire in the 1880s. The original inhabitants of the land, several branches of Coast Salish peoples, never ceded the land to Europeans. Vancouver is a settlement built on illegally occupied territories. It was a brash idea of the colonial city, shaped by class divisions based on race, economic class and sex that fueled structures of domination and social dislocation, both reinforced by and reproducing prostitution and addiction (Alexander, 2008; Farley, Lynne & Cotton, 2005). These divisions essentially remain intact in present day Vancouver, BC (Farley et al., 2004).

The Downtown Eastside of Vancouver (DTES) is notorious nationwide for its active

drug culture, public prostitution and devastating poverty. Throughout the life of the city, it has been an epicentre of prostitution. There were very few women in early Vancouver, and trafficking of women and girls for sex from China, Japan and Korea was (and remains) a common practice of settlers from Europe and Asia (Keller, 1986). Dupont Street, now the section of Pender Street between Cambie and Main in the Downtown Eastside, became the de-facto “red light district” (Keller, 1986) soon after Vancouver was rebuilt after the devastating June 13, 1886 fire.

At the time, the city was not prosperous, and the fire might have been the ruin of it but for the manipulations of the city administrators of the time. According to Betty Keller’s book, *On the shady side: Vancouver 1886-1914*, the first known brothel-owner in Vancouver was Birdie Stewart (Keller, 1986, p. 26). When the city fathers went about the business of financing the rebuilding of the city, it was to Birdie and the other women in prostitution they turned “Every time the city got into a financial bind...the council remembered that it was possible to resolve that crisis...by rounding up the ladies and fining them for their trespasses”. As the women were marched to the courthouse, they set up dates with a variety of men, in order to pay the fines they were about to incur (p. 29). In Vancouver’s early years, laws governing prostitution were local city bylaws rather than territorial or federal legislation (Vancouver Archives, City by-laws, 1886). As the city’s fortunes warranted, the architects of these bylaws set both the description and penalties of crime. In essence, the city became a pimp, benefiting from the avails of prostitution. .

1.2 City By-Laws: Jumping forward to current day, laws governing prostitution are within federal jurisdiction, but by-laws determining property and business zoning and licensing fees are under municipal jurisdiction. It is through these by-laws that the city still

derives money from prostitution related activities. Indoor prostitution generally takes place in what are known as health enhancement centres, which pay a yearly business license fee of \$248. “Health enhancement centre” is a euphemism for brothel, but because the term also applies to legitimate physiotherapy or massage services, they operate with impunity, unlike the slightly less euphemistically titled “body rub parlours” which pay a fee of \$9,888 per annum (as of 2013)²¹. This fee is meant to act as a deterrent “but of course most brothel owners and operators opt for the ‘health enhancement centre’ option” (Bula, 2012, Sept 6, para. 8).

Print media also reap financial reward from off-street prostitution. A survey by the Asian Women’s Coalition Ending Prostitution (AWCEP) in the fall of 2008 of advertisements in three local Vancouver free newspapers revealed that the combined income of the Georgia Straight, the West Ender and the Vancouver Courier from ads for escort services, massage centres and “adult entertainment” services was \$75,000 a month²². Many of the women in the massage parlours and health enhancement centres, as well as the women on the back pages of the newspapers, are trafficked from Asia and Eastern Europe. The women prostituted on the streets, on the other hand, are disproportionately Aboriginal women, many from impoverished reserves (Perrin, 2010, p. 92-98). Vancouver is no longer using fines derived from prostitution to shore up faltering

²¹ City of Vancouver (2013). Licence Bylaw no. 4450, Schedule A, p. ii. Retrieved from <http://former.vancouver.ca/bylaws/4450c.PDF>

²² Statistics compiled by members of ACWEP as part of “Flesh Mapping: Vancouver markets pacific women”, an artful political conversation between women of the pacific rim. This statistic was featured in an installation at the Gallery Gaget as part of the Flesh Mapping Project, which took place in Vancouver during the 16 days of action on violence against women, November 25-December 10, 2008. See <http://www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/learn/resources/flesh-mapping-vancouver-markets-pacific-women-2008-inside-look-process>

budgets. However through licensing costs, the City of Vancouver—and these newspapers—continues to profit from prostitution.

In the next sub-section, I outline the different prostitute-related groups that formed since the 1980s, and evidence of discursive and political shifts from their mandates and activities.

1.3 Prostitutes Rights Groups from the late 20th to the 21st Century: In Vancouver, at least since the 1980s, women in prostitution organized to provide peer support, safety strategies, and encouragement to each other to exit prostitution. They worked in (sometimes tense) collaboration with feminist anti-violence groups, and sought also to provide opportunities to women in prostitution to organize with other women. The following section briefly describes some of these Vancouver groups and their activities from the early 1980s to the early 2010s.

ASP and POWER: The 1980s saw the development of grassroots initiatives of feminist and prostitutes rights groups which can be understood as the beginnings of what we now know as harm reduction. Sally De Quadros and Marie Arrington organized a prostitutes' rights group named The Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP) when they were collective members of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter (lee et al., 1987). Initially the aim of ASP was to both assist women in prostitution and to help them get out (Fraser, 1985, p. 363).

In the early 1980s, the founders of ASP met Margo St. James who founded a prostitute's rights groups in the US which she named Call Off Your Tired Old Ethics—COYOTE. They maintained contact and shared ideas and tactics. DeQuadros and Arrington found St. James “fresh, energetic and brave, but Sally [DeQuadros] and Marie [Arrington] gradually rejected her tactic of ‘glamorizing’ prostitution” (lee et al., 1987, p. 16). In 1984, Sally and Marie left

Vancouver Rape Relief in order to focus on their work with ASP, and by 1986 changed their name to Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights (POWER). When still with Rape Relief, they began the practice of walking “the stroll” a few nights a week to meet women in prostitution. This was the beginning of the “bad trick sheets”, and as they met with women and offered condoms, sandwiches and talking about the bad trick sheets, they also worked to engage with them in political organizing and activism with other feminist groups²³ (lee et al., 1987, p. 16).

PACE: In 1994 Paige Latin and other women formerly engaged in prostitution founded Prostitution Alternatives, Counseling and Education (PACE) with the goal to “help women escape from—and avoid getting into—prostitution” (Durning, Dolan & Crowther, 1997, para 15). To this end, PACE made presentations to schools, non-profit organizations, youth detention centres, universities and civic groups, and ran a successful program called “PACE²”, a six-month program that provided prostituted women opportunity to finish high school, learn basic computer skills, build their resumes and gain practical employment experience through practicum placements²⁴. Before a decade had turned, the founding members were gone, and PACE’s mission statement read: “By, with and for sex workers—PACE Society promotes safer working conditions by reducing harm and isolation through education and support” (PACE Society, n.d.). By 2011, PACE’s name was changed from “Prostitution Alternatives Counseling and Education” to “Providing Alternatives,

²³ When I was a collective member of a feminist anti-violence organization in the late 1980s-early 1990s, we were still regularly in contact with these women, and received from them the bad trick sheets.

²⁴ This program was in operation during the late 1990s when I was working at a drop-in centre in East Vancouver. A number of women did their practicum placements at my workplace, and went on to further education and employment. Funding for this initiative was cut in about 2000. There is no reference to this part of PACE’s history on the current website.

Counseling and Education” and the stated mandate of the organization had changed to “PACE is a sex worker led and driven organization offering low-barrier programming, support and safe respite for survival sex workers in Vancouver BC Canada” (PACE Society, 2014).

PEERS: The shift in focus from helping women in prostitution to exit, to providing “low-barrier services” and harm reduction is not unique to PACE. Prostitution Empowerment Education Support Society (PEERS) began in Victoria BC in 1994, when “a couple of women from the trade got together and decided to start a group for others who had exited or wanted to exit the sex trade” (Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001). In 2002, PEERS established a drop-in centre in the DTES. At present, PEERS “is dedicated to the empowerment, education and support of sex workers...working to improve their safety and working conditions, assisting those who desire to leave the sex industry, increasing public understanding...and promoting the experiential voice” (PEERS, n.d.²⁵).

Most women who came to PEERS, regardless of their intentions in the beginning, left prostitution because they found peer support and self-confidence because of their involvement with this organization (Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001, p. 15). PEERS stayed closer to their founders original aim to provide women in prostitution with the support and means to exit prostitution than did PACE. Nevertheless, PEERS has maintained that decriminalizing all aspects of prostitution—including pimping and buying sex—will make “sex work” safer (PEERS, n.d.).

²⁵ The PEERS website—www.peers.bc.ca is no longer available, and that address redirects to <http://safersexwork.ca>. However, some content from the old website can be found through The Wayback Machine at <http://web.archive.org/web/20130317094204/http://www.peers.bc.ca/>. The safersexwork.ca site does not have the content or links previously housed at the peers website.

Until the fall of 2013, one of their most popular programs was “Elements”²⁶, an employment alternatives program for people engaged in prostitution (much like PACE² had been in Vancouver). Due to a series of funding cuts and government restructuring of BC social services, this program, as well as the PEERS drop-in centre closed. They maintain a night-time outreach program, and are looking for other funding sources in order to re-open (www.peers.bc.ca/home accessed November 25, 2013). PEERS in Vancouver was defunded due to the same social services restructuring, and closed in 2011.

WISH Drop-in for Women: Women’s Information Safe House (WISH) first opened in 1987, with roots in St. Michael’s Anglican Church’s street ministry for youth²⁷. The initial aim of WISH was to provide a safe place for women in prostitution to connect with each other and to have a meal and a bit of comfort in the evenings. Initially funded by short-term municipal grants and donations, WISH has become a service project supported by ministries of all three levels of government (Federal, Provincial and Municipal) and individual donations. A great proportion of their funding comes from Vancouver Coastal Health. Many of the services and programs provided by WISH, including the bad trick sheets, and the Mobile Access Project (MAP²⁸) van, are now projects of social services and Vancouver Coastal Health (WISH, 2008-2009; 2010-2011).

Presently, WISH provides many services and supports to women in prostitution – including literacy programs and other educational opportunities; meals and cooking classes; and the MAP van. These services are important and useful – and the women

²⁶ Originally www.peers.bc.ca/home; now <http://safersexwork.ca/>

²⁷ wish.org/about

²⁸ The MAP van operates from 10 pm to 8 am in the DTES and other nearby neighbourhoods. It is staffed by a nurse and an “experiential woman” who distribute “harm reduction” supplies, and some material supports such as food and blankets to women in the streets (WISH 2010-2011).

providing them have concern and respect for the women who access them. While WISH claims to take no public position in the public debate about whether to decriminalize or take steps to abolish prostitution, volunteers and staff of the centre are advised to not discuss exiting with the women who use the service²⁹.

To be sure, given the closure of PEERS and the steady dismantling of PACE, combined with ongoing cuts to other services for women, the already slender options to help women exit, or even imagine leaving prostitution, are becoming more scarce. It seems cruel to suggest to women in prostitution that prostitution is a form of violence or to tell them they deserve real, better alternatives, when those alternatives do not exist (or do not exist *anymore*). However, as much of the current research indicates, both women who have exited prostitution and women currently in prostitution have an analysis of the conditions of their lives, and say that prostitution is not something they would have chosen for themselves, given other options (see for example Raymond, 2013; Bindel et al., 2012; Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001; Farley et al., 2003). Nor is it something they want for other women, and certainly not for their daughters or nieces³⁰. Given the evidence from these women's own stories, therefore, the persistence of service providers and activists promotion of harm reduction and decriminalization over exiting programs indicates a lack of solidarity or compassion for women in prostitution.

Kate Gibson, the executive director of WISH, while expressing her regard for the women her agency serves, speaks about prostitution with a kind of hopelessness and

²⁹ Personal communication, September, 2008, with former staff member of WISH.

³⁰ Alexis Kennedy, university of Nevada, speaking of her research in the spring of 2009 at the University Women's Club in Vancouver.

cynicism. “There is no way that some of these women will leave sex work” she asserted during a public forum in May of 2012³¹. At the same meeting, she argued against a Nordic model of law, saying that Canada does not have adequate social programs to support comprehensive exiting programs, and besides, criminalizing johns would place women in more danger. The best that can be done, she said, is to reduce stigma and offer some material comforts to women on the streets.

Though WISH claims to take no position on decriminalizing prostitution, such statements indicate that the leadership of WISH, if not the staff and volunteers, are settling for a version of “lesser evil”. The bad trick sheets, condoms and safety tips initially developed by women in street prostitution are now in the hands of the caregivers and professionals. Initially tools of mutual aid or peer support among women who are engaged in street prostitution, they are now techniques of governance, essentially making women accountable for the actions of men. Women who receive these bad trick sheets and lists of resources are then expected to make use of them; to recognize the “bad guy” from the description; to call the clinic or rape crisis line when they are attacked. This is consistent with state and media responses to other forms of male violence against women – women are advised to dress conservatively, travel in pairs or not go out at night, to carry noise makers or learn self-defense techniques. The onus to prevent attack is on the victims of men’s violence, not on the men who perpetrate the attacks.

1.4 Low-Barrier For Whom? Several agencies which provide services in the DTES

³¹ SAFE in Collingwood. Sex Work Awareness For Everyone held a public forum about sex work in Collingwood, sponsored by Living in Community and the Vancouver Police Department. May 5, 2012. Kate Gibson was one of the speakers.

describe their services and shelters as “low-or-no-barrier”. The internal structures of women-serving organizations in Vancouver have shifted considerably as the state has undergone a period of sustained retrenchment. As I described briefly in my discussion of prostitutes’ rights groups, the initial aim of these groups to provide peer support, some comfort, and opportunities to organize with others, gave way to services, programs and harm reduction. There are now, in Vancouver, a proliferation of “low-barrier” services and shelters (mostly in the DTES). “Low-barrier” means that the residents can invite johns into their rooms, and/or they can be in the drop-in or shelter while they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol (some have a restriction that residents or members may not use drugs or alcohol on the premises, others allow some use on site).

The current discourse of decriminalization and harm reduction argues that women in prostitution will be safer if they are allowed to prostitute off-street, in brothels or safe houses and when men who buy sex will not face criminal sanctions (Pivot, 2004; 2006; O’Doherty, 2011; Living in Community, 2007; Remple et al., 2007). Agencies in Vancouver which operate “low-barrier” shelters and harm reduction services include Atira Housing for Women and the Portland Hotel Society (PHS).

There has been a flurry of research by medical professionals in Vancouver which conclude that harm reduction measures such as moving prostitution indoors increases women’s safety and meets their approval (Shannon et al., 2009; Krüsi et al., 2012). Shortly after Atira Resource Society for Women (Atira) opened a low barrier residence for women “in the sex trade”, one study “investigated the effects on women’s sense of safety when they lived in low-barrier, harm reduction–focused housing for women” (Krüsi et. al. 2012, p. 1154). The study argued that:

Despite the lack of formal legal and policy support for indoor sex work venues in Canada, the environmental-structural supports afforded by these unsanctioned indoor sex work environments, including surveillance cameras and support from staff or police in removing violent clients, were linked to improved police relationships and facilitated the institution of informal peer-safety mechanisms.

(p. 1154)

Proponents of full decriminalization assert that criminalizing men who buy sex will further jeopardize women in prostitution by driving prostitution “underground” (Shaver, February 2005). Others, however, describe a different view:

There is no evidence that prostitution has ‘gone underground’ in the decade the law has been in place. Men who buy sex will not do so if it is inconvenient and if they will be arrested. They’ll stop on the way home for a blowjob, but they won’t cross the border into Denmark if they can’t buy a woman nearer³².

Much of the evidence suggests that although women who reside in these low-barrier shelters are grateful for the increased surveillance, they still lived in fear, and did not trust the men who bought them: “I prefer the date in my place for safety reasons, you know. ‘Cause there’s cameras on each floor, they’re not allowed in unless they have ID, their name is written down, and, people have seen you with the guy, so he knows that he can’t go and try to do something to me and get away with it.” (Participant 29) (p. 1156). Though the harms of men’s violence may be reduced by increased surveillance within brothels, women

³² Gunilla Ekberg, former special advisor to the Swedish Government, on March 8, 2012 at the Vancouver Public Library.

still experience fear, uncertainty, and a resultant degree of trauma.

The women in the Krüsi's study of the Atira housing project were marginalized not only by sexism, but also by poverty, racism (30 of 39 study participants were Aboriginal), and often trauma-related mental and physical disabilities, including active addiction. The threat posed by men who buy sex was downplayed by the researchers' focus on tactics of governance and surveillance imposed by the shelter as the means of reducing harm. Both recipients and providers of the services are expected to adjust and regulate their behaviour in relation to men who buy them for sex. Women are expected to familiarize themselves with the information on the 'bad trick' or 'bad date' lists posted at the entrance of the building, for example. And women are allowed to bring johns into the building during visiting hours. Therefore, women staffing the residence are in the position of acting as guards or bouncers, requiring men to register, (at one hotel men must surrender their identification for the duration of their visit), and monitoring the security cameras (Krüsi, et al, 2012, p. 1156). In the event that a man becomes violent or threatening, the staff must ask him to leave or call the police. While women reported they judged they were safer in such living conditions, it remains true that women are still in the position of monitoring their behaviour and maintaining vigilance against potential attack. In other words, these low-or-minimal-barrier shelters and services still require women to adhere to a regime of self governance to become 'ideal residents', and effectively reduce barriers to men's access to paid sex.

1.5 Prostitution as a public health concern. Other studies about women involved in street-level prostitution that recommend harm reduction focus on indicators of physical health, such as rates of HIV infection. These mention "violence" as a phenomenon rather

than naming the perpetrators of specific incidents of assault, threats or theft. Rather than finding problematic the demands and behaviours of men who buy sex, a study by Shannon et al. (2009) determined it is the “failings of legislation that criminalizes sex work on the health and safety of sex workers” (p. 664). While Shannon et al’s study does call for active criminalization of harassment and abuse by clients and third parties, they do not find prostitution, or men’s demand for paid sex problematic.

Though Shannon’s study focuses on some of the health risks of prostitution and argue that prostitution laws and law enforcement practices may exacerbate these risks: “our findings offer important empirical evidence to suggest that the current sex-work laws and enforcement-based policies may be directly increasing women’s sexual HIV risk” (p. 664), the researchers do not address trauma-related mental health concerns which may be present because of the conditions with which women in prostitution operate.

Indications of the trauma and fear with which prostituted women live, and the damage thereby caused are addressed in other studies, however. Brents and Hausbeck (2001 & 2005) noted that women prostituted in Nevada brothels, though they found the presence of cameras and bouncers somewhat relieving, nevertheless reported high levels of fear (Bretons & Hausbeck, 2001, 2005). Norwegian criminologists Cecelia Høigård and Liv Finstad published one of the early studies of prostitution in 1992. Their book, *Backstreets: Prostitution, money and love*, was their attempt to gain “an understanding of the content of prostitution” in Oslo, Norway (p. 8). To their surprise, they found:

The women’s reactions to prostitution have many similarities with the reactions of women who are survivors of incest and rape. [...] Information about such types of emotional reactions to these forms of sexual assault has attained the status of

established facts. This is not true of prostitution research. *This is new knowledge.*
...*This is the most important discovery we've made in our research* [emphasis added]...The idea that prostitution constitutes a gross form of violence was not even a vague impression before we began our research (p. 115-116).

Hom and Woods (2013) conducted a qualitative research study with front-line workers which re-confirmed Høigård and Finstad's findings, but from the point of view of front-line mental health professionals working with women trafficked into prostitution. "The findings from this study highlight the pervasiveness of PTSD, depression, and shame in women who have been commercially sexually exploited" (p. 80).

Other research indicates that women count on the support and solidarity of peers in order to find their way *out* of prostitution, as well as to achieve a measure of safety while trapped within it (Hedin & Månsson 2003; Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001). My research also confirmed the importance of mutual aid and peer support for women to leave prostitution, as well as to the well-being and efficacy of women in front-line work.

1.6 Affects of and challenges to stigma discourse: Numerous studies of women currently involved in prostitution report that "the stigmatisation of sex work is *the main problem* [emphasis added] interviewees experienced while working in the sex industry and this impacted negatively on both their private and professional lives" (Mai, 2009, Executive Summary, para. 4). Researchers who advocate for decriminalizing prostitution-related activities claim that this stigma is the main reason that women in prostitution do not go to the police or social service agencies for assistance when johns or pimps have further victimized them (Pivot, 2004; 2006; Shaver, February 7, 2005; Lowman, 2012). Brents and Hausbeck (2001), as well, focus more on the stigma that is imposed by legislative frameworks, and very little harms to women from johns

(including assault, harassment and theft as well as transmission of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections): “In general, legalized prostitution across the world is not an expression of society’s acceptance of prostitution but functions to isolate, stigmatize, and render prostitutes invisible” (p. 310).

Again, more than twenty years after Høigård and Finstad concluded that prostitution *itself* “constitutes a gross form of violence” (Høigård & Finstad, 1992, p. 116), studies such as Krüsi’s (2012), though recording women’s experiences of trauma from prostitution, recommended *only* what their research participants said they wanted:

Our study documented that being able to conduct sexual transactions in safer indoor environments bolstered solidarity among women and allowed for informal peer support mechanisms, which are more difficult to advance in heavily policed and stigmatized street level sex and drug markets. (Krüsi et al., 2011, p. 1158)

This persistent focus on stigmatization of prostituted women ignores the fact that stigma is a significant problem for women *in general*, (though more so for women in prostitution). The shame and degradation imposed upon prostituted women, through social sanctions and regulatory frameworks, certainly reinforce their marginalization. This stigma, however, is neither the main problem faced by prostituted people, nor a discrete problem of *only* women in prostitution. Effects of past trauma, poverty and the degrading and constant effects of systemic racism and sexism underlie and fuel stigmatization. The social censure women in prostitution endure is an extension of the pressure upon all women to live up to various versions of “ideal” femininity. Women in prostitution, then, in addition to dealing with the “normal” strain of “being woman” in patriarchy, also endure sustained trauma of having to engage in sexual acts at the behest of men (whether or not

individual men are additionally abusive). Then they must suppress this trauma in order to continue in prostitution (Farley, 2006; Høigård & Finstad, 1992; Brents & Hausbeck, 2001).

Many women in prostitution express their feelings about prostitution in their attitudes toward johns. In my experience as a front-line worker, and evident in studies using interview data from women in prostitution, their disdain for men is palpable. I suggest they may express this disdain as a way of suppressing the trauma they endure. Stigma, they may think, can go both ways. The women Hoigard and Finstad (1992) interviewed often had opinions of men very like those held by Vancouver women in prostitution: “Make sure you say,” said “Jane”, a Norwegian prostitute to Cecelia Høigård, “that lots of women are prostitutes because they’ve lost respect for men” (p. 19). More than two decades later, this is consistent with more recent observations of my interview participants (and from other research data) of women’s attitudes toward abusive men. Women spoke the same way about men who used them in prostitution, and of men (husbands, fathers, boyfriends) who abused or exploited them, that is, with a poignant mixture of pity, disdain and fear (Graham, 2006).

Part 2. Prostitution in Canada over Two Decades: Comparing the *Fraser Report* with *The Challenge of Change*

In this section I focus on the 1986 Fraser Commission report on pornography and prostitution in Canada and the 2006 report by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, *The Challenge of Change* which investigated Canada’s prostitution laws. I describe each report separately, and then highlight particular features for contrast. The Fraser report, for example, was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice under a majority Liberal federal government. The *Challenge of Change*, on the other hand, was produced by a

Special Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 1). The scope of the latter report, therefore, was much narrower, as were the resources assigned to the Special Subcommittee, than those of Fraser. Each report reflects the political climate of the time in which it was produced, and in the following accounts, I compare some specific features that show some of these differences. These features include the structure and relative strength of Canada's social services, (particularly as these structures pertain to women's poverty and other markers of inequality), the analysis and influence of different women's groups and women-serving organizations, and the discourse of choice and agency evident in each report. Both reports made recommendations for future action, and again, the Fraser Report is much more comprehensive than *Challenge of Change* in the range and detail of recommendations, and unlike *Challenge*, included draft legislation.

2.1 The Fraser Report, 1985. In 1983, the Canadian government struck a committee on pornography and prostitution, chaired by Paul Fraser, to report to the Minister of Justice (Fraser, 1985, p. 5). Over the next two years, the committee conducted research, accepted submissions and met with many individuals and groups across Canada as it researched problems related to pornography and prostitution. They held public hearings, publicized in advance, in 22 centres across the country. The final product was over 700 pages long in two volumes and contained 108 recommendations, each recommendation including draft legislation. It remains the most comprehensive study of these issues, and played a major role in how Canadian governments and agencies responded to prostitution.

The Fraser report stated that the most egregious harms of prostitution come from

men who purchase sex: “Customers are the primary source of sexual violence against prostitutes” (Fraser, 1985, p. 388). The report stated that improving women’s status and eliminating economic disparity would “decrease the likelihood of prostitution being seen as the only viable career” (p. 526). The report recommended that “governments in Canada strengthen their moral and financial commitment to the removal of social inequalities between men and women” (Robertson, 2003, section 3). Other recommendations were that Canada either directly or indirectly provide funding for “community groups involved in the care and welfare of both practicing and reformed prostitutes, so that adequate social, health, employment, educational and counseling services are available to them” (Fraser, 1985, p. 530).

Further to these, the committee made twelve recommendations specific to prostitution, including the addition of preventative educational curriculum in high schools as well as broad reforms to social services to youth and children (p. 665-668), wide-spread welfare reform to address women’s poverty (p. 527), more restrictions on street prostitution to reduce nuisance, and attendant relaxation of bawdy house laws in order to allow women to set up independent brothels and so stay off the streets (p. 538).

The Committee argued that the current laws were unevenly applied, and made the observation that street prostitutes “are more likely to be arrested and convicted of prostitution-related crimes than any other category of person involved in the business”, whereas pimps and customers were least likely to be charged (p. 390). Twenty-one years later, the Special Subcommittee on Canada’s Prostitution Laws reported in *The Challenge of Change* they found the laws were still unevenly applied, and the primary targets of law enforcement still those women prostituted from the streets (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p.

86).

Fraser described four basic categories into which the received briefs and representations from Canadian organizations and individuals fell (Fraser, 1985, p. 514). Placed on a continuum, at one end was the further criminalization of all prostitution-related activities and at the other end, complete decriminalization of prostitution. The latter representations advocated reliance on other categories of the criminal code to deal with exploitation and other forms of criminal activities. A third view recommended that prostitution-related activities be legalized and subjected to regulatory schemes including taxation and labour standards. “Furthermore,” the committee wrote, “...there was a conscious blending of the criminalization and decriminalization options which represents an additional [fourth] category” (Fraser, 1985, p. 514).

The fourth category can be understood as an early version of what is now known as “The Nordic Model”. In a submission to the Fraser Committee, Professor Constance Backhouse and a team of female law students of the University of Western Ontario argued, “prostitution should not be accepted without question. The law should attempt to deal with the root cause, which is the demand by men for sexual services” (Fraser, 1985, p. 362)³³.

At the time of the Fraser Commission, the independent women’s movement was active and influential across Canada. At the time, equality-seeking women’s groups had considerably more influence on public policy, much of it through broad coalitions such as

³³ It is this demand that Sweden addressed in 1999 with prostitution legislation which has since become known as The Nordic Model, to which I referred in Chapter one. This legislation is comprised of four aspects: decriminalization of the sale of sex; criminalization of the purchase of sex; comprehensive services to assist women to exit prostitution, (including welfare, housing, educational opportunities and drug and alcohol treatment options); and widespread public education about prostitution and prostitution-related harms.

the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres. The high activity of this movement is reflected in the breadth and depth of submissions contained in the final report, and in the language and recommendations the Commission used. Fraser strongly recommended the Canadian government bolster social programs and educational initiatives to improve the conditions of women, and work towards economic and social equality between women and men in Canada. He observed that in relation to equality , “...it is highly unlikely that significant results are going to be achieved overnight” (p. 529), Fraser’s commission argued that agencies which provide support to prostituted people be reinforced and supported with government funded research, education and material resources (p. 529). Some of these recommendations were carried out, but as I describe in the section “The Waning Social Contract”, the social welfare state has been dismantled over time.

2.1.1 The implementation of Section 213 of the Canadian Criminal Code. Because street prostitution was widely regarded as a public nuisance, and (to a lesser extent) out of concern for those engaged in prostitution, Fraser recommended section 171(1)(a) of the Criminal Code (public nuisance) be amended to include the use of sexually offensive language (p. 541) as an offence. This recommendation “represents a response to the feeling of anger and frustration which many women who live in or travel through areas affected by street prostitution feel at the verbal abuse to which they are subjected by prospective customers of prostitutes” (p. 541). This eventually became Section 213 of the criminal code, the “communicating law” which rendered any communication in a public place “for the

purpose of engaging in prostitution, or of obtaining the sexual services of a prostitute³⁴". On December 28, 1986, the Canadian Parliament passed Bill C-49, which had been introduced by the Minister of Justice that fall. This bill, a precursor to Section 213, was controversial. Some citizens' groups, city governments, and law enforcement officials enthusiastically welcomed it (Robertson, 2003, section 2D). Others, including feminist groups, found it problematic, warning that it could potentially increase the power of pimps, give too much discretion to police and law enforcement, and serve merely to move prostitution-related problems elsewhere (Robertson, 2003, section 2D).

The Communication Law, Section 213 of the Criminal Code, was implemented in January 1986 by the newly elected Conservative federal government (Robertson, 2003, section 3A). The implementation and enforcement of this law since that time indicates that Fraser's analysis and recommendation was misinterpreted. The recommendation from the Fraser report for some form of communicating law came about because a significant number of women and women's groups (including women in prostitution) stated their concerns about the harassing behaviour of johns. It seems that the initial intention of the recommendation as to interfere with men 'trolling' for paid sex (Fraser, 1985). However, since its inception, law enforcement has applied Section 213 disproportionately against prostituted women and only sporadically against johns.

Feminists could see this coming. Shortly after Bill C-49 was tabled, feminist groups including prostitutes rights groups staged a "wave-in" on two corners of Downtown

³⁴ Section 213, and Bill C-49 before it, made illegal the acts of a person who, in a public place, or in any place open to public view and for the purposes of engaging in prostitution or obtaining the sexual services of a prostitute: stops or attempts to stop any motor vehicle; impedes the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic to or from a public place; stops or attempts to stop any person or in any manner communicates or attempts to communicate with any person (Robertson, 2003, section 2D).

Vancouver. The organizers demanded the review and repeal of Bill C-49. They noted that prostituted women experienced additional harassment by police since the introduction of the bill, while johns and pimps were not facing negative sanctions (lee, regina, joni, & lyn, 1987, 19).

At the time of the Fraser committee's research, there was a great deal of conflict and tension about prostitution activities in the West End neighbourhood of Vancouver. It was (and is) the most densely populated residential area of Vancouver, and at the time heavily frequented by johns, pimps, and prostitutes (Fraser, 1985, p. 346). Gordon Price, a Vancouver city councilor, started a "citizen's action group" in the early 1980s called Concerned Residents of the West End (CROWE), which launched a campaign to drive the prostitutes from the brightly-lit, well-frequented West End north east toward the light industrial area of the city (Price, 1981) . CROWE argued that "legitimate residents" of the West End were not safe because of the activities and disturbance related to prostitution. These disturbances included those caused by behaviours of the johns, who would drive slowly down the streets, tying up traffic and harassing all of the women in the neighbourhood (Price, 1981). It was, however, the women and not the pimps and johns, who were blamed for the nuisance and fears of the residence, and it was the women who were run out of the neighbourhood. In 1984, the Attorney General of BC passed an injunction banning prostitutes from the West End, and declared 30 prostituted people "public nuisances", publishing their names in the newspaper, and posting their names on lamp posts in the West End (lee et al., 1987, p. 17). Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter (VRRWS) and The Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP) declared themselves "Public Nuisance #31" and marched in protest, gathering the support of women in

prostitution and bystanders in the neighbourhood (p. 17).

At this time, also, residents of the West End and Mount Pleasant neighbourhoods organized “Shame the Johns” campaigns. Although they claimed to target “the men who buy our children”, these campaigns did not result in negative sanctions against men who bought women or children, but instead harassed and punished the women in prostitution (p. 16).

These injunctions and legislative reforms corresponded to the preparation for and opening of the 1986 World’s Fair in Vancouver—Expo ’86—an event that precipitated a municipal initiative to “clean up” the city. All of these actions targeted the women rather than the buyers and effectively moved women—not out of prostitution, but merely into the more isolated light industrial area of East Vancouver, far from the densely populated West End. It was clear to feminists and to women in prostitution that these injunctions and other actions would result in more dangerous circumstances for women (p. 18-19). Other researchers have used the rise in the disappearances and murders of prostituted women since that time as arguments for decriminalizing prostitution (Lowman, 2004, p. 147), and continue to do so. Feminist anti-violence activists, however, while acknowledging that women in street-level prostitution are in great danger, argue that no matter where prostitution occurs, it is the actions of the men buying sex that poses the danger (Overall, 1992; Audet, 2009; Jeffreys, 2009).

From the late 1980s, there was more documentation of women disappearing from the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. In the late 1990s women’s groups, Aboriginal organizations and social service agencies began to put pressure on the police to take seriously and investigate these troubling cases of over 60 vanished women. Not all of these

women were involved in prostitution, but most of them had at some point turned a trick. The majority of these women were Aboriginal. They were confined and murdered, after the Fraser report, with all its recommendations and draft legislation was released, and the plight of these women eventually lead to another cross-Canada government-sponsored report on prostitution and prostitution laws. The next section discusses that report.

2.2 The Challenge of Change: In 2002, Willie Pickton, (a man well-known among prostituted women in the DTES) was arrested and charged with the murder of 26 of approximately 70 women who had gone missing since the mid 1980s. As it was twenty years before, the debate about what to do about prostitution heated up in Vancouver. Once again, the argument for moving women indoors hinged on safety. This time, however, (perhaps out of remorse for the deaths and disappearances of so many women), policy makers and “community members” claimed that the safety of “sex workers” should be the most important consideration, as well as reducing nuisance, litter of discarded condoms and needles, and public disorder³⁵ (Living in Community, 2007, p. 19).

The Canadian federal government, in response to a motion brought forward in 2003 by NDP MP Libby Davies, proposed “to review the solicitation laws in order to improve the safety of sex-trade workers and communities overall, and to recommend changes that will reduce the exploitation of and violence against sex-trade workers” (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 2). A Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (hereinafter referred to as “the subcommittee”) was struck, and began conducting research in 2003, releasing the final report in December of 2006.

³⁵ Living in Community’s 2007 self-titled report recommends enforcement of “no-go zones” around schools and parks (LIC, 2007, p 19).

Challenge was narrower in scope than the Fraser report, resources were fewer and the result was much less comprehensive. The subcommittee was comprised of representatives from each Federal party, the Conservatives and Liberals with two, and the Bloc Quebecois and the New Democrats with one each. Active for two years (the final report was delayed in 2005 when Parliament dissolved), they heard from almost 300 witnesses in seven cities across the country (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 2), a much-diminished sample from that of the Fraser Committee's research two decades earlier.

Even as the resources allotted to the subcommittee were more limited, the resources and infrastructure available to women's groups to prepare submissions were diminished. The governments in the intervening decades had implemented several changes to tax transfer payments and social program funding schemes with the result that Canada's social safety net, including funding for welfare, education and training, housing subsidies, and health care had been significantly eroded (Day & Brodsky, 2002; 2007). Women-serving organizations provided more services with fewer resources, and engaged in much less advocacy, certainly less systemic advocacy. The reduction in advocacy over twenty years was a result of funding requirements which imposed criteria for staff and agency mandate, and an emphasis on service provision over advocacy or political organizing (Bonisteel & Green, 2005).

The constrained mandate of the subcommittee indicated not only a truncated definition of state responsibility and influence in public life, but also that public discourse shifted away from a feminist-influenced understanding of prostitution. While the Fraser report described, with quotes from submissions, the material conditions that shaped women's entry and engagement in prostitution, the Subcommittee report was more

abstract. For example, the Fraser report concluded that women entered prostitution because of poverty, and because they were conditioned to “believe that their bodies are their only valued asset” (Fraser, 1985, p. 351). The Subcommittee report also related that poverty was still a significant contributor to women entering prostitution: “many witnesses agreed that a significant number of women are forced into prostitution by economic hardship” (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 10). Yet childhood sexual assault, social conditioning, and women’s oppression and inequality to men were minimally featured in Hanger and Maloney’s report of the subcommittee’s research.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two reports is the discussion of the “choice” of women to engage in prostitution (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 8). The second chapter of *Challenge*, “A profile of prostitution in Canada” (pp. 5-28), includes research and witness submissions that describe aspects of prostitution in Canada, and discusses firstly the question of consent. John Lowman, a criminologist whose testimony features throughout the report, suggests that most prostitution is an exchange “where both adults are consenting, albeit in a way that is shaped by their gender, occupation, ethnicity, socio-economic status and cultural values” (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 6, citing Lowman).

In his submission to the subcommittee, Lowman acknowledged that “consent” is shaped by the actor’s social locations and life conditions. However his submission to the Subcommittee did not describe the ways in which consent is shaped, or the coercive forces constraining the possibilities for consent, nor does he acknowledge gendered power inequities in prostitution. In more recent writing, this failure to acknowledge inequities has become a passionate defense of prostituted women’s “agency” and a misrepresentation of feminist recognition of power imbalances and demand-focused proposals. He claims the

feminist abolition position infantilizes and ignores women in prostitution:

By denying their agency, demand side prohibition³⁶ effectively places sex workers in the same category as children and the mentally ill, i.e. persons who are unable to give consent. It creates a double jeopardy. Already denounced by society at large, sex workers who refuse to embrace the victim paradigm are cast out [by feminist anti-violence services]. Rape relief will not be extended to them.

(Lowman, 2011, November 6).

On the contrary, I argue that “the double jeopardy” here is not that women in prostitution who refuse “the victim paradigm” are then denied the support of feminist anti-violence services. Instead it is that, when these women take up prostitution in the absence of other ways to earn money, they are encouraged, even pressured, to frame their experience as free choice, an economic transaction, an expression of their agency. If they have unpleasant feelings or experiences about their “choice”, Lowman’s version of harm reduction ideology urges them to supplant those memories and feelings and accept their lot. The pro-prostitution advocates then disguise their abandonment of prostituted women as valorizing their choices.

Challenge later features a section “The concept of choice” which offers an argument from Quebec writer and researcher Yolande Geadah who asserted, “We have to stop seeing it as an individual choice with no consequences. In fact, it is a choice that has terrible

³⁶ The use by Lowman (and others) of the term “prohibition” in reference to demand-focused feminist abolition arguments also obscures the intention and analysis of these arguments. “Prohibition refers to restricting access, distribution and consumption of a substance. “Abolition”, on the other hand, refers to dismantling structures of oppression and inequality as a way to abolish inhumane and degrading practices such as slavery, prostitution, and human trafficking (Graham, 2012).

consequences...” (Geadah, quoted in Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 8). This statement serves as an echo, however faint, of the submission to the Fraser commission two decades earlier by Dr. Backhouse and her University of Windsor students.

Challenge named prostitution “a dangerous activity” and found that “...in more than 85% of the cases, the people who committed the homicides [of prostituted persons] were clients” (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p.18). In the twenty-years between reports, it appears that little had changed. Women were still in danger mainly from the men who bought them; but unlike one of the conclusions reached by Fraser, *Challenge* did not conclude that women’s oppression and inequality were the most important (or even among the most important) issues to understand prostitution. A significant shift in the discourse in *Challenge* was that prostitution was characterized as primarily a health issue: “above all else, prostitution is a public health issue, more than a law enforcement issue” (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 89). A result of this categorical shift was that the report made no legal or social reform recommendations to alleviate the socio-economic concerns underlying prostitution (Taylor, 2010, p. 56).

Both Fraser and the Subcommittee found that concern for women in prostitution was high among those groups and individuals who offered submissions. The overt hostility demonstrated in the mid-1980s by Vancouver neighbourhood groups such as CROWE and the “Shame the Johns” campaigns had much diminished by the mid-2000s. By 2006, possibly because of the high-profile Pickton trial and increased public awareness of the troubling disappearances and murders of women, especially Indigenous women, from areas known as sites of procurement of prostituted women, this hostility appeared to have shifted to more compassionate concern. In urban areas particularly marked by prostitution,

however, the concerns of business owners and residents still seemed to be less for the women than for the economic impact, stigma, litter and other nuisance harms associated with the sex industry (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 29; Living in Community, 2007, p. 17-19). In 1985, Fraser (1985) wrote:

Canadian judges seem inclined to require a strong reason, such as involvement in other forms of criminal activity or the creation of a discernable public nuisance, for convicting prostitutes of criminal offenses. Whether this will translate into acceptance of the argument that prostitutes are, or can be, discriminated against as a group, remains to be seen. (p. 461)

By 2006, a further shift was evident. 'Prostitutes' were considered a distinct group, and referred to as "sex-workers", thereby referring them as separate from the political category "woman". The new class of sex-worker were understood to face discrimination, not because they are women, but specifically because they sell sex: "First of all, the Subcommittee agrees that violence, discrimination and intimidation against individuals selling sexual services must never be tolerated" (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 85). This statement, while not directly contradicting Fraser's conclusions, serves to reinforce an idea that people selling sexual services constitute a distinct group, separate from women as a political class. The 2006 subcommittee's conclusions represent a significant shift away from Fraser's, or a radical feminist analysis that the practice of prostitution itself constitutes discrimination and oppression of women, and that it is as much a gendered practice as it is classed and racialized.

In both reports there is a message that prostitution is inevitable, although Fraser's report addressed the vulnerability of impoverished and racialized women to involvement

in prostitution, and provided recommendations to relieve this vulnerability. *Challenge*, on the other hand, described prostitution as primarily a public health issue, and while the authors agreed that women living in poverty and racialized women are more likely to be criminalized, they did not seem to consider prostitution itself as indicative of women's political and social inequality.

Christine Overall (1992) engaged with arguments about what is (or is not) wrong with prostitution, and found that an argument to decriminalize and regulate prostitution as "sex work" amounts to essentializing:

Prostitution is called "the oldest profession", suggesting that women have always done it, will always do it, and will choose to do it, even if a full range of other options is made available. The implication is that there is something inherent in women and independent of sexist cultural conditions that makes us want to sell sexual services to men. (p. 719)

She went on to argue:

Prostitution epitomizes men's dominance: it is a practice that is constructed by and reinforces male supremacy, which both creates and legitimizes the "needs" that prostitution appears to satisfy as well as it perpetuates the systems and practices that permit sex work to flourish under capitalism.

What is bad about prostitution, then, does not just reside in the sexual exchanges themselves, or in the circumstances in which they take place, but in capitalist patriarchy itself. (p. 724)

To return to *Challenge*, the commission ultimately provided very little challenge to the status quo. However, the report did illustrate that little had changed in the conditions of

the lives of women in prostitution. For the most part, *Challenge* framed prostitution as within the remit of human rights discourse, detached from a structural analysis of women's inequality. The majority view of the subcommittee was that, while rife with risks to the prostituted, prostitution is nevertheless a form of labour. The risks of violence and incidences of exploitation and trafficking, the majority proposed, could be (but were not) mitigated through general application of laws already in force. They were "unable to find an answer as to why [these laws] are rarely used to address such crimes" (Hanger & Maloney, 2006, p. 92), and in the end called for more research and discussion before changes could be made to the laws.

The next section describe a brief history of harm reduction in Vancouver, and then how harm reduction has come to be applied to prostitution-related problems.

Part 3. Harm Reduction in Vancouver: Health, History, Politics.

Harm reduction, originally a set of policy and medical approaches problems related to drug addiction, is lately increasingly applied to prostitution-related problems.

Vancouver officially adopted a harm reduction approach in 2000 with the implementation of a new municipal drug policy called *A Framework for Action* (MacPherson, 2001). I describe Vancouver's practice of harm reduction earlier in this dissertation in regard to addiction, and engaged in a comprehensive critique in earlier work (Graham, 2007).

Among the dramatic changes in Canada's social and political infrastructure was the devolution of Federal support for social programs and welfare. In the contemporary moment, the language in the public discourse about prostitution, particularly in the DTES, frames prostitution not as a political or feminist issue, but as a public health problem. This framing is partly due to the relatively high incidence of drug addiction and sexually

transmitted diseases, (including HIV+) among women in prostitution compared to non-prostitute women (Shannon et al., 2009, p. 659). Political inequality of women to men is subsumed by the focus on health problems that harm reduction was developed to address, notably morbidity, mortality and social disorder (MacPherson, 2001). Thus, a focus on harm reduction is a reactive stance that offers some relief to individuals in the moment, but does not account for a longer-term goal of harm elimination.

Vancouver has become a sort of petri dish for liberalized schemes of governance of the marginalized. Harm Reduction policy first emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Europe and the Netherlands as a medical response to the disorder, disease and the degradation of urban public spaces (particularly in urban concentrations of poverty) which were related to the use of illicit drugs, specifically heroin (Baker, Anderson, deVlaming, Hickey, & Ross, 1997; Inciardi & Harrison, 2000). In Vancouver, the first interventions were the introduction of methadone as a replacement for heroin, initiated in 1959 by Doctor Robert Halliday, and a needle exchange service initiated by John Turvey and the DTES Youth Activity Society in the late 1980s. In 1997, the City of Vancouver declared the DTES a “state of emergency” because of an alarming spike in HIV+ status and overdose deaths in the area. The Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) formed and took action to draw public attention to the poverty and stigma which contributed to their social dislocation and consequent use of illicit drugs³⁷ (MacPherson, 2001). The signing of the Vancouver Agreement in 2000 gave rise to the city’s Four Pillars Drug Policy³⁸, which

³⁷ Personal communication, Donald MacPherson, former Vancouver City Drug Policy Coordinator, Spring 2001.

³⁸ “The Four Pillars” of Vancouver’s Drug policy are: Prevention and Education, Treatment, Law

focused first on the DTES, and set the policy scene for the establishment of Insite, which now supervises up to 800 injections a day.

There are, broadly, two versions of harm reduction: the Dutch model and the Merseyside Model³⁹. The Dutch Model, the one closest to Vancouver's version of harm reduction, contends that drug use is inevitable; drug use itself is not harmful, but some activities and effects of drug use can be; and harm reduction is a set of strategies meant to reduce harmful or risky practices. Abstinence is not necessarily a goal of this model of harm reduction (MacPherson, 2001, p. 58). The Merseyside model, on the other hand, holds that drug use itself is harmful and utilizes harm reduction strategies as steps along a continuum toward eventual abstinence (O'Hare, 2007, p. 142). As in the Dutch model, Vancouver's goals are to reduce public disorder, including public use of illicit drugs, and to reduce morbidity and mortality as a result of the use of illicit drugs. Abstinence is not necessarily a goal of Vancouver's drug policies (MacPherson, 2001, p. 61).

To these ends, then, interventions provided by medical bodies and social services agencies claimed to reduce harm caused by "the use and abuse of illicit narcotic drug use [*sic*]" (Baker et al., 1997), not the social and political causes of drug addiction. Like the western medical system upon which this approach is based, these techniques of harm reduction treat the immediate symptoms or consequences of addictive behaviours. These symptoms or consequences are named as: public disorder including litter of dirty needles

Enforcement and Harm Reduction. Aspects of this policy were enacted from 2001 (MacPherson, 2001). I engaged in an extensive critique of this policy in my MA thesis (Graham, 2007).

³⁹ Merseyside is a county in the Northwest of England, and includes the city of Liverpool. In the early 1990s, the local medical and law enforcement bodies, in response to increasing and devastating intravenous drug use, implemented a constellation of harm reduction interventions (www.addictioninfo.org/articles/256/1/Harm-Reduction-History-and-Definitions/Page1.Html).

and wrappers, property damage, theft, and public drug use; spread of blood-borne illness and disease; and overdose deaths (MacPherson, 2001, p. 53-54).

In the spring of 2003, members of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, (VANDU) and neighbourhood allies opened an “illegal” injection site staffed voluntarily by VANDU members and a public health nurse. The municipal government of Mayor Larry Campbell (former City Coroner) and the Vancouver Police Department tolerated this temporary site for a few months, primarily because Insite was due to open in the fall of that year. The media of the time asserted that public opinion was strongly in favour of the establishment of a safe fix site for addicts. The supervised injection facility called “Insite”, was initially a four-year research project funded through Vancouver Coastal Health. The site, has renewed an exemption from Section 56 of the Controlled Substances Act⁴⁰ and remains open as a health and research facility despite many attempts by the Federal Conservative government to force its closure. Research coming from Insite indicates that it has achieved some success in reducing morbidity and mortality, as well as decreasing public disorder (Kerr, Small, & Wood, 2005; Small, Palepu, & Tyndall, 2006; Wood, Mark, Zhang, Montaner, & Kerr, 2007; Strathdee & Pollini, 2007). This and some other state sanctioned harm reduction strategies seem to have also achieved some reduction of evidence of problematic *public* drug use. The popularity of harm reduction approaches in relation to drug users has sparked an interest in applying some of these tactics to work with prostituted women, and particularly those women involved in street-level

⁴⁰ Section 56 of the Controlled Substances act prohibits activities pertaining to controlled substances (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/substancontrol/exemptions/index-eng.php> July 20, 2014). Medical researchers may apply for an exemption for research purposes.

prostitution.

Initially these women were targeted for harm reduction interventions because of problems related to their drug use (Boyd, 2004, 2008; Shannon, 2009). Clean needles and condoms remain an essential component of harm reduction supplies to women. In 1991, Susan Boyd of Simon Fraser University, along with service providers and women who lived in the DTES, founded “Drug and Alcohol Meeting Support” (DAMS) for women. This grassroots initiative was an early version of harm reduction, chiefly organized and operated by the women it was founded to serve—namely women, including new mothers, living with addictions (Boyd, 2008). DAMS initially operated as a volunteer-run initiative, providing meeting support and social connections for women. They struggled to obtain funding, and for a while had some help from the YWCA. By and by they partnered with Atira Housing for Women, and are presently funded by Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and operated out of the Three Bridges Community Health Centre.

From the late 1990s through the 2000s, the drug of choice among drug users in the DTES shifted from heroin to crack cocaine and crystal methamphetamine⁴¹. The term “crack whore” became an oft-heard pejorative in the service agencies and on the streets of the DTES. The proliferation of cheap potent stimulant drugs coupled with the rapid unraveling of Canada’s social safety net under a neoliberal regime created increasingly deprived conditions for the most marginalized citizens, particularly women⁴².

Harm reduction seems to be the connective tissue between public health

⁴¹ Personal communication with former street nurse, January 2008; personal communication with long-time mental health advocate in DTES drop-in centre, November 2011.

⁴² Personal communication with former facilitator of women’s programs for VANDU, Nov. 2009; also, I have had recent conversations with a number of people who are residents or employees in the DTES, and they see this.

considerations of and approaches toward prostitution and law enforcement and legal considerations and approaches. Harm reduction is now part of the taken-for-granted discourse and action regarding drug use. Some activists and researchers still frame harm reduction as a form of systemic advocacy (for example, Osborn & Small, 2006), even though it is now firmly located and promoted by hegemonic institutions of power, particularly medicine and social services.

There has been some criticism of both Insite and the ideology of harm reduction. Harm reduction has been analyzed as a form of social control and governmentality (Roe, 2005; Graham, 2007). Other researchers argue that harm reduction practices function essentially to “purify public spaces of drug users” (Fischer, Turnbull, Poland, & Haydon, 2004) and to contain their potential rebellion within a pathologized space of dependence (Roe, 2005). I have also argued that harm reduction participates in the reproduction of cultural and political structures of inequality (Graham, 2007), and by claiming to be “non-ideological” (Erickson, Riley, Cheung, & O’Hare, 1997; BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, 2004), harm reduction in fact promotes hegemonic demonizing (or at least patronizing) discourse about drug users and prostituted people.

Specifically, one feature of my critique of harm reduction is that expectations of changing behaviours are placed on those who are most at risk of harm, rather than those who stand to profit materially from addiction or prostitution, namely, the dealers, johns, and traffickers. A parallel harm reduction approach to women in prostitution as to users of illicit drugs, would target the user (or the john). It would be he who would be expected to reduce his use of women; alter the manner in which he used women; consent to state or medical professional surveillance of his use of women; and accept alternatives to use in

place of women. People who use illicit drugs in public are expected to do all these things under a harm reduction regime.

Of course, in the case of prostitution, it is the “commodity”, or the woman purchased for sex that is harmed, not the purchaser of the commodity. Again, harm reduction demands that both the addict and the prostitute, those in danger or facing harm must change their behaviour, govern themselves, and submit to regimes of surveillance in order to benefit from harm reduction. In neither case are those who profit from, enforce or enable addiction or engagement in prostitution targeted or affected by harm reduction.

3.1 Harm Reduction and Health Research: Harm reduction is a model of intervention developed by medical professionals. It was always meant to curb mortality and morbidity, first from use of injection drugs, and now also from prostitution-related activities. Concerns about women’s health makes certain sense when thinking about harm reduction when applied to women in prostitution, as there are a number of illnesses and damages which occur as a result of activities involved in acts of prostitution. Melissa Farley’s research (2003a & b; 2004; 2005) reveals widespread incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among people engaged in prostitution. Her findings are reinforced by Jannit Rabinovitch’s (2004) observations of women who were members of PEERS:

A number of medical problems have been connected to prostitution (Rechsteiner, 1999). Most of those who have been in prostitution for some time experience symptoms of sexual trauma. Mental health problems include depression, suicide attempts, panic attacks, traumatic stress, sleep disorders, flashbacks, and migraines (Smith, 1996; Rechsteiner, 1999; Benoit & Millar, 2001). People in prostitution commonly feel isolated, alienated, suicidal, are

alcohol or drug dependent, have eating disorders, self-mutilate, have difficulty concentrating, have gynecological problems, and sexual dysfunction. Many addicted prostitutes were not involved in substance abuse before entering prostitution. (p. 240)

For some of these problems, harm reduction principles are appropriate, and the practice of “meeting women where they are at” with generosity and respect is a fundamental characteristic of both harm reduction and feminist anti-violence interventions. Beyond that, these two perspectives part ways ideologically and practically.

Much health research attends to “social determinates of health”, and takes into account the particular barriers to health care and safety of racialized and impoverished women. However, researchers come to the DTES with hypothesis to prove, which may not be the same as the mission of the people or organizations they study. VANDU, for example, depends primarily on health research funding. VANDU initially had a class analysis, and their goals were to achieve not only access to health care, housing and social support for drug users, but recognition and respect for their humanity. Health research projects are much more narrowly focused, and often take focus away from the original mandate of the organization.⁴³

A former employee of VANDU remembered an example of this kind of disconnect: A PhD candidate in UBC Nursing conducted research with the women of VANDU about the use of filters in crack pipes, and tried to promote the use of a filter other than steel wool. Women who were members of VANDU were hired as research assistants to hand out crack

⁴³ Personal communication with former women’s program coordinator, VANDU, December 2009.

kits (a glass tube to use as a pipe and a filter) and to ask other women drug users what kinds of filters they used. The research assistants then encouraged them to use something other than steel wool (particles of which are inhaled when used as a filter).

In the process of the research, women provided lots and lots of other stories about the relationship between incest and sexual violence as a passage to drug use, about internal immigration within Canada, [and] current patterns of violence against women. They exposed all this with their stories, but there was no use of these womens' experiences...The facts they told of their lives was just a way to create a sociological map, it wasn't the bottom line of the research. It reinforced what I knew about violence against women, about prostitution, and about drug use⁴⁴.

The information these women provided about their experiences, then, about their path to drug use, their victimization by men, the effects of poverty and racism on their lives, was rich and compelling. Had these dimensions of their narratives been understood by the researcher as more than merely contextual data, these stories might have provided a spark for women to organize together to create interventions helpful to reduce their drug use, or make more opportunities for education, work or housing. The researchers had simultaneously given voice to and suppressed the experiences of the participants – enacting a “politics of containment in which visibility can bring increased surveillance” (Collins cited in Naples, 2003, p. 166).

The material reality of their lives was not the focus of the research—the focus of the

⁴⁴ Personal communication, former women's program coordinator with VANDU, December 2009.

research was how to promote use of filters for crack pipes. Stable operational funding for support services is scarce, however, so VANDU and other community organizations in the DTES depend on funding derived by cooperating with studies framed as health interventions. This financial support comes with conditions and in effect redirects the mandate of the organizations and the energies of staff and members to match the aims of the research projects which provide funding.

At present, many shelters and services in Vancouver now claim a harm reduction approach to their service provision, in collaboration with medical research entities. To some extent, the services agencies have become governmental. That is, they receive funding from bodies which operate at arm's length from the state, but in so doing are diverted toward the agenda of the research (and funding) body, and away from an agenda of political critique and structural challenge.

Harm reduction, because it claims a 'non-judgmental' stance in regard to drug use and prostitution, can be understood as a technique enacting a liberal or negative conception of freedom. A negative conception of freedom understands freedom as the individual being unrestrained in their choices and activities (Quincy, n.d.; Day & Brodsky, 2002). This liberal understanding of freedom fits with the *laissez-faire* libertarian economic and social and fiscal policies of both BC provincial Liberal government and the Federal Conservatives. In the next section I shift focus to a wider policy context that is being shaped by neoliberal⁴⁵ ideologies of which harm reduction and legalization of

⁴⁵ Neoliberalism is "a loosely-knit body of ideas which became very influential during the 1980s and which were premised on a (slight) rethinking and a (substantial) reassertion of classical liberalism" (Marshall, 1998, p. 445). It promotes the idea of the autonomous individual, *laissez-faire* capitalism, and in general, negative (without

prostitution are a part. I begin with a brief note about the deterioration of the Canadian welfare state and take note of policy orientations of transnational organizations such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO) that reflect the rise of neoliberal ideology.

Part 4. Neoliberal Shifts at Home and Abroad

As was noted earlier, in 1995, the Federal government repealed the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and replaced it with the Health and Social Transfer (Day, 2006). The CAP was the mechanism by which federal revenue was distributed to the provinces as both cash and tax points. A certain amount of the tax transfer was allocated to welfare, health, and social programs, and Provincial governments were required to meet a set of conditions of distribution in order to qualify for receipt of these funds. After 1995, these conditions were relaxed. Provinces received less money, over all, and the conditions to use a defined proportion for social programs were no longer in force. As a result, social assistance and civil legal aid experienced a sharp decline in federal funding with devastating effects, particularly for impoverished women (Day & Brodsky, 2007, p. viii).

In 2003, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women found that the cuts to Canada's social programs as a result of the repeal of the CAP contravened the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), and since that time, Canada has come under sharp criticism from the United Nations (Day & Brodsky, 2006, 2009). The resulting increase in "feminization of poverty" has contributed to conditions that force women into prostitution (Day, 2008, p.

13). West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) released their CEDAW report card on the BC Government in October of 2013⁴⁶, indicating that little had changed in this regard.

The repeal of CAP and subsequent federal and provincial tax and social program reforms indicate a shift from the post-war social welfare state to a free-market laissez-faire approach to economic and social development. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms articulates substantive rights and of citizens that are, or were, made possible through a comprehensive "social safety net". Formerly, Canada's social programs, while certainly not perfect, nevertheless provided a limited measure of security that (even if only partially) enabled historically disadvantaged groups to gain access to the means to achieve equality rights. Jurisprudence under The Charter's section 15 expresses a commitment to substantive equality, which recognizes that "inequality is disproportionately experienced by groups in society that are vulnerable to marginalization and discrimination..." (Day, 2008, p. 11).

In the face of an increasingly globalized economy, "free-trade" agreements and other liberalized approaches to economic and social policies, women disadvantaged by structural class and racialized discrimination find themselves teetering on the edge of ever-widening cracks in the social infrastructure. As government fiscal conservatism advanced in North America, labour markets were deregulated, and social responsibilities shifted from the government to the individual (Griffin & Pulkingham, 2009). As women's resources centres, anti-poverty organizations and feminist anti-violence centres faced increased demands by

⁴⁶ October 18, 2013: <http://www.westcoastleaf.org/index.php?newsid=241&pageID=1>

the government to professionalize and adhere to state-imposed sanctions, they became increasingly restricted in their ability to mobilize for political action and systemic advocacy (Bonisteel & Green, 2005).

Globally, both corporate and military imperialism operate in tandem with market liberalization, and women are placed in increasingly tenuous economic conditions rendering them increasingly vulnerable to forced migration and trafficking. Those who think of prostitution as a form of labour do not directly address these forces, but describe these indirect forms of trafficking as “migration”, and argue that women who leave their home countries in search of paid work, including “sex work” are in fact exercising agency and enjoying the freedom to explore the world (for example Lim, 1998; Agustin, 2007; Brewis & Linstead, 2000).

In 1998, for example, the International Labour Organization (ILO) released a report about prostitution in Southeast Asia (Lim, 1998). Studies represented in the report recommended that prostitution be recognized as a form of labour and that policy makers develop schemes for states to regulate, monitor and tax the prostitution industry (Lim, 1998). Noting that prostitution “is a survival mechanism for coping with poverty and a method of compensating for lack of social welfare and income maintenance programs in South East Asian countries” (Karandikar, 2008, p. 2) the ILO maintains that dispassionate legislative and policy approaches to legitimate prostitution as “sex work” would reduce the stigma those in prostitution face, and provide mechanisms to increase safety and health outcomes for them. Though the ILO agrees that 98% of all those who are trafficked for prostitution are girls and women, they note that trafficking for prostitution accounts for only 43% of all forms of trafficking (Lim, 2007). Lim decries the abolitionist “approach to

end demand in the sex market”, and claims that such an approach does not adequately address human rights concerns. Lim, speaking as the ILO, agrees with abolitionist assertions that “we need to address the areas of vulnerability [and] the reasons why people migrate and are trafficked and the reasons why other people are able to traffic them” (p. 1). However, she conversely posits that some women enter prostitution voluntarily, and argues that “morality-based prohibitionist arguments” do not account for a human rights discourse (p. 3). Such arguments illustrate a neo-liberal approach to problems related to economic globalization. Though there is some acknowledgement that patterns of immigration and migration are responses to structural forces of domination – the ILO’s proposed solution targets the individual and argues that reducing stigma and legitimating sexual exploitation as a form of labour will improve safety for these individuals.

By contrast, other researchers perceive these patterns of migrations and immigration as indicative of increased domination of the south by the global north, and call into question the increased visibility in prostitution zones of migrant and immigrant women, or women who have clearly been trafficked for prostitution (Farley, 2006; Perrin, 2010). Vanwesenbeeck (1994) wrote, “Development of increasing mobility and migration of women in prostitution is worldwide” (p.10), and this trend seems not to have abated (Agustin, 2007; Malarek, 2009). This increased migration presents states that have legalized prostitution with particular challenges.

Acknowledging that prostitution generated a great deal of income unavailable to states as part of the gross domestic product (GDP), the ILO report also called for labour rights and benefits to sex workers, including improved working conditions through regulatory schemes (Lim, 1998; Raymond, 1999). These recommendations, however,

cannot be met consistently even in jurisdictions which have legalized prostitution (including Australia, new Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands, and 11 counties in Nevada, US). In these areas, the state is in the uncomfortable position of normalizing prostitution while dealing with the attendant flourishing of illegal brothels, and rise in trafficking and procuring activities of organized crime (Raymond, 2013; Jeffreys, 2009; Brents & Hausbeck, 2001).

Revenue from prostitution still accounts for an enormous unrecognized contribution to the GDP of many developing countries (Raymond, 1999; Lim, 2007). Women from Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe move to developed nations where prostitution is legalized, and send money to family in their home countries. Once they enter prostitution, their ability to get out is extremely constrained:

As more women worldwide find themselves in dead-end situations and migration because of economic necessity becomes more and more common for prostitution all over the world, the exploitive and often abusive grip of traders on prostitution becomes stronger. (Vanwesenbeeck, 1994, p. 11)

The United Nations Palermo Protocol (2000) advised states to adopt strong measures to interfere with the demand for prostitution:

States Parties shall take or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, including through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of person, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking.

(cited in Jeffreys, 2009, p.170)

In 1999, the Netherlands further liberalized prostitution laws in a bid to legitimate the prostitution industry, and to contain its operations such that the influence of organized crime could be reduced or eliminated. In an attempt to regulate and control criminal activity associated with prostitution, then, they adopted a legalization scheme that applied the recommendations put forward in the 1998 ILO report. The Dutch approach was initially touted as an effective way to legitimate prostitution as work, reduce stigma and improve safety for women in prostitution:

[I]n October 1999 the Netherlands legalized brothels [with the] stated aims...to control child prostitution, to guarantee cleaner and safer working conditions for their thirty thousand prostitutes, and to control the recent increase in illegal immigrants (Deutsch, 1999)...New standards will set permits, locations, and working conditions. Amsterdam has allowed window prostitution, a quasi- decriminalized form of prostitution whereby independent prostitutes can rent window space in a certain district and advertise in newspapers and fliers. Its regulations have long been cited by decriminalization proponents as a successful model. (Brents & Hausbeck, 2001, p. 310)

Within 10 years, however, it became apparent that the Dutch model was a failure. Amsterdam, and other prostitution zones in the Netherlands became overwhelmed by an exponential increase in illegal brothels, on-street prostitution, and trafficking.

Organized crime has a strong grip on the supply side [of prostitution]. Huge amounts of profit go into the hands of the mafia, criminals who either reinvest by enslaving more people or sustain other illegal markets...the goal

is now to restrict and reduce prostitution as much as possible in order to cut the financial supply for other criminal activities. (Kovari & Pruyt, 2012, p. 3)

Recently, Amsterdam city council took steps to dismantle this “successful model”: In Amsterdam—where the spectacle of half-naked women pouting behind shopfront windows is a city trademark—the link between prostitution and organised crime has proved durable. Efforts to break it have been a “complete failure”, says Lodewijk Asscher, a deputy mayor who has led the city hall’s effort to buy up and transform much of the red-light district. (The Economist, 2008, October 30, para. 5; see also Jeffrey, 2009; Foster, 2011, December 16; Bindel, 2013, February 2)

In light of the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision to strike down Canada’s prostitution laws, Canada is now in a position to learn from the experiences of jurisdictions which have adopted a variety of legislative approaches to prostitution. Representatives of the Federal Conservative government claim to agree with the Nordic Model, but the social welfare policies and punitive state regulations imposed on women’s advocacy groups indicate otherwise. Increased illegal prostitution activity has occurred everywhere prostitution has been decriminalized, except for those states which have provided adequate social and housing supports for prostituted people to leave prostitution. Contemporary promoters of decriminalization and harm reduction approaches to prostitution and pimping claim to eschew regulatory schemes or legislative reforms, yet nevertheless advance recommendations for fairly complex regulatory schemes and legislative reforms (Pivot, 2006; Benoit & Shaver, 2006; Jeffrey & Sullivan, 2009).

The repeal of CAP is a symptom of the liberalization of international trade and

attendant devolution of Canada's commitment to social programs. Even as social supports are diminishing, responsibility for services to impoverished and marginalized women is off-loaded from the state to private interests. In the absence of adequate welfare, housing, and health care options, women will turn to prostitution in order to bridge the gap. Fraser's report acknowledged this trend, and advised the state to devote more resources to education, housing, social supports and health care. The Conservative government that came to power shortly after Fraser's report was released took the decision to implement only those recommendations that were inexpensive in the immediate. Over time, fiscal conservatism and liberalization of trade policies combined, with the result that the state eschewed responsibility for social supports, offloading these burdens gradually to the individual. Thus, instead of recommending increased government responsibility for provision adequate services and funding to marginalized women, the 2006 *Challenge* report promoted harm reduction. From the bad trick sheets, free condoms, drop-in centres for women in impoverished neighbourhoods, to dramatically reduced arrests for prostitution-related offences, and now the repeal of Canada's prostitution laws, these actions (and inactions) have the effect of essentially handing responsibility back to the victims of social retrenchment.

Summary

This chapter offered a context for the problem this research addresses. I began with a brief history of prostitution and reviewed some of the key legislative reforms and attendant activities that contributed to the writing of the 1985 *Fraser Report* and the 2006 *Challenge for Change* document. Prostitution-related groups emerged during this time of significant policy activity and these groups are introduced as well as some related research,

particularly into the issue of stigmatization. I then considered how harm reduction as a key social services policy came into being and discussed some of the attendant research associated with harm reduction. I concluded the chapter by locating these shifts in discourse and policy as part of broader neoliberal agenda. In the next chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework for analyzing and understanding this history, interviews with front-line workers, and other sources of data.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

The theoretical orientation I have adopted in this chapter is largely premised on a radical feminist approach. This approach is informed by many years of front-line work and activism, and the particular political education from my membership in a radical feminist anti-violence collective⁴⁷. I interrogate my research questions with a conceptual frame that relies on theoretical ideas about freedom, choice, social construction, agency, political thought and action. The thinkers upon whom I particularly rely are Hannah Arendt and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as contributions from other theorists including Nancy Fraser (1987, 1997, 2009), Susan Bickford (1993, 1996), Beverley Skeggs (1997) and Naomi Zack (2005). I also look to Simone de Beauvoir's phenomenological study *The Second Sex* (1948, 2009; and Rigo, 2003) and to the feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987). I do so to better understand women's critical analysis of the influences on their work by the patriarchal, capitalist and colonial state. In this chapter, then, I describe a theoretical terrain of the particularly gendered type of workplace learning engaged in through anti-violence work, social advocacy and (in some cases) political organizing and activism.

In the first part of this chapter I sketch out the concepts I used to make sense of interview and documentary data, in relation to social policies of harm reduction and the analysis and understandings of women in front-line work. My aim was to reveal some of the main convergences and contradictions between these harm reduction and women's services or feminist

⁴⁷ The importance of this collective to the formation my political analysis and intellectual development cannot be overstated.

anti-violence work. This chapter also described the path (and some of the politics) by which harm reduction developed from grassroots activist groups into social service and medical schemes of regulation.

Key Concepts

I use Arendt, Bourdieu and other thinkers' ideas for the key theoretical concepts of this study: freedom (Arendt, 1954/1968; Beauvoir, 1948/2009), choice and reproduction (Arendt, 1954/1968; Skeggs, 1997; Bourdieu, 2000; Naples, 2003), political action, dichotomies of public and private, personal and political (Arendt, 1958/1998; Hanisch, 1970; Benhabib, 1993) and Bourdieu's notion of positional suffering (Bourdieu, 2000). All of these concepts are woven together and help me to interpret the data of this study: the interviewees' narratives, the spare, poignant stories found in the Pivot affidavits, and government reports and policies.

In the current moment, harm reduction is held up as the most benevolent and humane approach to many social problems, and proponents claim that this approach respects the choices and agency of those who are its targets. The medical model of addiction treatment claims harm reduction is one of the "best practices" for the most marginalized residents of the pathologized urban space. Following a brief definition of "evidence-based practice" in comparison to praxis (concerning the treatment of addiction), I then discuss how harm reduction practices may relate to Arendt's work on freedom and action. These ideas help to understand the current forms and functions of identity politics in operation in the discourse of prostitution or sex work. Seyla Benhabib (1993) shows how Arendt's work can inform a feminist critique of the formation of "identity" and of human rights discourse. I also turn to Susan Bickford (1996) to further examine the Arendtian notion of "action" as speaking and acting in "the public space of appearance" (Arendt, 1958/1998), the corollary action of listening, and the nature of "dissonant democracy"

(Bickford, 1996).

Some forms of feminist discourse assert the notion that one can “self-identify” in order to claim membership in particular political categories. The act of claiming an identity, in this analysis, is enough to confer upon the claimant the characteristics of those categories, and of being in solidarity with others who share membership. While claiming, (or rather, not denying) membership of an oppressed category to which one does not belong can be a courageous political act, at other times such an act can serve to render invisible those whose lives are defined by their class⁴⁸. The political categories within which we are born, and to which our families, education, and cultural milieu further shape us, determine in large measure how we understand others and ourselves. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, reproduction, and positional suffering helpfully reveal and define processes by which different capitals are taken up as bodily dispositions and reproduced. Simone de Beauvoir’s foundational work *The Second Sex* provides further evidence and theoretical grounding for these reproductive social processes as they pertain specifically to females.

This chapter, then interrogates different meanings of “identity” and “the self”, seeks to use different but collaborative ideas of freedom, agency, choice, action, reproduction, the public and democracy in order to construct a way to hear the research data as a conversation between actors—these women on the front lines, and the women in prostitution who are not always, (or not yet), but may yet become allies.

⁴⁸ A common tactic to silence, dismiss, or threaten women is to use the label “dyke” as a pejorative. If a heterosexual woman says, “so what if I am? My argument is still sound”, or something like that, she is acting in alliance with lesbians. If, on the other hand, a man claims to be a feminist, and insists on access to feminist events, this is an adversarial act. It is not enough to proclaim oneself an ally of an oppressed group – one must be invited.

Evidence-Based Practice versus Dialectical-Materialist Praxis

I discussed praxis briefly in Chapter One—broadly, it is the process by which a theory is realized (and enhanced) through practice. Arendt (1958) revived Aristotle’s notion of praxis—action that humans do to establish and sustain the realm of human affairs (p.13). It is by speaking and acting together, she wrote, that we produce (and are entangled in) the web of human relations—the product of humanity’s capacity for freedom (Arendt, 1958, pp. 233-234). Paulo Freire (1970) implemented praxis somewhat differently, calling it the only means by which the oppressed can achieve liberation (p. 33), and using it as a pivotal concept in the development of his pedagogical approach.

Can harm reduction be understood as a form of praxis? It may seem so, at first, but I argue that the process of developing harm reduction policies as “evidence-based practice” is different from praxis. Proponents of harm reduction describe it as pragmatic, non-ideological and “value-free” (Duff, 2004; Erikson et al.,1997), and evidence-based. Evidence-based medicine is “the use of mathematical estimates of the risk of benefit and harm, derived from high-quality research on population samples, to inform clinical decision-making in the diagnosis, investigation of management of individual patients” (Greenhalgh, 2010). Harm reduction, then, is enacted upon principles derived from medical and academic research. Researchers begin with a hypothesis or a question for which they seek proof or answers, and then apply those proofs to the situation or problem they study.

Praxis, on the other hand, follows a different logic. It might be also phrased as “practice-based evidence”. Effective anti-violence programs and interventions (and addiction recovery programs, for that matter) are based in peer-support and mutual aid, the kind of praxis which Freire discussed and promoted in his teaching. In short, those who are most affected by the social

problem work together to develop theories that they then practice. It is, then, those who are most affected by the social problem who seek collectively to develop theory and practices about their own lives, rather than researchers or other professionals seeking to prove an hypothesis from a vantage point outside of (above, often) that class. This is not to say that evidence-based practice is necessarily the opposite of praxis, but I do think there is a failure of academics and other researchers to fully listen and attend to the subjects of their research. I turn now to Arendt to illustrate how her thinking can be useful to understand how harm reduction and prostitution operate to constrain women's freedom. Arendt's thinking about constraint as a necessary condition for freedom, the web of human relations, and the public space of appearance as political have relevance to my study.

Hannah Arendt: Public and Private; Freedom and Responsibility

In *The Human Condition*, (1958/1998) Arendt developed her thinking about the Aristotelian notion of praxis to examine further the idea of freedom as action in “the public space of appearance”. For Arendt, the three components of the *vita activa* were autonomous, but linked. *Labour* is about sustaining life, *work* is the fabrication of the structures that maintain worldliness, and *action* is the activity that “discloses the identity of the agent, affirms the reality of the world, and actualizes our capacity for freedom” (p. 49). Action was synonymous in Arendt's thought with praxis, in that it depended upon human plurality—each person, acting in the space of public appearance, contributed something unique to the political public sphere, and their contribution was important to the attainment of freedom. “Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act” (p. 188). Therefore, no one is inessential, each actor contributes to the whole public. Each

⁴⁹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arendt/>

person in the public sphere shares common conditions and characteristics—and common cause, though each is unique in their perspective and contributions. For her, praxis, or public action, is the highest and most important level of public life. Freedom, though achieved in relation to others, is bound to natality, which is a capacity of each individual: “as an inner capacity of man [*sic*] is identical with the capacity to begin, just as freedom as a political reality is identical with a space of movement between men [*sic*]” (Arendt, 1948/1994, p. 473). Arendt determined that it is our human capacity for renewal and beginning again that enables us to rise above historical forces, institutions and practices that humans have created—and that only in taking action, each unique individual together with others, can we achieve freedom. In Arendt’s considerations, too, “fences of laws” and our negotiations or relations with them are essential to freedom (Arendt, 1948/1994, p. 466). Restraints, in an Arendtian conception of freedom, are essential to the experience of freedom.

Feminist anti-violence work is a significant enactment of politicizing the personal, exposing the false dichotomy of public and private. This approach seems contradictory to some aspects of Arendt’s philosophical framework. In *The Human Condition* (1958/1998) in particular, but as well in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (1954), Arendt makes and maintains space between the political—the public space of appearance and action, and the personal—the private sphere of necessary labour—and claims action in this public space is chiefly what separates us from the animals, who also labour for survival. Feminists, especially “second-wave” feminists, have leveled criticism against this division, and the obstacles such divisions place between women:

[Feminist historian Gerda Lerner] showed that the division of women into private and public has been fundamental to the patriarchy; the latter being prostitutes;

women that, like so many public men, although much less freely than them, exchange being for money. (Garretas, n.d., para. 2)

As Garretas mentions, an old-fashioned term for women in prostitution is “public women”. Such a designation speaks not of her capacity to engage in action in Arendt’s public space of appearance. Rather it indicates that in public, she “exchange[s] being for money”. The notion of prostituted women as public women, and the married woman as chiefly (or solely) responsible for the private sphere is parallel to the dichotomous idealized woman—the “Madonna-whore”. Prostituted women, then, are not identified as “public” because they are part of the public realm as actors, but because they are there for the consumption of the public man. A “public house”, or a pub was open only to men; the only women allowed in the pubs (in Quebec up until the 80s!) were those women who were, like whiskey, there for the consumption of men. Women in prostitution then, appear in some cases in public space, but only insofar as they are commodities to be consumed in men’s space, which men design to their ends and their politic. Patriarchal capitalism culturally reinforces and structures men’s sense of entitlement to sexual access to women’s bodies.

Arendt’s thinking about politics, freedom, the “web of human relations” and her clear distinction between public and private seems contrary, even oppositional to the sociological⁵⁰ and feminist politicizing of personal or private spheres. However, Benhabib (1993) argues that while Arendt may indeed have been less than sympathetic to feminism, “a critical exchange between Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy and contemporary feminist theory may be illuminating on both sides” (p. 98). Many thinkers at all points along the political spectrum,

⁵⁰ In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote: “Neither the life of an individual, nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” (p. 3).

writes Benhabib, maintain that some boundaries between public and private spheres are essential to preserving human freedom (p. 99).

Our private lives, intimate relationships, and self-understanding are conditioned by the political structures within which we live. Arendt separated the condition of *labour* from the condition of *work*, with *labour* being that which was devoted to bodily functions—and in the ancient world, done for the master by slaves and women (Arendt, 1958/1994, p. 72). Though they were not free, that is, acting in public, the freedom of others depended upon their labour, so in that sense, the private sphere of the household was also a place of politics. Then again, the master himself was not free, either. His ability to appear in public in relation to others was made possible and protected by the labours of his slaves, or wife. The insistence of feminists to reveal how structures of power and domination are repeated and reinforced in private life may not be inconsistent with Arendt's distinction between public and private. She maintained that the public sphere was one of association and collaboration, and the private sphere of the household was one of inequality reinforced by violence. Investigations into the forces that constrain women's activities in public serve to reveal some of the more subtle ways in which democratic participation is still withheld from some people who may (or may not) be citizens, but are in effect stateless. Women in prostitution in Vancouver, while their voices are sought, and their stories revealed, are still not *listened to*, and the web of human relations for them is, in the current political moment, much more of a trap than a safety net.

In the Greek *polis*, there was difference and diversity, but not hierarchy, so much, because it was men who were out in public, not women or slaves. Even though there are, in the Western world, more public and political actors who are female, of colour, and working-class, the possibility to engage politically in public is still no guarantee of equality. In some ways,

however, there may now be greater potential for dominated groups to gain emancipation when acting and speaking together in public (Moynagh, 1997).

The political “public space of appearance” for Arendt, is not just the physical space where people are together, like a sidewalk or a shopping mall⁵¹ (though it may come into existence there). The public realm is created when people gather together for the purpose of acting (Benhabib, 1997). Even though they are not open for just anyone to come, then, the transition house or the advocate’s office are public spaces of appearance, in that they are places where women come together and “make themselves present to each other”, through speech and action (Bickford, 1996, p. 64). The kitchen of the transition house is a public space, because it is where women *appear* to each other, share their stories and engage in collaborative action—sometimes as domestic as planning the chores for the week or cooking together or as daring as telling the truth about the male violence they have experienced, going to a woman’s former home to retrieve some of her belongings, or planning a public action. On the other hand, the line-up at the food bank or the drop-in center donation room is not quite public, for the same reason that the shopping mall is not a public space—the uniqueness of each person’s humanity and potential for action has been erased. They are together, but isolated from each other, not in communication together so much as they are in competition for access to meagre resources.

Arendt drew a distinction between types of public and private space as well, which may be useful to consider in recognizing the relevance of her thought with feminist theory. She warned that the political-public was a different type of space than the social-public (Benhabib, 1993, p. 106). Central to Arendt’s thought was the notion that plurality is a characteristic all

⁵¹ Shauna Butterwick, (personal communication, February, 2014) reminded me that shopping malls are privately owned, so not strictly public. Though they are places where people, strangers to each other, are together, merely being a place where people are together does not constitute a public space, in the Arendtian sense.

humans shared. It is this “unique distinctness” that we disclose to each other through action and speech “in order to live as citizens” (Moynagh, 1997, p. 29). Plurality is different from “individuality”, for Arendt. For her, it was important that actors seek not only to reveal themselves, but to seek to recognize and understand the perspectives of others. So, though humans are distinct from each other Arendt had little patience for the “cult of individuality” (Benhabib, 1993, 106). She considered the liberal ideal of the lone individual to represent disengagement. And to Arendt, disengagement from the world, from rules, from interaction with others, is not freedom.

The next section looks at identity and competing notions of identity formation in order to further understand distinctions between political and social, private and intimate.

Identity—Competing Notions of Formation and Implications

Vancouver’s notorious Downtown Eastside (DTES), though not the focus of this study, nevertheless serves as a backdrop for the interventions and activism familiar to several of the women who participated in my research. In some ways, it is a city-state of its own, functioning as part-but-not-part of Vancouver, and governed within itself. The DTES is home to a handful of organizations that now operate the bulk of the social and housing services available to the most impoverished and pathologized residents of the city. These residents are variously identified by such labels as “hard to house”, “intravenous drug users (IDUs)”, “mental health consumers”, and/or “sex-trade workers”.

Once someone is connected to one of these organizations, they access any number of services and programs that essentially shape the recipient into a citizen of that nation-within-the-inner-city. These organizations provide services to people known not by their membership in a political class, such as women, Indigenous, and/or working-class or impoverished communities.

Rather, they are identified by (and as) current conditions of their lives. Political categories are neutralized, and they are known by identities such as “sex worker”, “intravenous drug users” or person with HIV/AIDS, (or more efficiently, they are SWs, IDUs, or PWAs). This process of atomizing or “separating out” people from the larger political categories to which they belong has the effect of also hiding or dismissing the points of solidarity they might share with the women working in the services they are accessing. Though I do not for a minute believe it is the intent of the agencies to do so, this process is not only one of division and separation, but also of dehumanizing. Those who are in need of support are perpetually in a state of dependence without responsibility, or, “innocence”, as Arendt wrote of European refugees (including Jews) in the inter-war years of the last century: “Innocence, in the sense of a complete lack of responsibility was the mark of their rightslessness as it was the seal of their loss of political status” (1994, p. 295).

Arendt might well have been writing about the internally displaced persons⁵² now residing in the DTES, maintained by the plethora of social services and soup kitchens. Of the conditions she described prior to the grip attained by totalitarian governments, Arendt noted that “[S]ociety was pervaded by a liberal individualism which wrongly believed that the state ruled over mere individuals” (Arendt, 1994, p 231). In fact, she continued, the state ruled over *classes*, but sought to maintain power by keeping the nation in a “state of social atomization” (p. 231).

A similar state of social atomization, I argue, is manifest in the provision of harm reduction services, and other social and legal policies targeted toward prostituted women and

⁵² By “internally displaced”, I refer mainly to Aboriginal people, who make up perhaps 30% of the population of the DTES, and account for only 3% of the population of Canada as a whole. Many come to the neighbourhood from impoverished reserves, so many, in fact, that the neighbourhood is referred to as “the urban reservation” (CS, political activist and Aboriginal youth support worker. Personal communication, February, 2010).

people addicted to illicit drugs. Harm reduction ideology constructs the notion that “individuals choose” to use drugs, or to sell sex—even if society finds those activities troubling or distasteful—and should be accorded respect and dignity for their “choices”. There is no social context for how their choices have been configured, or which regimes of power operate to normalize the constrained conditions within which the ‘service recipients’ must exist. It is a difficult place for a front-line worker to be, having concern for the well-being of the people who use these services, yet under harm reduction, having to accept a certain (undefined) level of harm as the inevitable lot of the type people they serve. These people are the de-politicised sex worker, the drug addict, the “mental health consumer”. They are defined by the activities they take up to contend with the pain of oppression, not by their (economic, racial or sex) class locations. The individual activity-based identifying labels (*drug user*, *sex worker*, *mental health consumer*) hide the potential solidarity that could be shared by the women needing help and the women providing services. All of the women providing services shared with the women to whom they provided service membership in the sex class ‘female’, and attendant experiences based on their membership to that political category. Were that common life condition emphasized, the potential for collective shared analysis and action might be greater than it seems currently to be.

“Identity” is often thought of as something that individuals take up. It is common to see that individuals “self-identify”, as a member of a group or as an individual. Identity is something that someone may define for themselves, based on their observations or ‘feelings’, and then ‘perform’ or enact as an individual. This conception of identity does not account for social forces and structures which define identities or differentiate between identities. Nor does it account for power inequalities that are accorded to members of identified classes. Naomi Zack (2005) suggests instead this understanding of identity:

For a feminist social theorist, identities are not things in theorists or other women, insofar as the identities are oppressive (and critical theory is about what is oppressive) but circumstances and situations that theorists try to understand, with goals of changing them. (p. 73)

Zack goes on to say that only when we understand identities as “external and situational”, that it becomes possible for individuals to change their identities (pp. 74-75), not by merely choosing another, but by engaging with the external and situational conditions within which identity is formed, and undertaking to change those. It is important to also note that these conditions, because they are in the material, political and social world, must be changed by means of collective action.

This is where Bourdieu comes in. In the following section, I discuss Bourdieu’s concepts of the habitus, social reproduction and symbolic violence in order to more clearly reveal what I mean by the contradictory promises of harm reduction. His thinking was helpful in order to understand the similarities and differences between my interview respondents and Pivot’s affiants, and how to listen to the conversation in which their stories engaged.

Bourdieu—Habitus, Reproduction, Symbolic Violence and Misrecognition

Arendt defines power as “acting together” (Moynagh, 1997, p. 33). It is achieved, like freedom, by acting in concert with each other, and is different from force: “While violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it” (Arendt, 1958/1994, p. 202). Her theories about what she saw as uniquely human characteristics of plurality and capacity to “start over” (natality) offer a way to understand and interpret the perceptions and actions of others in relation to ourselves. A limitation of Arendt’s thought is that she does not acknowledge that differences between people are also hierarchically organized. Even when acting together in the public space

of appearance, there are differentials between individuals based upon the political categories to which they belong, and the hierarchy is consistent in that white, middle-class males occupy the top spot, and wield the most power, which they can maintain by force. Therefore, I find that Bourdieu's structural materialist analysis of class structure and reproduction adds a helpful dimension to Arendt's important understanding of the ways political resistance and action arises and grows.

Bourdieu's concept of the habitus helps us see how structures of domination are continually reproduced, and how dominant classes maintain power. Bourdieu's argument that we live within the parameters of our habitus, as our habitus is also in us, offers a challenge for us to question dispositions and values we take for granted.

Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these.

(Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170, cited in "Bourdieu and Habitus" n.d.)

The habitus, then, seems self-evident, and through it, durable forms of classism, sexism and racism are "inscribed in the objectivity of institutions" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 108). It is because they are so deeply inscribed—in fact, "normal"—that we mistakenly assume they are "natural". Bourdieu sought to reveal the naturalizing processes of class reproduction (Bourdieu, 1984). Not content to reveal systems of domination, he also exhorted those who have more cultural capital and influence, to act in the interests of interfering with inequality and reproductive domination (Bourdieu, 2000). In so doing, he offered criticism not only of the structures of domination themselves, but of those who critiqued these structures in ways that

were problematic in themselves:

One kind of feminist critique which tends to make the female body, the female condition, or women's lower status a pure product of performative social construction and which, forgetting that it is not sufficient to change language or theory to change reality (the typical illusion of the lector) uncritically attributes political efficacy to textual critique. While it never does harm to point out that gender or race are social constructs, it is naïve, even dangerous, to suppose and suggest that one only has to 'deconstruct' these social artifacts, in a purely performative celebration of resistance, in order to destroy them. (p. 108)

In this passage, Bourdieu offers a criticism of the postmodern convention of "deconstruction" as an appropriate response to social inequality. He agrees that gender and race are social constructs, rather than innate or essential traits, and that revealing them as constructed is an important part of achieving equality. However, he is critical of the belief that textual analysis or theoretical critique is sufficient to change structures of inequality. Bourdieu, in fact, particularly near the end of his life, urged those with some measure of power and influence (including journalists, teachers, academics) to use that influence to "throw grains of sand into the well-oiled machinery of complicity" (Bourdieu, 2003 p. 68). In other words, "speaking truth to power does not topple it" (Gershon, cited in Naples, 2003, p. 166).

In order to change social constructs and processes of domination and inequality, then, it is not enough for individuals to 'begin again', but also to understand that identities—which are both socially constructed, externally imposed and taken up by individuals—are inscribed in institutions. Reproductive features of powerful institutions (education, medicine, media, and so on) are rendered invisible by general acceptance of them as natural—but Bourdieu's work

consistently attended to these “big picture” orthodoxies and placed next to them the heterodoxies of art and sociological critique. He went from the macro, the taken-for-granted assumptions of the dominating classes (which reproduce behaviours, dispositions and tastes and so entrench hierarchies of inequality), to the micro, the habitus, or “structuring structure” within which we live and which lives in us.

I found particularly resonant the concept of “positional suffering”, the tendency of the dispossessed to “match their expectations to their objective chances” (Bourdieu, 2000a, p. 213). Bourdieu said that this tendency is reinforced in the dominated by the dominating class who, by a form of “class chauvinism”, reinforce that they choose these deplorable conditions. Positional suffering also refers to that felt by those who occupy “an inferior, obscure position in a prestigious and privileged universe” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 4). In both cases, the consolation for their suffering is something like “it could be worse, you could be like them”, or a base for criticism, “You shouldn’t complain” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 4). Bourdieu cautioned against this response to the positional suffering of “the professions whose mission is to deal with poverty or talk about it” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 5), because using material poverty as the only measure of suffering keeps us from seeing and understanding a particular view of it, and increases the social/political divisions between dominating and dominated groups (Bourdieu, 1999, pp. 3-5).

In effect, processes of positional suffering are set in motion by various forms of “misrecognition”. The term misrecognition describes a form of forgetting, or taking the social world within which we live as normal, “the way things are supposed to be” (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, p. xiv). It does not mean “unrecognized”, or “misunderstood” so much as it means a way of knowing others, and the world, in a sense, “too well, without objectifying distance” (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 142-143). Those who promote a decriminalized and regulated

prostitution industry may be reasonably suspected of misrecognizing the phenomenon of prostitution as normal—indeed, it *is* sanitized and normalized by media, popular culture and the relentless marketing of harm reduction. An example of this normalization is the redefinition and “whitewashing” of the word “pimp”. A few days ago, I noticed a truck with a logo on the door advertising the services of a landscaping company called “Pimp My Lawn”. The word used to refer to a shadowy, menacing (usually racialized) man who exploited women, and sold them to other men who would sexually exploit them. Now it means to dress-up, enhance, or render a product desirable. Women in prostitution are, like the lawn, (or the cars in the reality TV show “Pimp my Ride”), passive objects upon which the pimp acts. He is the actor, they are the object of consumption to be dressed, defined and displayed for sale. No matter what she is called, no matter if her sex or race are covered over by the title “sex worker”, the categorizations of sex, race and class are still inscribed within the institution of prostitution, which operates to satisfy male demands for sexual access to women’s (and “feminized” men’s⁵³) bodies.

It is difficult indeed to perceive the prostituted women and the institution “with objectifying distance” —much less apprehending the conditions of their lives without the chauvinism that accepts positional suffering as inevitable and necessary, especially considering all the promotion of prostitution as a form of women’s agency, and at the same time an inevitable phenomenon—“the oldest profession”. Of course when one defines prostitution as inevitable, the idea of choice becomes moot. I discuss this contradiction in the following section.

Benevolent Dominion over the “Fallen Women”: Bourdieu describes ways in which

⁵³ Most prostituted people are women, but there are some men who are prostituted, as well. These men are usually young men and boys; sometimes they are cross-dressers or male-to-female transsexuals. They are “feminized” or seen as subordinate, just as women are. The overwhelming majority of sex buyers are men, whether the prostituted person is female or male.

historically marginalized or powerless groups are maintained in positions of subordination, by people who are members of the dominating class, and particularly those who would describe themselves as sympathetic or allies. The promotion by the dominating classes of a libertarian version of “choice” can be seen as a way of constraining choices and limiting agency.

Conservative or religious discourse often demonizes or pathologizes women in prostitution as “fallen women” or morally degraded or dangerous⁵⁴, a discourse that proponents of decriminalization and harm reduction reject. The progressive left, too, fall into marginalizing and often pathologizing discourse, in their insistence that women in prostitution make “real choices” (Pivot, 2004, p. 6). This rhetoric indicates a form of chauvinism—as Bourdieu (2000) says:

[An] inversion of the class racism which reduces working-class practices to barbarism or vulgarity...which, under the guise of exalting the working class, helps to enclose it in what it is by converting privation into a choice or an elective accomplishment. (p. 76)

This process of converting (or perverting) conditions of deprivation into a choice is rationalized by framing prostitution as form of freedom, or empowerment for women in prostitution. This process is symbolic violence; “the coercion which is set up...through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator” -- and depends upon “shared conceptions that make the relations of domination seem natural” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 170). The misrecognition that results from these obscure yet profoundly durable relations of domination serve to reproduce these effects of social and political inequality.

⁵⁴ Which categorization I also find harmful and distasteful, by the way. Such attitudes are present not only among the religious right, but fragments seem to be held in assumptions among people all along the political spectrum. I am thinking of the somewhat frantic “reclamation” of the word “slut” by some of the organizers and participants of “slut walk”, a mass demonstration in 2012 against the words of a Toronto city police officer. He suggested that women provoked men to rape them by dressing provocatively.

Symbolic power is exerted only with the collaboration of those who undergo it because they help to construct it as such. But nothing would be more dangerous than to stop short at this observation....This submission is in no way a ‘voluntary servitude’ and this complicity is not granted a conscious, deliberate act’ it is itself the effect of a power, which is durably inscribed in the bodies of the dominated... . (p. 171)

Bourdieu described the operation of political domination of classes as a cycle of expectations and chances—a cycle that it is possible to interrupt and reverse. In Chapter five, I explore some insights of interview participants about successful interventions in this downward cycle.

In general, Bourdieu’s class analysis is useful in its application to women. Certainly many choices for women, such as marriage or prostitution, especially for impoverished or working class women, are forms of constraint; the kinds of expectations that women are conditioned to accept as the limit of their chances. Subordinated classes, the women who have “served the nation”, will have expectations for themselves, but only so far as they perceive are their objective chances. Thus, they are encouraged by the structures of domination and the promotion of harm reduction to regard the decisions made within the limits of their exploited conditions as choices, even valuable choices.

Bourdieu’s Limitations

Though I found Bourdieu’s theoretical frame most helpful and challenging, I note he was also caught in complicity. While he called on academics, journalists, “cultural workers” and others who have a bit of influence to use it to affect change, he himself “misrecognized” prostitution as a choice women make, a choice he blamed the law, religious taboo or moral code

for interfering with:

It is obviously because the vagina continues to be constituted as a fetish and treated as sacred, secret and taboo that trade in sex remains stigmatized both in the ordinary consciousness and in the letter of the law which denies women the choice of working as prostitutes. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 16)

How disappointed I was to read this. There he was, mistaking the effects of power and coercion as “voluntary servitude”—a mistake he had strenuously warned was dangerous in earlier work. He nearly redeemed himself, however, by the next line, wherein he writes: “By involving money, some male eroticism associates the search for pleasure with the brutal exercise of power over bodies reduced to the state of objects...” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 16), and further asserts that “the masculine representation can condemn the feminine capacities or incapacities that it demands or helps to produce” (p. 16, *fn. 26*). In other words, male desire and demand for sexual access to women’s bodies has the combined effect of producing and reinforcing women’s subordination and denying women’s sexuality.

Simone de Beauvoir tackled that very dynamic in her powerful and influential 1948 book, *The Second Sex*. I turn now to her work therein, and show how her ideas combine with Arendt and Bourdieu to contribute to my theoretical approach.

Simone de Beauvoir and the Second Wave

Simone de Beauvoir’s germinal⁵⁵ work *The Second Sex* was more influential in France

⁵⁵ I know the usual word used to describe work as influential as Beauvoir’s is “seminal”, but I find it distasteful, frankly. Also, it is not an accurate descriptor. In the first place, Beauvoir was a woman, writing about what it meant to be and become woman. Of course, the root of “seminal” is “semen”, which I’ve always found especially vexatious when referring to the significant influence of women’s work. The closely related word,

than North America, possibly because the first (and until 2008, the only) English translation was quite flawed (Dietz, 2002, pp. 90-91). Nevertheless, it is widely regarded as one of the foundational texts of the so-called second wave of feminism. For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus on two of her contributions, first, her concept of women's identity formation "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Beauvoir, 1948/2010, p. 283) and second, her conception of freedom, which "must be achieved by reaching out to other freedoms, and can be compromised by oppression" (Rigo, 2003, p. 278).

The process of becoming woman that Beauvoir described in her book, *The Second Sex*, is a process of becoming "other" in relation to "the first sex"—male. "Beauvoir is insistent that woman is neither an irreducible given nor a social/mythical product, but a "becoming [*un devenir*], an unending 'quest of values in a world of values'" (Rigo, 2003, citing Beauvoir, p. 147). Beauvoir describes the "coming of object/age" of the [middle-class, European] girl as a process that is both fundamentally biological and fundamentally externally enforced by male domination. The girl learns to disguise herself, to deny her body—she tries to stop or hide her periods, she "experiences herself as an uncertain, dispersed existence, knowing her failings" (Beauvoir, 1948/2009, p. 369). As she becomes woman, she also learns to "become object"—"one's eyes no longer perceive, they reflect; one's body no longer lives; it waits; every gesture and smile becomes an appeal; disarmed, available, the girl is nothing but a flower offered, a fruit to be picked" (p. 270).

The structuring-structure, or habitus of womanhood is a process defined also by the habitus of race and class. Depending upon women's experiences as racialized and classed

"disseminate" is also inaccurate in terms of the reach and influence of this theorist's work. She did not, in fact, scatter her seed widely, but well, *gestated* a central concept, which developed and became one of the root texts of feminism.

persons, experiences and processes of becoming woman vary. Women whose class and race afford them more credibility, power, and opportunity for autonomous action are also in dominant positions in relation to women of colour and Indigenous women, impoverished and working-class women, but they may be more subordinated to the individual men with whom they live.

Women are set up, not by their biology, but by the political and social structures of various forms of men's domination, to dominate and compete with each other in order that we may be rescued from a life of labour and/or inessence. In achieving a "good marriage" or a place of relative power within patriarchal capitalist structures women will still be "other", but will at least be *something*. This division (often also competitiveness between women) is foregrounded in the institution of prostitution, and the surrounding human services industries that provide services to women in street prostitution. There is between individual women and agencies subtle and overt competition for territory, resources and the attention of men to achieve the power and economic security they represent. This competition illustrates that systems of male domination still operate to constrain and define women.

In the process of becoming that all women undertake (and within which all women are produced), the intricacies of sex, race and class hierarchies can reinforce competition between women, *or* women can use these interlocking conditions to bridge difference and build solidarity. The prostituted woman, whom Beauvoir describes in Volume Two of *The Second Sex*, may be the ultimate end (if not the goal) of men's domination over women. "The existence of a caste of 'lost women' makes it possible to treat 'the virtuous woman' with the most chivalric respect" (p. 599). Women in prostitution, Beauvoir contends, are constructed by men to be "participants in men's immoderate appetites", a scapegoat upon which "he unloads his turpitude" (p. 599).

One of the arguments of American slaveholders and defenders of slavery is that,

released from slavish drudgery, Southern whites could establish the most democratic and refined relations with each other; likewise, the existence of a caste of “lost women” makes it possible to treat “the virtuous woman” with the most chivalrous respect....Whether a legal status puts her under police surveillance or she works clandestinely she is in any case treated as a pariah. (p. 599)

It appears that this mythology of “the sacrificial whore” has some contemporary currency. Harm reduction, while not explicitly promoting the creation and maintenance of “a caste of lost women”, may effectively do so. The women I interviewed, women who often intervene directly in the processes of construction described by Beauvoir, may serve as an intermediary or a bridge for the prostituted woman to imagine other options. Beauvoir writes of the “choices” of the prostituted woman, “One asks, why did she choose it? The question should be: Why should she not choose it?” (p. 601). Or, I would add, “How could she choose anything else?” In the absence of livable income, safe, decent housing, or access to other opportunities, the “choice” of whether or not to prostitute is so constrained that the concept is meaningless.

A contemporary question posed by abolitionists is also, “why do men demand, (or need), prostitutes?”⁵⁶ After all, men’s entitlement and demand drives the prostitution industry. The responsibility for her choice rests with the society that has placed her in that position. It has become the work of the woman in the rape crisis centre, the women’s shelter and the advocacy centre to open other choices to women—to examine with her why and in what ways she can *not* choose prostitution. In Chapter five, I explore accounts from front-line workers of some of the obstacles they encounter to successfully provide alternatives to prostitution.

This work, the work of providing haven for battered women and of intervening in male

⁵⁶ S. Butterwick, December 19, 2013, personal communication.

violence, was not formally acknowledged in the middle of the 20th century (though of course women did this work with and for each other). Now that it is a legitimized “sector” of work, how do the ideas of Arendt, Beauvoir and Bourdieu play out? How can these theories of identity construction, achievement of freedom and concepts of solidarity illuminate our understanding of the practical aspects of front-line work and feminist organizing? In the following chapter, I describe the methodologies I employed in order to apprehend women’s understanding of these questions in relation to their work and especially in their understanding of the place of harm reduction as approach and ideology.

What would Beauvoir make of the current promotion of the idea that prostitution is a form of work and a choice that women make? I argue that the women who provide the services and prostituted women were faced with options that on the face of it appear similar, but were grown in vastly different conditions. This means that their choices cannot be understood as equal to each other. This gives rise to a troubling question—can the service provider or activist be understood as a bridge for the prostituted woman; as an active occupant of the space between woman *being* and woman *doing*? Or is the prostituted woman also “other” in relation to the front-line worker, whose livelihood depends upon the presence and need of the prostituted woman? What forces and social constructions define or limit the potential for them to form peer relations—to act in concert in the public space of appearance? Furthermore, how can we imagine shared freedom, guided by “fences of laws”, and collaborations across differences? To be sure, at present the services (including harm reduction) provided by women such as my interviewees are important, often necessary, to women they serve, but how do we imagine solidarity beyond mere service?

As evidence from my research indicates, the relationships between these women are

sometimes conflicted and tense. Both groups of women depend upon each other for the necessities of survival, but alliance in the service of shared freedom is clouded by the constructions of dependence and pathology that reinforce patriarchal systems of domination. Both Beauvoir and Arendt promote similar ideas of the nature and potential for freedom. In their minds, freedom can only be achieved when we are connected in ethical and political ways to others. These are others who we may not easily understand or pretend to know, but for whom we must stand in alliance. Here solidarity is the central term—which can be achieved through acting and speaking together across differences. It is this action together that creates the *interesse*, that in-between space where we are connected to others, not yet free, but on the way together.

Nancy Fraser and Claims for Justice

Nancy Fraser (1987) describes a “politics of needs assessment” in relation to the American welfare system’s practices which “construct women and women’s needs according to certain specific and in principle contestable interpretations, even as they lend those interpretations an aura of facticity which discourages contestation” (p. 105). This characterization of the structuring and reproductive function of the welfare system also illuminates some of the processes by which women in prostitution in the contemporary moment are constructed and their needs interpreted by the social services and criminal justice and health systems. This is still true of the reproductive function and process of social services systems and welfare. In terms of this study, prostitution is another institution operating in concert with the institutions of social services, health and law, to construct women and women’s needs according to structures of domination, and presented as uncontested. Fraser noted that the American welfare system was “feminized terrain”, as women made up the majority of both welfare recipients and social workers, and this is true also of prostitution and services to prostituted

women.

Fraser (1996, 2000, 2009) also writes of forms of justice for which social movements and individuals work and organize. She describes three main forms of justice claims: *Recognition*, *redistribution*, and (more recently) *representation* (2009). This section briefly defines these forms.

Recognition is a term that refers to the idea that dominated groups are oppressed through a process of ‘invisibilization’ or misrecognition. That is to say that the contributions of all of “the others” (those who are not white, middle-class men) are unrecognized, demonized, or forgotten (misrecognized). Means of communication and interpretation are controlled by the dominant group, and dominated classes see themselves consistently misrecognized and their characteristics and concerns inaccurately defined by the dominant discourses.

Claims for justice on the basis of recognition are often tied to redistribution of goods and resources. Claims for redistributive justice are founded on claimants understanding that they are also dominated because the ruling classes withhold or deny access to economic resources or political power. Individuals who are “recognized” as members of historically subordinate classes can gain access to material and political resources in two ways: One is by accepting the dominators definition of their fundamental characteristics and aligning themselves with the powerful (Arendt’s *parvenu*⁵⁷, or by processes described by Bourdieu and Beauvoir), or by organizing in solidarity with others in opposition to the dominating class. In this way, recognitive and redistributive modes of justice are aligned.

⁵⁷Arendt (1948) wrote of the conundrum that European (and particularly German) Jews faced within nineteenth century European society—either become a pariah, which meant to stay out of society altogether, or become a parvenu, one who is a Jew without belonging to Jews—acquiring personal privileges at the expense of solidarity with other Jews (pp. 66-67).

Fraser's latest addition to forms of justice, *representation*, is "a third dimension of gender justice, beyond redistribution and recognition" (Fraser, 2005, p. 306). Identity politics have atomized projects of shared political struggle, and "aimed at more valorizing difference than achieving equality" (p. 299) and have played into the trajectory of capitalist schemes that shape the nation state at the expense of social democratic forms of governance. In the current global development of neoliberal economic structures, social movements that depend upon shared conditions and definitions have faltered, especially in North America. Fraser suggests that claims for representational justice may serve to confront the misframing which "arises when the state-territorial frame is imposed on transnational sources of injustice" (p. 114). Representative forms of justice, then, would provide the means of communication and interpretation to the dominated in order that they may accurately represent their conditions and concerns. This form is tied to recognition as recognition is tied to redistribution.

Feminism, historically, has pursued both recognitive and redistributive forms of justice. Recognition matters because women are seen, or *misrecognized*, by the dominating class (men) as relatively "less than" or devalued—thereby causing women to suffer a distorted sense of selfhood. This necessarily includes women's sense of belonging to the world—how do women recognize each other when the distorted version is so ubiquitous? Redistribution matters because women, as a class, have much less access to resources unless mediated by the men with whom they are associated (by marriage, birth or possibly employment). The women's liberation movement attempted to address these strains of injustice with varying degrees of coherence and success, with arguably the most powerful and effective arm of the movement being anti-violence work. It was through this work that "Take Back the Night" rallies were organized, an example of an action of recognition. It was through this work that changes in criminal and civil laws gave

women access to family assets upon divorce and to welfare and ultimately represents redistribution.

Gradually the mission or goals of North American women's or women-serving organizations have shifted from primarily redistributive recognition toward claims driven by identity politics for more solely recognitive forms of justice. There is an allied anti-poverty movement in Canada, lead and guided by people who have experienced poverty themselves⁵⁸. Like the early women's movement, then, recognition played a key role in the formation of groups which aim for redistributive justice. It was women, for example, who founded and organized rape crisis centres and transition houses for battered women. Recognitive claims, for example that women are primary caregivers of children, lead to claims for redistribution, such as the struggle for pay equity. There seems now, however, to be a de-coupling of recognition from redistribution, and this division is evident in prostitution-related service organizations. In the *Bedford* case, for example, the Supreme Court's agreement to recognize 'sex workers' as a distinct political category (separate from sex, race or economic class) served to obscure the connection between other forms of male violence against women. In recognizing "sex workers" as a distinct category, the feminizing of poverty, and the near universal threat to women of male violence are hived off as separate problems of redistribution – not the primary concern for those who argue that stigma is the pivotal problem faced by sex workers as a class.

Fraser (2000) notes that the shift from redistribution to recognition serves to drastically simplify and reify group identities, and encourages intolerance, patriarchalism and

⁵⁸ "One of the special characteristics of Canada Without Poverty is that, since our inception in 1971, we have always been governed by people with direct, personal experience of living in poverty, whether in childhood or as adults. This lived experience informs and helps to guide our work." <http://www.cwp-csp.ca/about-us/> August 13, 2014.

authoritarianism (p. 108). This shift, she notes, is occurring in a context of rapidly expanding capitalism, which is radically exacerbating economic inequality (p. 108).

In the last ten or fifteen years the feminist movement faltered across North America as politics of recognition seemed to take precedence. Fraser (2000) described two ways in which recognitive politics undermined or displaced action for redistributive justices: one stream recognizes the demeaning effects of misrecognition, but does not consider it within a matrix of institutionalized maldistribution; another form of identity politics recognizes the link between cultural recognition and economic and political inequality, but claims that revaluing unjustly demeaned cultural identities will indirectly remedy maldistribution⁵⁹ (pp. 110-111).

A common adage in feminist anti-violence work is “women are the experts in our own lives”. In one analysis, this phrase is a claim to recognition of women as capable human beings who necessarily have a right to speaking and acting in the public. In the Arendtian sense, they are political actors. In acknowledging the expertise in their own lives, feminists also question the claims of “authorized” experts, whose opinions have long led to constraints and imposed definitions of women’s lives and “natural” dispositions. Feminist assertions of women’s expertise advances a definition of woman as a political actor in public life. Women are then placed at the centre of their own lives, rather than as patients under the care of doctors, or witnesses to crimes committed against them. For example, the criminal justice system frames

⁵⁹ For example, PACE, founded in 1995 by three formerly prostituted women, initially had as their mandate to provide counseling and education to women wishing to leave prostitution. They also provided education to community groups and schools about the causes and conditions of prostitution. Their work addressed maldistribution and misrecognition, more or less equally. Sometime in the early 2000s, the mission of the organization changed, as the leadership changed. Now the mandate is almost entirely recognitive--to achieve respect for sex workers and reduce stigma by advocating for decriminalization, harm reduction, and framing prostitution as labour. If women in prostitution are free of stigma, they claim, they will have access to more resources including opportunities to gain benefits and livable wages. While they have always claimed to represent women in prostitution, there has been such a significant shift in organizational goals that one wonders which representation, or framing, of prostituted women is more accurate.

male violence against women, including sexual assault and wife-beating as crimes against the state—the woman herself is a witness.

This theoretical understanding of women's expertise and attendant agency arose from consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, which led to some of the founding principles of rape crisis centres and transition houses for battered women (Schechter, 1982; Adamson, Briskin, & McPhail, 1988). Feminist theory began to diverge in the early 1990s, as the movement struggled to address justice claims from within by lesbians, women of colour and Aboriginal women, and working class women. Some of these struggles devolved into identity politics, others led to advances in feminist understanding and engagement with problems such as the changing shape of capitalism, and global reforms in the nature of the nation-state and citizenship.

The women's movement encompassed both a struggle for recognition and for redistribution. Early emphasis was, however, on redistribution and revealing the particular ways in which men's dominance over all women is reinforced through physical and economic coercion and socially sanctioned structures of domination (Fraser, 1996, p. 2). Claims for recognition did achieve widespread acknowledgment that all women are oppressed, despite the ways we are kept divided and used against each other. Sex worker recognition is at the expense of recognizing them as women. In this context, the focus on recognition limits possibilities for solidarity between women, and this is also where claims for recognition have tended to predominate, such that “activists that look to redistribution as the remedy for male domination are increasingly dissociated from tendencies that look instead to the recognition of gender difference” (p. 4).

The current acrimony between proponents of harm reduction and decriminalizing prostitution, and feminists who argue for abolition of systems of prostitution as part of the larger

goal of women's liberation, may be characterized as a struggle between recognitive justice and redistributive justice. As I have attempted to describe, Fraser added to her theoretical framework the dimension of representation. She notes that feminism became diffused and fractured along "identity politics" lines at the same time as a decade of conservative rule in Europe and North America "breathed new life into free-market ideologies previously given up for dead" (Fraser, 2005, p. 298). The rise of neoliberalism, according to Fraser, was a catalyst to the atomization of the feminist movement into extreme identity politics. In order to adequately address sources of transborder gender injustice, feminists are faced with the problem of challenging interlinked injustices of maldistribution and misrecognition, as well as "a newly visible meta-injustice...called *misframing*" (Fraser, 2009, p. 113, emphasis in original). This representational injustice occurs when transnational, or global sources of injustice are misframed as still within the scope of intra-state institutions that organize relations among fellow citizens (p. 304).

Summary

Fundamental concepts upon which this research rests, and which I have discussed in this chapter, are the meanings of freedom, identity formation, political action and public space—all of which are informed by liberal notions of choice and agency, and contested by feminist resistance to patriarchal and capitalist definitions and domination of woman. I seek to understand the dichotomies of public/private, passive/active, and of course, harm reduction/liberation.

In the coming chapters, I draw upon this theoretical foundation as I analyze research data derived from interviews, conversations and archival and policy documents. In these accounts, it is possible to see how Arendt's concept of freedom as shared action in the public space of appearance and the necessity of judgment support Bourdieu's concept of the structuring structure of habitus and the reproduction of dominant-dominated classes. Beauvoir's examination of how

woman becomes the other in relation to man has poignant significance to the narratives of study participants and the affiants of Pivot's research, and operations of Fraser's forms of justice are evident in the stories of resistance, action, hope and despair from both groups of women.

With the use of these theories, I argue that women who work in front-line women's services should and do speak on behalf of the women with whom they work and provide service, and that their voices ought to influence public policies. At present, there are many advocates on all sides of the debate about what to do about prostitution who claim to speak for women's best interests. There are among them, however, but few of the voices of women who in fact work on "the front lines".

The following chapter is a description of and rationale for the methodology I used to gather and analyze information about women's front-line work, harm reduction, prostitution and feminism. A mix of methodological approaches served to aid my efforts to better understand the contradictions and effects of harm reduction policies and ideology on the work and relationships of front-line workers with women in prostitution.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This study broadly investigates and analyzes how women in front line services negotiate disjunctures between harm reduction public policy and the practices of their work with/for women in prostitution. In this chapter I describe the methodological approach used to address the research problem, and discuss the design and rationale for the chosen methodology. I then move to describe the criteria for selecting and recruiting participants, interview protocols and coding procedures. My methods included semi-structured interviews and archival document analysis.

A Sociology for Women

My methodology is informed by Dorothy Smith's "Sociology for women" (1987). My aim is to reveal and challenge deeply held assumptions about feminist action and thought as it pertains to front-line work and feminist activism, and harm reduction policies. Thinkers such as Nancy Naples and Beverly Skeggs were also helpful in this investigation, their methodological concepts and approaches informed and deepened my analysis of the research data.

Smith noted that the social sciences are part of the practices by which we are organized and managed: "In general, social scientific knowledge represents a standpoint in the ruling relations, not from the standpoint of those who are ruled" (Smith, 1999, p. 16). In this study, my purpose was to represent the standpoint of those who are ruled, yet who are also in positions of relative power to those women to whom they provide service. Sprague (2005) explains Smith's analysis that there is a material knowable reality, and that this reality is created and revealed by everyday activities in which people engage together within "webs of social power and domination that Smith calls 'relations of ruling'" (p. 44).

I return again here to the notion of praxis. It is central to the ongoing work and learning

of the women I interviewed. That is, the practical work in which we engage informs and improves the way we make meaning of the world and our work. Once I began to volunteer at a rape crisis centre, my experiences of our work made sense of the feminist theory I encountered first in college; and the application of this theory strengthened and supported the work. By the time I entered graduate school, I knew that I wanted to develop both deeper understanding of the operations of power that I saw on the front-lines, and a practical, disciplined and sophisticated way to interfere with the reproductions of inequality and oppression that I observed in the social services system.

My methodological orientation is qualitative, influenced by feminist standpoint and social constructionist theories (Sprague, 2005). I sought, through hearing their stories, a deeper understanding of formative experiences and influences, their motivations and how their praxis and analysis developed as they came to do the work they did. Smith's sociological approach was influential, particularly for her investigative approach to women's everyday lives within the relations of ruling.

Feminist standpoint theory "calls us to ask if there is something systematic and social to the nature of the biases in knowledge" (Sprague, 2005, p. 51). An approach that critically addresses the social constructions that arise from (and stratify) differences of race, class and sex reveals the consequences of these constructions. The critique and analysis of social structures makes space to account for the influences that various social locations have on the development of knowledge, and reveal that these constructions are historically specific and changeable (pp. 51-52).

Dorothy Smith's (1987) ideas of a feminist sociology, as she describes in *The Everyday World as Problematic* addresses the problem of where to place women's thought, experience and

understanding (as subject) within the discipline of sociology (p. 122). She constructed a sociology that problematized the everyday practices and rules encountered by women in the institutions which shaped them—namely, the family, the home, and the “work world”. Integral to her methodology is that it is situated “in real life”, the social world as both the object and situation of inquiry.

I see the limitations of what we might be able to write when it is unconnected to relations tying its relevance to consciousnesses subjugated by those very relations of ruling within which we work. Those connections have to be such that women can speak to us and through us as subjects: these connections have to be such that we who are doing the technical work of research and explication are responsible in what we write to those for whom we write; we have to do our work in such a way that it continually addresses, speaks of and explicates the world that is known directly and practically outside the text and including the text... The critical force of these methods is contained and “institutionalized” if they are not articulated.

(pp. 224-225)

Smith (1987) broke ground for feminists by studying women’s experiences and relations with and within institutions of power not usually studied, such as schools, universities and hospitals. Her method, therefore, is helpful to understand how women think about, explain and carry out their work, as well as the effects of institutions and nests of relations upon our values, beliefs and practices.

Like Dorothy Smith, Nancy Naples also foregrounds the importance of approaching research from a basis of a “standpoint in women’s experience” (Smith, 2005, p. 8; Naples, 2003, p. 8). Naples focuses her work on groups of people who, as individuals, have little power, but

who organize together to influence institutions (2003). I also drew upon the work of Beverley Skeggs (1997), who argues that though the category “woman” has achieved some legitimacy as a point of knowing, class is still “disappeared” into a middle-class norm (pp. 19-20). Class and racialized background and status had significant influences on women’s analysis and practices.

These scholars use ethnographic methods--detailed descriptions of groups or cultures—from women’s, or feminist standpoints. Beverley Skeggs embarked upon women who, like herself, were working-class or from working-class families (pp. 24-25). Naples’ work, in some aspects, draws upon her personal experiences as a victim of sexualized male violence (2003, pp. 187-193). She uses her experiences of a survivor and a feminist researcher to interrogate some of the possibilities and contradictions of generating a participatory action research project (p. 187). In a similar vein, my own experiences of front-line work and feminist activism were both helpful and problematic for the interview processes which I discuss later in this chapter.

Beverley Skeggs (1997) writes that it is easy to construct those researched as “[O]bjects of knowledge without agency or volition” (p. 19), and indeed, this is a problem with which other feminist social scientists struggle: “[W]e worry, collectively and alone, about how best to unleash ourselves from our central contradiction—being researchers and being activist feminists” (Fine, 1994, p. 13).

My position within the academy and its disciplinary practices, based on rational knowing, implicated me with the potential to reinscribe the women as other, as outside of legitimate knowledge. Yet it was my experience of feeling as if I was a misrepresented object of sociological and feminist knowledge that motivated my working with a group of white working-class women in the first place.

(Skeggs, 1997, p. 19).

Skeggs referred to an important consideration of methodological approach. How can researchers fairly represent those whom we would study? Do we necessarily “reinscribe women as ‘other’” because we are implicated in the traditional disciplinary practices of the academy? In my career outside of graduate school, I often encountered academics and researchers who were interested in studying my work practices, or studying aspects of the lives of people with whom I worked. I looked upon these (mostly well-meaning) researchers with a mixture of interest, curiosity, distrust, or (sometimes) disdain, and in general was critical of academics building their careers on researching “the other”. When I arrived in graduate school, I was concerned about exploiting others and engaging in research that might advance some kind of knowledge, but would not result in meaningful change. I am still worried about that, to be frank. But I know that the views I encountered in my research are rarely given voice in the mainstream media, and the critiques and suggestions feminist women offer are often sidelined prior to take-off (to mix metaphors). Therefore, I sought to hear and understand the stories and analysis of women who were, like me, employed in social services, anti-violence work or feminist activism as harm reduction was introduced and developed.

Research Design

Interviewing: Kvale and Brinkman (2009) discuss several forms of interviewing, depending upon the problematics of the research questions and foci of the study. While I focus on the stories that women told of their lives and work, which are typically drawn from narrative interviews, I also employed aspects of conceptual and discursive interview forms. Questions in conceptual interviews “explore the meaning and conceptual dimensions of central terms, as well as their positions and links within a conceptual network” (p. 151). Conceptual interviewing tends

to reveal taken-for-granted assumptions about what is normal, and can show the development of participants' or an agency's conceptual structure (p. 151). Discursive interviewing focuses on "how individuals and groups utilize language to enact specific activities and identities" (Gee, 2005, cited in Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 155).

The interviews contained information about how discourses (of speech and text) act and what they reveal about power relations in different contexts. Discursive analysis attends to the variations in and between interviews as well as consistencies – the researcher is as much a participant as the interview subject (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 156). I interviewed women I knew well, other women who were acquaintances, and women who were strangers to me. The subtle power differentials between us based on presence or absence of shared experiences or analysis shaped the discourse, even when the interview questions were the same. Narrative interviews centre on the stories that interviewees tell which give shape and meaning to their experiences. The narrative interview style seemed to me the most natural to use because storytelling is fundamental to feminist anti-violence work, especially considering that the initial rape crisis centres and transition houses were born out of the stories women told each other in consciousness-raising groups.

Criteria and recruitment: I conducted a qualitative study relying principally on interviews with sixteen women engaged in work that addressed violence against women, and in which they collaborated with or provided service to women (currently or formerly) in prostitution (whether or not that was the focus of the agencies for which they worked). In order to obtain a textured narrative of the last fifteen years of Vancouver's approach to problems related to prostitution and implementation of harm reduction, I interviewed women who were active in front-line work for at least five years, and who experienced over that time the rise of

harm reduction ideology and practice within their workplaces. The agencies for which they worked served women, either exclusively or primarily, and operated from feminist principles. By “feminist principles” I mean that women’s experiences, life conditions and needs were central in the founding principles of the organizations, though some of these organizations may no longer explicitly use the words “feminist” or “women’s liberation” in their mission statements or public documents⁶⁰. For my purposes, it was not necessary for participants or their workplaces to identify as feminist. Most of research participants did identify as feminists and all had worked in one or more front-line women-serving organization for at least five years. Each of these women provided rich, interesting and often inspiring accounts of their work, their analysis and perspectives and their ideas of success.

In order to recruit participants, I first approached women-serving organizations, primarily those that were focused on anti-violence work with/for women. I sent initial requests to Atira Women’s Resource Society (Atira), Battered Women’s Support Services (BWSS), Surrey Women’s Resources Centre, Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter (VRRWS), the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre and to allies and friends who were involved with other front-line work (for example, with youth or people with mental illness) or feminist organizing.

I distributed to these agencies a flyer (appendix a), followed by a letter explaining the project and rationale. I followed this letter with a phone call and/or visit to the agency, or to the individual woman (several women were no longer employed or volunteering in front-line work)

⁶⁰ One of the women I interviewed revealed that although her workplace was founded as a feminist initiative, most of the women employed there do not define themselves as feminist, and in fact distance themselves from the label. This phenomenon is unfortunately common, (Lehrner & Allen, 2009; Beres, Crow, & Gotell, 2009), and warrants further research, but is beyond the scope of this study.

and arranged to interview women at a location of their choosing. Participants were variously employed or volunteered as outreach workers with young people or women, rape crisis workers and feminist activists, advocates on behalf of impoverished women or women involved in the criminal justice system or psychiatric systems. For example, one participant was a registered nurse, and as well as having worked in an anti-violence organization, provided health care services to women who were impoverished, drug addicted and pregnant or new parents and another, who had a variety of experiences working in front-line social services work and feminist anti-violence organizing, was also formerly engaged in prostitution.

I had been a long-time employee at one agency that I approached to recruit research participants. I called the coordinator, went in person to drop off a flyer and asked management if I could briefly discuss my study at a staff meeting. The management team, though they posted a flyer on a staff bulletin board, seemed resistant to cooperating with my study. They did not invite me to a staff meeting, and expressed reservations about me approaching women in the centre. I reiterated that my study was not about women receiving services, but about women who worked there, but they remained circumspect—in the end, I asked individual women who worked there if they would be interested in participating, and they agreed. The executive director of another organization expressed interest, and told me that my work sounded interesting and important, but declined my invitation for an interview. She said she would tell other women who worked there. I also called the volunteer coordinator of another agency to invite her to an interview, and she, too, promised to tell other women with whom she worked, but did not respond to my invitation.

Another anti-violence organization did invite me to a staff meeting to discuss my project. They were interested in my proposal and three women agreed to meet with me for an interview. Women at another organization were also generous with their time, and put me in touch with

allies they thought would be interested to talk to me. I found both the cooperation and the resistance I encountered, and the manner in which my requests were handled interesting. On the face of it, all of the agencies and individuals with whom I discussed my study share a common cause, to achieve, at the very least, safety for women (and at most, freedom). I know that there is tension and disagreement, and debates about prostitution are especially polarized.

I wonder if some of the lack of engagement I encountered was a form of resistance due to a misunderstanding of, or perhaps disagreement with, the focus and aims of my research. Upon learning that I was a post-graduate student studying prostitution and harm reduction, sometimes people (including some I invited to participate in the research) asked if I interviewed, or planned to interview, women in prostitution. Though my study is, broadly, about front-line workers and social policy in relation to prostitution, I encountered implicit criticism that it was a mistake to write about prostitution without speaking to prostituted women themselves.

My decision to focus my investigation on the experiences and analysis of front-line workers is itself an answer to this criticism. Prostituted women want to tell their stories, and their voices are vitally important in order to form shared understandings and to develop ways to have conversations with each other (however difficult they may be). There is, however, already a large body of research that mines these stories. I reference some of this research to add to the context for my study. The focus of my work, however, is on the practical and ideological meanings of harm reduction as it pertains to the praxis of front-line workers in their work with women in prostitution.

Interview Process: I did one pilot interview and altered the questions slightly. Appendix C shows the final interview questions. The first few questions were to learn about some of their life experiences, personal history, and some events or influences that motivated their

involvement in the work. We talked about the purposes or goals of their organizations, operating structures and funding sources, and aspects of their work, including their role and influence within their workplaces. Women told stories about the women they worked with and to whom they provided service. These stories illustrated the development of each woman's praxis and her solidarity with women. Other interview questions asked how front-line workers experience, understand, and engage with harm reduction ideology and policy, and other techniques of governance of regulatory bodies.

Once we made contact with each other, I asked the women if they would prefer to meet at their workplace or another location. I met three women at their homes, seven in their workplaces, two in my home and the rest in restaurants and coffee shops of their preference. I conducted interviews between February of 2010 and June of 2011, and recorded each interview on a digital recorder. One participant asked for a copy of the recording, which I downloaded onto her home computer. I sent two other participants copies of the transcripts of our interview.

Research Participants: Table 1 illustrates demographic data about study participants. They were from a wide range of class, race and experiential backgrounds and between the ages of 29-64, most in their mid-to-late 30s. The length of time in front-line work varied from five years to 40, the average being about 10 years. Most women did not work with the same organization for the entire time, and developed their analysis from not only work experiences and practices, but their lives as gendered, classed and racialized women. Two women were Aboriginal, one French Canadian, one African-Canadian, two immigrated to Canada as children (one of these came as a refugee), another immigrated to Canada as an adult and worked in anti-violence organizations in her home country before coming to Canada. Several interviewees said they became interested in feminism and/or political organizing because of their parents or their

mother, a few developed their interest in university, two talked about the influence of their religious (Christian) upbringing on their interest in the work. Two women, both Canadians of European descent, began feminist organizing while working abroad. One participant is the daughter of Chinese immigrants and is the first in her family to attend University. Most women were from working-class families, and most had attained University degrees and some attendant economic stability.

Table 1 – Interview Participants Demographic

Name (all are pseudonyms)	Time of entry to work and age at time of interview	Class background	Race	Education
Sharon	1973-present early 60s	Working	White/European	Some college/ teacher training
Hannah	1995-present, early 40s	Middle	White/Jewish	BA
Dusty	Early-to-mid 1990s, early 40s	Working	Aboriginal/Cree	College Diploma
Bronwyn	1999-present	Middle	White/European	RN and Master of Nursing
Wendy	2003-2008, mid 30s	Middle-working	White/European	MA
Grace	2005-2010, early 30s	Middle	White/European	Didn't ask
Pascale	1991-2009, 50	Working	White/French Canadian	Didn't ask
Betty	1994-2006, early 40s	Working	Asian	MA
Homa	1996-present, late 30s	Middle	White/ Middle Eastern	BSW
Angela	1987-present	Working	White/European	BA
Gillian	2003-2009, early 30s	Middle	White/European	MA
Genevieve	1997-present, late 30s	Working	White/European	MA
Mabel	1993-present, late 40s	Working	Aboriginal/Ni'isga + Gtksan	College, some University

Name (all are pseudonyms)	Time of entry to work and age at time of interview	Class background	Race	Education
Muriel	1992-present	Middle	Black	BA
Magda	2001-present, late 20s	Working	White/European	BA
Sarah	2000-present, mid-50s	Working	White/European	College diploma

The anti-violence sector is a relatively new area of employment for women, and as noted in chapter two, was developed from the political and social women’s liberation movement of the early 1970s. In Canada, the first rape crisis centres were founded in 1973 in Vancouver and Toronto, and transition houses for battered women began to operate around the same time. From these initial collectively operated feminist anti-violence interventions, women went on to develop other services and women’s centres, such as drop-in and resources centres, women’s health collectives, and lesbian-specific organizations. The 1970s and 1980s were a period of high activity for the feminist movement, with many women encountering feminism through their universities, labour unions, and other social circles. The trajectory of the women’s liberation movement over forty years from activism to social service frames the stories of interviewees; it is important to have a sense of the historical context of the current workplaces of study participants to better understand the phenomenology of lived experiences within them.

Interview participants were generous and thoughtful. They talked with me about their motivations for entering the work, the political analysis and political strategies they developed over time, and the effect the political climate and shifts in social policy had on their work. Each of the study participants have, for at least five years, offered support to women escaping violence; living in poverty; coping with physical or psychiatric illness or disability and/or

addictions. In these interviews, my history and reputation served me, because we were more or less familiar with each other's stories (even the women who were previously strangers to me), and there was, therefore, a level of trust between us⁶¹.

Significantly, all of these women were drawn to their work in response to their own experiences or observations of sexism, racism or class inequality, and most because of male violence against women. Many of them had been raped themselves, and others knew friends or family members who had been assaulted, abused or killed by men in their lives; some women were drawn in more by the social than political aspects of organizing with women. They grew more politicized once they began, and found anti-violence work both necessary and compelling. I elaborate more on the motivations and backgrounds in the following chapters.

Confidentiality and Ethical Agreements: The names used to identify different interviewees are pseudonyms. I did not identify the agencies they were employed, or where they were located, identifying them only as either urban or suburban. A knowledgeable reader may be able to identify specific agencies based on my descriptions of their organizational structures, but I did attempt to protect the identity of all participants and their work sites. One organization asked me to sign a contract stating that I would share my research findings with the agency, including published articles, conference papers, and my final dissertation. I have presented some conference papers based on my research, and provided these to the agency along with the final dissertation.

⁶¹ This familiarity may have interfered with meaning, too, because I may have assumed I understood what they wanted to say, and so missed opportunities to further explore some areas of discussion.

Other Sources of Data—Pivot Affidavits

Another source of data which augmented the interview data was stories told within the 90 affidavits that Pivot Legal Society gathered in the summer of 2003 from women in prostitution in the DTES. These affidavits were gathered in the year that Insite opened and at a time when harm reduction was on the ascendance as the ‘go-to’ intervention. The stories in the affidavits provide an early record, from the perspective of women who are targets of harm reduction interventions, of their understanding of the meaning and effects of harm reduction. They also round out a picture of women’s experiences of social policies and service practices in general, and what expectations they have for themselves. Placed next to the interviews, the affidavits serve to enact a “virtual conversation” between women in prostitution and women who provide crisis intervention and other supports.

Data Analysis

Once transcribed, each interview was between 40 and 70 pages long. I did not use any analysis software, though there are some useful programs available. To find themes that came out in the interviews, I read the transcripts and listened to the recorded interviews. I preferred to sift through the information in the physical world, not a software-and-interface world. Van Manen (1997) writes of the process of thematic coding analysis:

Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure— grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of “seeing” meaning. Ultimately the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be considered simply as a means to get at the notion we are addressing. Theme gives control and order to our research and writing. (p. 79)

Though Van Manen muses about the relevancy of theme in phenomenological research, I take his notion to remind the researcher to find, in all of the information contained in an interview, some threads of consistency that speak to the ideas the researcher wishes to address. Indeed, the idea of “theme” is methodologically significant in that it helped me to be more reflective in my questioning as I interviewed women, and then reviewed the recordings and transcripts. I found common themes emerged from both sets of stories, the articulation of which gave a fuller representation of how women negotiated and engaged with harm reduction policies and the ideologies and governing techniques they represent.

Initial themes from the interviews were women’s recollections of the influences and motivations that lead them to front-line work and/or feminism, their perceptions of an engagement with forces or influences on other women whom they see at work, and their relationships with each other and the world. Their stories revealed their analysis of and resistance against elements of individual and systemic racism, classism and sexism. The themes of relationships and influence encompassed interviewees perceptions of their role in the work place and the influences they reported having on institutional practices at work, facilitating discussions/peer support among women, and influence and relations on other actors or institutions that relate to or govern their work. The interviews revealed that women shared many common understandings of violence against women, gender equity, sexism, racism, male violence, and they each told stories of women’s (theirs and other women’s) resistance. Other themes less closely related to violence intervention concerned how women understood and articulated the structure of their organization and their perception of their place within that structure and in relation to the women they worked with (including their colleagues).

Coding Process: Interviews were professionally transcribed with help from a research

grant from the Office of Graduate Programs and Research (OGPR). I gave the recorded interviews to the transcriber on a USB flash drive, and she returned the recordings and transcriptions on the same flash drive. I then printed out the transcribed interviews, and used the hard copies in my coding and analysis process. All recordings and transcriptions were stored, unless I had the hard copies with me, in a secure place in my office at UBC.

I coded over the course of a week during which I had an opportunity⁶² to stay in a house on the Sunshine Coast of BC. I woke early every day, read through each transcript, and jotted down notes on post-it notes from each interview. I then put these notes on newsprint I hung on the wall, and rearranged them according to the themes I described earlier. I marked the themes in felt pen on the newsprint, then rearranged the post-it notes again, and made another category.

These interconnected notes became a series of narratives, or stories. Each of the women I interviewed had a unique individual story, but were connected in the same way that the epic stories comprising creation or nation-building myths are connected. The epic stories of these women are bound to each other by a shared response to male violence against women, loyalty to and action to strengthen and nurture family bonds, a shared yearning for connection, and for some a strong belief that they are part of something greater than themselves. For some this was the women's liberation movement, for others it was commitment to Aboriginal political organizing and cultural reclamation, and for others this sense of belonging came from their church. There were a couple of women who did not seem to share this connection with others or with a political movement, but as I re-read their transcripts and listened again to the recordings, I heard more nuanced analysis of the women's movement and the politics of their work and

⁶² My advisor, Shauna Butterwick, alerted me to an opportunity to stay in a cottage of friends who were away for a while. I remain grateful.

analysis of their place within both feminism and their workplace.

My intent was to conduct two separate interviews and to hold one additional focus group, but I found the amount of data from the first round of interviews provided me with so much food for thought, so many rich stories, that I had more than enough to develop this work. I almost wrote, “more than enough to answer my research questions”, but that would not be accurate. The analysis and writing and talking I have been doing over the course of building this dissertation has lead me along several paths, and brought up many more questions and considerations. The following chapters will elucidate these findings and questions in more detail.

Discourse Analysis: To analyze the affidavits, I employed a form of critical discourse analysis (Jorgenson & Phillips, 2002). The affidavits serve as evidence of discursive practices that construct and reproduce unequal power relations (p. 62), and reveal subtle forms of resistance among affiants against racialized, classed and sexual domination. The themes that emerged from these affidavits shared parallels with and showed divergences from themes from my interviews. Perhaps most striking of both parallel and divergent themes are women’s perceptions of themselves as actors or agents. Their experiences of male violence were, as well, similar and very different—and indicate a thread of shared experience that crosses class and race differences. Both groups of women experienced male violence, but the affidavits revealed that for many affiants, sexualized male violence began in childhood. Poverty was a current and pressing concern for all of the women Pivot interviewed. Poverty was not a present concern for any of my interview participants, though several had experienced poverty, and one had experienced homelessness.

Social Science that Matters: Construction of Quality

Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that social sciences fail because they have aimed to emulate the

predictive and explanatory theories the natural sciences develop (p. 4), and in so doing, lose sight of social sciences contributions to reflexive analysis and “discussion of values and interests, which is the prerequisite for an enlightened political, economic and cultural development in any society” (p. 3). He presents a conception of social sciences based on the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which includes explicit considerations of power. *Phronesis* goes beyond analytical scientific knowledge, or technical know-how, and “involves judgments and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor” (p. 2).

The interview data and affidavits together create a multi-dimensional representation of the reproductive social structures with which women continually engage and negotiate. Though my findings are not necessarily reproducible, nor is this desirable, they nevertheless contribute theoretical insights from women’s everyday engagement with each other and within structures of domination. The stories from this research illustrate women’s everyday ‘practical knowledge’ that incorporate and also go beyond the other two Aristotelian intellectual virtues, *episteme* and *techne*, (factual, scientific knowledge and technical know-how, respectively).

Tracy (2010) describes a model of “quality assurance” for qualitative research. She recommends eight criteria against which researchers may check for quality. These are: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence. Table 2, below, outlines how this study meets these criteria for quality

Table 2 Criteria for quality interview analysis

Criteria (Tracy, 2010, p. 840) and **Application**

Worthy Topic: relevant, timely, significant, interesting

Application: This topic has great relevance in light of the current global debate about prostitution and trafficking, and in the context of claims of the efficacy and success of harm reduction approaches to social problems. The recent Supreme Court decision in *Bedford*, striking down Canada’s prostitution laws adds a sense of urgency to this research, and highlights the

relevance of this study.

Criteria: Sincerity-- self-reflexivity, transparency

Application: I am invested in this study as a former front-line worker and feminist activist. I had political and/or personal connections with most of my interview subjects, and I think this was helpful because women knew I had similar experiences to theirs. I chose this study because of my interest in the analysis and perceptions of front-line workers especially in relation to prostitution and harm reduction and what seem to me increasing misconceptions about and backlash against feminism. Interviews were conducted as conversations, and I shared my analysis with interviewees (without taking over or contradicting their analysis). In this dissertation I have worked towards the goal of being transparent with respect to my researcher location and interests, conceptual framing, methodology and analysis.

Criteria: Credibility-- thick descriptions, crystallization, multivocality, member reflections
Interview participants were from a wide variety of experiential and cultural backgrounds, and occupied different social locations in regard to racialized and classed categories. Each had different entry points to front-line work and feminism, including geographical locations, political orientations, and temporally, which added to the richness of the data. Interview transcripts and affidavits collected by Pivot revealed powerful insights into the conditions of women's lives and effective enhancements and constraints on women's agency.

Criteria: Resonance-- aesthetic representation, naturalistic generalizations, transferable findings
Application: I presented initial findings to adult education conferences and to Women's Worlds 2011, a biannual global feminist conference. Audiences were varied—adult educators found my findings surprising, but in the way of “I never thought of it that way, it makes sense to me, though”, and attendees to the panel at Women's Worlds expressed appreciation and relief to have their perceptions and experiences confirmed. The generalization I make between front-line and feminist understandings and interventions against other forms of male violence against women locate prostitution within a larger context of women's inequality to men, and reveal harm reduction's function to maintain women in positions of subordination.

Criteria: Significant Contribution-- conceptual, practical, moral, methodological, heuristic

Application: This research is practically and theoretically significant because it opens conceptual paths to imagine greater human potential. It foregrounds the experiences and analysis of women who share a commitment to improving women's lives, and challenges the contradictory notion that prostitution is inevitable and women's choice. The stories women relate of their work provide examples of liberatory feminist practices and the efficacy of acting in concert in the interests of shared freedom.

Criteria: Ethical-- considers ethics related to procedure, situation, culture, relationships, exit

Application: This research project received approval from UBC's Behavioural Ethics Research Board. All participants received a letter with detailed information of the research project (Appendix B). Participants were assured that anonymity would be maintained, and all signed an informed consent document prior to the interview. I requested permission to audio record interviews and explained recordings would be transcribed, but all recordings and transcriptions

would be stored in a secure location to which only I had access. I used pseudonyms and removed any information that would compromise the anonymity of the interviewee, including identifying information about their specific workplaces. The subject matter of my research is sensitive for some of my participants, and I took care to establish trust, remind them they could answer whichever questions they wanted, and that we could take our time.

Criteria: Meaningful Coherence--achieves what it aims to, uses methods and procedures fit to stated goals, interconnects literature, research questions, findings and interpretations

Application: The purpose of this study was to explore front-line workers' experiences, perceptions and analysis of harm reduction policies and ideology in relation to their work with women in prostitution. I interviewed women who worked in women-serving organizations, and recorded their stories about their work with women, and the context for that work. I reviewed the literature to understand the shifting political and social contexts of their work over time, and how the dominant discourse is represented in public policy, media and state regulatory schemes. Analysis of the interviews implemented aspects of Smith's (1987, 2005) feminist sociological approach as well as Skegg's (1997) and Naples (2003) perspectives for examining power relations and the complex and contradictory negotiations women undertake in our work and other relations.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study deals with issues about which I have strong opinions, based on years of involvement in front line work and feminist activism. Prior to undertaking this research, I knew most of the women I interviewed, and knew the organizations with whom they worked. I discussed earlier in this chapter some of the resistance I encountered from organizations I approached for interview participants, and I regret that I was unsuccessful in convincing them to talk to me.

The approaches required to be an effective researcher and being an activist are quite different. An activist organizes with others who have similar values and goals, part of political organizing is engaging in processes to build unity and articulate a shared vision. On the other hand, a researcher often seeks participants who express a range of opinions, analysis and experiences. Though I made every attempt to indicate I welcomed a variety of ideas and opinions, perhaps my previous activities and affiliations influenced whether responses (or lack of

response) I received from the agencies I approached. I am reasonably certain that my radical feminist standpoint influenced how I framed the initial flyers and recruitment materials, and my choices of where I sought participants. It is predictable that the women I interviewed shared some of my concerns and critiques. My familiarity with the context of their work and practice, may have meant I made assumptions of understanding, and therefore missed opportunities to more deeply explore the meanings they brought to their work.

The variation of the social locations of each woman, their work experiences and other factors, however, provided an enormous body of information that is multi-vocal, rich and deeply textured. This study seeks to be a nuanced and sophisticated examination and critique of an under-researched area of political and social practice, and the insightful and generous contributions of each woman opened to me a number of pathways by which to consider how women working in these front-line agencies engage with the current discourses and practices of ruling institutions such as government, social service, law enforcement and medicine.

Summary

In this chapter I have described the methodology I used to gather and analyze my research data. Dorothy Smith's sociological practice that foregrounds women's lived experiences within the web of ruling relations informed this inquiry as did other feminist thinkers including Nancy Naples and Beverly Skeggs. I have outlined my approach to interviewing, participant selection criteria, recruitment strategy, analysis, limitations and ways to consider the quality and trustworthiness of the data and analysis.

The next three chapters offer the findings of my study, beginning in Chapter Five with analysis of the interview data focusing on my participants' pathways and motivations with respect to their front line practice. Chapter Six continues with analysis of the interviews turning

to participants' perspectives on prostitution, harm reduction, and the challenges facing social service and feminist organizations engaged in women's anti-violence work. In Chapter Seven, I offer my analysis of the discourse of the Pivot affidavits.

Chapter Five: Pathways and Motivations

Looking back, you know, it's clear there was an eruption going on all over the industrialized West. And Canada was in the lead in many ways on developing ... rape crisis centres and transition houses.... There's nowhere else where shelters and rape crisis centres became normal in every population base of any size.

(Sharon, February 2011).

This chapter focuses primarily on the life conditions, pathways, and motivations of research participants who engage in front-line work, including their perceptions of different sites of work as well as organizational structures. Their collective experience totals over 100 years, and their combined influence has touched hundreds and hundreds of women, (including prostituted women), who were and are responding to, escaping from, and resisting male violence. These women are not only “workers”; they are activists, intellectuals, knowledge producers, health professionals, educators and political organizers.

In order to explicate my participants' motivations, pathways, histories and work places and practices, I attempted to distill the information these women so generously offered into discrete categories. However, as is likely very clear from reading these sections, there is a great deal of overlap and the boundaries are blurred.

Making a Difference

Each woman has a unique story, and each has taken a different path to the front-line, but there are themes threading through their lives they share. They all expressed a strong commitment to improving the lives of women which influenced their choices of work place.

Genevieve is one for whom the shared project of women's liberation held her interest in

the work. When we talked, she told me she had “grown up” in the anti-violence collective she was working with. She began in her early twenties, when she was travelling in Australia. She wanted to meet other women who were interested in feminism, so she signed up with the organizing committee of a local rape crisis centre for the Take Back the Night march. When she returned to Vancouver, she looked for similar organizing opportunities, and at the time of our interview, was marking her 14th year volunteering at a rape crisis centre and transition house in Vancouver. I asked her to tell me why she stayed in the organization for so long:

Two reasons. One, I personally get lots out of it. I find it fun, interesting, engaging, personally—to work for women’s equality. Actually, the process is fun and interesting. Two: I think we have, as one of my old comrades used to say, it’s your fucking duty. Especially if you’ve got a bit of privilege, it’s our duty to try and transform the world for all. And also, I don’t actually have it that good! I’ve got a fair amount of privilege, but I still get paid less, get treated like shit, and I’m always at risk of being pushed further down just because I’m a woman. Also, you only live once—might as well try to make an impact. So, those are the basic reasons. (Genevieve, February 3, 2011).

Sharon is in her sixties now, and has spent her life working to end male violence against women. In the early 1970s she joined a feminist consciousness-raising group that she found through an ad in the newspaper. By and by, the women in that little group recognized a need among women and opened Sharon’s house as refuge for battered women. That transition house is still operating today.

When she moved to Vancouver in the late 1970s, she continued to work in feminist anti-violence organizations. She has become a woman of influence through her continued

commitment to and activism with the independent women's movement. It is no exaggeration to say that her work has saved, and improved, the lives of countless women. When I asked Sharon what kept her in the work, she replied:

It's a better life for me than I would have had ...I have had more control over my work life and more opportunity for being useful than I would have had otherwise....And what's become true is that although I had compassion in the beginning and kind of a righteous determination to do something about what was in front of me—I've become more and more politicized over the years. I would say my political attachment in the beginning was pretty naïve—and it's become pretty sophisticated. (Sharon, February 3, 2011)

The opportunity to develop a sophisticated political analysis and practice was, for Sharon, one of the most compelling aspects of her work. I found that true of other women, as well. Several women talked about how important it was to them to be part of something bigger— as Sharon called it, “an uprising of women”.

Angela is the same age as Sharon, and comes from a similar family background. Her parents were working-class, and her father was active in his labour union. She approaches her work with an analysis tied initially to socioeconomic class, and then to gender and sex inequality. Her mother “worked here and there, and she was a very strong United Church person, and I was raised to be a critical thinker. That came from my mom....fairness was a really big deal. Really, to be simplistic about it, it comes down to, ‘is it fair?’”

I tend to be very much from a perspective of recognizing that our socioeconomic system drives almost everything...it creates inequality and it creates oppression, it creates violence and it creates war. So I've got that eye opened and it hasn't closed, I'm still there. (Angela, November, 2010).

While she was already aware, in the 1980s, of feminism and women's inequality, "I already knew about women's inequality from just growing up in the culture. I saw it every day. Like I saw something I didn't know, right?" Angela had said earlier that she often "comes from a theoretical perspective". Her consciousness-raising moment came through a practicum placement with Veteran's Affairs in the mid-1980s when she was in her 30s. She was working in a remote community, and "I was asked to go see the wife of a veteran who was held in jail because there was no transition house." This experience, Angela said, "started moving me", and it was then that she began to further explore feminism, "it [feminism] was in my time, but I didn't feel like it was part of me until in the '80s when I went to school and then I went to women's studies." It was through this praxis of theoretical understanding coupled with practical strategizing with this battered woman that Angela came to work in front-line women-serving organizations.

"Putting my Rage to Work"

Most of the participants said they were motivated to engage in anti-violence work because of either their own direct experiences of male violence or those of other women. Pascale, 50 at the time of our interview, came to the work in the early 1990s because, as she said, "I was looking for something to put my rage into". She is a long-time feminist activist and front-line worker, and like many other women she was drawn to the work in direct response to her experiences of male violence. She was engaged in prostitution as a young woman, and had left prostitution following a brutal sexual assault when she was visiting the US. Her first "straight" job was with the feminist anti-violence collective with which she volunteered. She had left prostitution for a year or two before joining them, still at the beginning of the process of transitioning out. She volunteered for almost a year, and then was offered a full-time paid position.

So I started the training and I started volunteering there, and I stayed there for a little over five years. About a year after I started volunteering they offered me a job, and that changed everything....It changed everything—how I felt about myself and what I was able to do, and I discovered that I was good at it, and I enjoyed it....I felt somewhat vindicated, you know? I was able to *do* something about violence against women. (Pascale, June 2011)

Gillian, who was in her early 30s when we spoke, also sought explicitly feminist work following a sexual assault. She joined a women's anti-violence organization upon her return from a year in Asia where she worked in International Development. While she was in Asia, a co-worker sexually assaulted her, and she was frustrated by the lack of resources available to her:

One of my co-workers sexually assaulted me. And that was [when] I'd come out of what I assumed to be the more vulnerable years—coming into puberty and coming into adulthood, and I'd become a lesbian—I'd got myself to this other country and I'd set up my own life, graduated from university and got myself this really respectable job. [I had already done] all those kinds of things that are meant to kind of set you up as independent and in control of your life, and, you know, all of a sudden, you know—How come? How come I don't have this control?...I just didn't believe anything would really happen to him, so—you know—I stopped talking to him. I told people I was really angry at him, and that I wasn't gonna talk to him or hang out with him anymore but that was as far as it went—
(Gillian, February, 2011)

Gillian said she had always been a feminist, in fact, feminism was a part of her habitus—her disposition, values, and way of being in the world and acting upon it. She credited her

mother's example: "I don't recall a time of my life when I didn't think of myself of as a feminist ...my mom was a big influence in that" (Gillian, February, 2011). Her feminism did not protect her from sexist violence, of course, but it gave her the confidence and resourcefulness to seek a political solution. Anger is, among the women I interviewed, a common motivation for engaging in front-line work.

Betty is the eldest daughter of Chinese immigrants to Canada. Her family settled in a small resource-based city in the north. Betty is the first of her family to graduate from university. She was drawn to work in a feminist anti-violence organization because, she said, "I was personally angry that I was being cautioned by a number of people to not go out alone at night, and this was in a busy part of the city, which I thought was really ridiculous!" She volunteered there for two or three years, then took a paid position, and stayed with the organization for over ten more years. She too found it satisfying to be part of a group, and together they were more effective than any one individual could be. The shared work and goals also served to challenge deeply held stereotypes, which added to the sense of confidence Betty (and her colleagues) gained:

I liked being effective, I liked being helpful to people. There was a lot of variety in the work there. I gained power, that was actual power to be developed and have access to and enact by being part of this group of women, part of this organization.... I also liked the fact that, you know, sitting on the bus, nobody would have expected that I would fight back. I had this impression that most people would perceive me as somebody's secretary, possibly somebody's nanny... But they would be surprised by how much I knew I could do, who I had access too. (Betty, March 2011)

Muriel, who occupies a leadership position in a suburban women's centre in the Lower Mainland, also spoke with passion about her motivation:

It's something that I think is important and necessary work to do and I wanted something important and necessary to do with my life, so—you know? I thought, you know, I could push stamps, I've got a friend who works for Canada Post, but ...for me, violence and poverty are the crux of women's oppression and so I think that this work addresses both of those things. (Muriel, January, 2011)

Muriel has worked in anti-violence work for over twenty years, beginning as a volunteer in a transition house when she was still in high school. She is troubled by the state abandonment of women, (something I discuss later in this chapter), and named the diminishing attention paid to women's issues as a primary motivator for her to continue that work:

And you know what the other thing, too, is? [Another reason] I stay in the work is because it's not as sexy as it was before...When I first got into the work, particularly when I moved to BC, it was sexy and everybody was talking about it, the government was giving money to it, you know. It got the attention that I think that it deserved...(Muriel, January, 2011)

Women of the Diaspora

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Marshall, 1998), a diaspora is “a dispersion of people throughout the world” (p. 158). In the modern era, this term was applied collectively to “Jews living outside of Palestine, latterly Israel but has come to mean any dispersion of migrant people” (Marshall, 1998, p. 158). Several of the women I interviewed could be considered members of diasporic groups, including the Aboriginal women. Though

Indigenous peoples have lived in what we now call Canada for thousands of years, European settlement over the past four centuries has resulted in widespread displacement and disruption of social/political structures, language and cultural practices as well as displacements from their lands and stewardship practices. Though my study did not interrogate all of the meanings or influences of the migration or displacement of study participants, the experiences these women had of finding and making home and community outside of their ancestral homelands shaped their political analysis, motivations and actions.

Each interviewee's work practice was shaped by their common experiences with the women they served "in the diaspora". While they did not attribute their particular views as a direct result of their migration experiences, it seemed to me that their connection with women in prostitution and escaping/responding to other forms of male violence was flavoured with the compassion of "sister outsiders".

Bronwyn was raised in an Asian country, her parents were Presbyterian missionaries, and her father was involved with an ethnic minority within the host country and their struggle for recognition and democratic rights. "Some of them were third generation residents, and they couldn't vote", she explained, and their residency and legitimacy was threatened. Her adult choices were shaped by her childhood, and, while she is "certainly not a churchy person anymore", her parents' example and the strong church influence gave her "strong family ethics of, values of working kind of in service, I guess" (Bronwyn, May 24, 2011). Her habitus, shaped by her family's involvement in a religious institution informed her educational and work choices. Because she has a degree in nursing, and experience in front-line work in non-government organizations, she also has some influence in the structure of her workplace.

She moved back to Canada to go to university because, "as a foreigner...there comes a

time when you have to decide whether you're going to stay or not,...because of the experience of my friends I decided I was never going to be fully accepted" (Bronwyn, May, 2011). She studied nursing:

I thought I was kind of interested in travel or seeing things, but I realized in university that I had kind of an interest in anthropology—you know, humans—human culture, and how that shapes people and so I thought well maybe I'll work in Northern communities, but realized that again, I'm a white girl, why am I, you know, what do I have to offer in that context? And then, what really shaped me was when a faculty member at our school was murdered by her husband.

(Bronwyn, May 2011)

This incident galvanized her, and when she moved to Vancouver, she started volunteering with a feminist anti-violence collective. Though no longer volunteering, she has remained committed to a feminist anti-violence agenda since. Her professional career is focused in inner city clinics or health centres. She provides health care interventions to addicted pregnant women and new mothers, people who live in impoverished inner city neighbourhood, and at the time of our interview, a mental health and addictions treatment centre.

Hannah is a recent immigrant to Canada, and worked as a director in rape crisis centres in her home country before immigrating. She now works within a feminist anti-violence collective. We talked in her home one evening, as her two children did their homework and got ready for bed. In between answering questions from her sons about math homework and telling them to brush their teeth, Hannah and I talked about why she chose to work in anti-violence work:

I like working with women and for women. I think violence against women is one of the most effective forms of women's oppression. It really, really takes a toll on

women and it's so common and so widespread, I think it's really crucial in almost every woman's life, so I think to fight against women's oppression, it's a good angle to work from. (Hannah, November 2010)

Hannah talked about the difference an education could make for women in terms of the opportunities they could have: “[The potential for individual women to achieve freedom from male violence] is still very, very tied to social class. The more educated a woman is, the more access she has to employment, she's more likely to be freer than the poor woman” (Hannah, November, 2010).

Hannah's project was explicitly feminist and tied to building solidarity between women. She noted some differences in legislation and governance, religious influences and cultural mores between her home country and here, but the condition of women's lives under patriarchy was similar. Male dominance was a consistent feature, and for her, radical feminism was a sensible theoretical basis for her practice. Other interviewees were politically motivated by primary commitments other than feminism. They may have prioritized anti-racist or anti-poverty work, though they, too, sought to find and build upon political and social connections between women as their chief collaborators and allies.

Dusty, for example, was drawn to working in a rape crisis centre because of her commitment to ameliorating racism and poverty against Aboriginal people. She described herself as “first and foremost, Aboriginal. I'm Cree-Ojibway, from Saskatchewan”. She did not go into detail about her home community, beyond saying that she “came from a very marginalized community, where the sex trade and drug dealing were among our only options for work...” (Dusty, November 29, 2011). She recognized that the conditions in her home community are consistent with conditions in First Nations reserves and communities elsewhere in Canada, so

ameliorating those conditions have been the focus of her work. When we talked, she was responsible for programs specifically addressing young Aboriginal women.

She came to the rape crisis centre through her previous work with a First Nations band in the Lower Mainland community to which she moved in 1992. There, her work was to develop successful proposals for government funding of social services programs. She said that she found success in these ventures “through our traditional ceremonial values”, and launched a social services organization in collaboration with other members of the Band. She applied for a supervisory position in that organization, but was told that she needed a Bachelor degree to qualify. So she went to school at the Native Education Centre, and when she graduated, got the job she was in at the time of our interview. She spoke with pride of her work with young women, about helping them get into shelter, housing, detox or school. “We connect them with Aboriginal services here, and Elders in the community...”. She told me that through her work and collaboration with other agencies providing services to Aboriginal youth, dozens of young women had gained some traction to get out of prostitution and/or homelessness. It seemed to me, however, that Dusty’s strongest work alliances were not with the other women in her agency, but with service providers in Aboriginal specific social services. She was committed to making changes to the conditions of young Aboriginal women’s lives, and spoke about talking to young people about how prostitution and drug addiction were instruments of racist oppression and colonization:

We also take them through anti-oppression training, we teach them about the legacy of residential school, we teach them about colonization and that's the very first work I do with aboriginal kids is that, "This is what happened to us as a nation, this is not your family's fault." "This is—this is systemic, this is not

something that we're—this is not created because no one loved you. This is systemic." And so I think that once the lights go on about that, huge change happens. Huge change. First of all, they get angry. (Dusty, November, 2010)

Like Dusty, Hannah and other participants, Homa talked about the importance of peer support for women escaping or responding to male violence. Her family left Afghanistan when she was eight and settled in Vancouver after a somewhat peripatetic decade. She started working at the rape crisis centre as a volunteer, moving through several different volunteer and paid positions:

I really liked working here, not just for the analysis they have around anti-oppression and the feminist views and the framework they have, but also [we apply that framework, and] you really get to work closely with the women... women have a choice in what direction they want to take their process and healing, so that I really find it to be respectful to their experiences. And so that has kept me engaged in the work. (Homa, November, 2010)

Homa has facilitated volunteer training groups and support groups for women, and in both settings noted that the women became more confident and resourceful as they were able to talk freely about their lives and offer one another support, strategies and a sense of belonging together.

When Magda was nine she came to Canada from Eastern Europe with her mother and brother. Her mom moved into BC Housing with her children when Magda was eleven, "and we still struggled and everything, but it could have been so much worse than it was." Her mother had left not only her homeland, but an abusive husband, and started over in this new place with her children. Magda has worked to advocate for girls and young women in the criminal justice

system for over a decade, and credited the availability of affordable housing as pivotal in improving opportunities for them, “it was huge...” (Magda, May, 2011).

She started working in her current workplace when she was still in high school, “I hadn’t been on the street myself—I was low income with my family” (Magda, May 2011). Magda was one of six young women hired that summer into an internship program. They were all between 16 and 24, and were paid a decent wage, more than minimum wage, for their work. “We did all kinds of things. Obviously, we learned about feminist theory and different things... We used to watch Youth Court and see how girls were treated in Youth Court when they were charged and we’d watch cases of male violence and monitor different files and things like that”.

Mabel’s life has had many similarities to the lives of the women with whom she works. She is an Indigenous woman, and came to the city in her twenties from an impoverished Northern reserve. She spent her early childhood mostly in the care of her grandmother, and later with her sister in a series of white foster homes. She brought with her to Vancouver both the uncertain capital of vaguely remembered traditions, and the resilience built of surviving injustices and abuse. She described some of her contradictory experiences as a child:

There's a lot of beauty within the community, and that's where I learned a lot about helping people and caring and [those values were] very much alive on the reserve where my grandmother was. We lived with her for a few years and, you know, just how the community pulled together with each other, and when a big boat came down—you could tell when it's loaded with fish—that one member from each family would go down and you'd get a bucket depending on how many lived in your house and no one was greedy, no one—everybody was caring and fun and helpful... (Mabel, February 2010)

While her early childhood with other family members and adults on the reserve were good times, her later experience in the foster care system was awful. She described neglect, arbitrary punishments, and physical and sexual abuse of both her and her sister, as well as individual and systemic racism. By the time she grew up, she said, “I felt like an apple, you know? White on the inside, but Native on the outside” (Mabel, February, 2010). Because she shares these perceptions and experiences of oppression and survival with women served by her organization, Mabel can find common ground.

Broadening Shared Horizons

All of the women I interviewed talked about how their life experiences and family influences shaped their choices and opportunities. Several also noted the importance that their work held for broadening their own horizons of expectations.

Mabel was in her forties at the time of our interview, her sister, with whom she had been raised in the foster care system, died some eight years previously. Mabel had the care of her sister’s three children, as well as her own four and two grandchildren, toddlers at the time. She had worked at a women’s resource centre for about 15 years, and named as her motivation for entering and staying in the work the importance of belonging, and offering women membership in a group, or at least access to a space of belonging. She said that her workplace gave her that, and provided her with support and responsibilities that helped her adjust her expectations for herself. “[My work] really supported me, you know? In a really non-judgmental way...so I still like to work that way...with the women.”

For a time she thought she wanted to get a degree in social work and become a youth worker, but:

It just was not for me...I did my first semester and it's like, "Oh, I don't—it's not something I really want to get caught up in," because of policies, because of the way you have to be and the way you have to run and the things you're—and it's like stuff that just keeps you, like, in the robotic state, you know? And it's like—and I saw how social workers work and it's just not something I wanted.

(Mabel, February 2010)

Like the other interview participants, Mabel valued the opportunity for connection and building relationships with other women. She was primarily concerned with strengthening the bonds of community through her work. Part of this was the work of constituting a social space for women within her workplace, in turn contained within the inner-city neighbourhood. The social space did not naturally become a site from which to build momentum of a political movement. There is potential for shared political action among and for women; Mable mentioned a women's group that met at the centre and planned events and marches both of celebration and protest, but such organizing was contained within her centre. This group seems to function more to build community bonds than as part of a broader feminist or social movement.

Pascale also talked about the personal and political transformations she experienced because of her work in the anti-violence collective. In the beginning she was very angry, and looking, she said, for an outlet for her rage. With each new opportunity to use her experiences and her resilience in the face of male violence to help the women who called the line and came to the house, her rage was tempered into passion and her discipline honed. The connections she made, the political analysis she developed and the skills she learned gave her many more options than she otherwise would have had. She also talked about the expectations other women had of

her abilities as pivotal in interrupting the “downward cycle of expectations and chances” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 217). She was able to find work that was interesting, meaningful and reasonably well-paid, “I would have been stuck in meaningless, you know, minimum wage labour without that”.

Magda’s experience of her work environment, colleagues and mentors was similar to Mabel’s, and to Pascale’s. “I have to say that the generosity and the understanding of women towards me, and towards other girls was huge” (Magda, May 2011). Magda described some of the specific supports that were in place for her and the other young women. They had each other, and the mutual aid, shared responsibilities and emotional and practical support from their mentors helped them to meet expectations they would otherwise not have had for themselves. “They [the women who hired her] believed that I could do things that I had never done before, right? I was writing grant proposals and doing stuff...at like 18”. Like Pascale, Magda thrived in her work because women who had more experience and more power in the world recognized her potential. The support and mentorship of those women made all the difference to Magda, “really, the belief that you can, that you will do well, and that...you have a role to play and your work is valuable” essentially gave her membership in a group, strengthened her voice and confidence to act in concert with others.

Each of these women engaged in work they found important and meaningful in collaboration with women who had somewhat more cultural capital and influence. For them, the “cycle of expectations and chances” that Bourdieu (2000a) discussed was reversed because others relied upon them, believed in their abilities, and provided the necessary tools and guidance to achieve. Research based on the exiting experiences of prostituted women (Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001; Hedin & Månsson, 2004) indicate that both the support of peers and of others who

have more privilege and cultural capital are important in order for prostituted women to first imagine and then take steps to exit prostitution. Having responsibilities for the well-being of others, community bonds and meaningful work are also important elements of recovery from addiction (Granfield & Cloud, 1999).

Grace was also drawn to the work because of her life experiences, but for her the main inspiration was what she learned about addiction and recovery in her quest to support her partner:

My partner is—was—a long-standing heroin addict...I was trying to find out everything I could about him getting better and me getting better. And at the same time harm reduction was emerging as...a new way of doing the work, because the Four Pillars had really just been released, and there was still the debate around the safe injection site, so—I began going to a lot of different support groups and from there, became very political about harm reduction being applied to—to substance abuse—that I was a real firm believer in the pragmatic approach of—you know—the stats aren't good around people just being recovered for life. So, what—so what can we do, right? And, from that, I was working in the corporate sector at that time, went—this is what I want to do. I really, just really believe in this work. So I got initially involved with [her current workplace] in 2004. (Grace, March 2011)

Yearning for Connection

Twenty years ago, Sarah's standard of living dropped abruptly following a divorce. She worked in food and beverage services for a few years as she parented her young son, and in the mid-1990s, decided to return to school for a social work degree. She earned a two year diploma

from a local college, and since 1999 has worked in the Downtown Eastside as a legal advocate. During our interview, she talked about the first few years of her employment with her current workplace—it was a time of great turbulence, for a variety of reasons the agency was driven to the brink of closure but staff eventually took over—it was quite dramatic. Current and former staff and board members put in many unpaid hours to keep the doors open. It was a time, Sarah recalled, “when we all worked together, you know? It was really really difficult, but we bonded, you know?” (Sarah, March 2011). Sarah was energized by this experience of working together for a common cause, and noted that the boundaries between “service provider” and “service recipient” were erased, (well, almost) as all the women met and organized together to keep the centre open.

This sense of solidarity, however, has diminished in the years since. At the time of our interview, she said she felt often isolated from her colleagues and from the life of the centre, and said that relationships between staff and management were frequently riven with tension. While Sarah does some work “on the floor” of the drop-in centre, (which is primarily service work—serving meals, giving out shampoo, cleaning and so on), she much prefers her one-on-one work with individual women. She is frustrated that the social service system is so inaccessible and punitive to the women with whom she works. She finds it satisfying, however, to prepare mediations with the Ministry of Family and Child Development, or appeals with the Ministry of Social and Economic Development (aka Welfare):

I think really and truly that my time is most valuable spent where it is—in the office and in the courtroom and at the mediation table, I’m doing negotiations for [women] because that’s my strength, that I was born with the gift of the gab, that’s where you should use me, and I seem to be just not very good on the floor.

(Sarah, March 11, 2011)

Wendy also came from a Christian background and that training motivated her to be of service to others, more than, at least initially, to act in solidarity. She sought to make connections with women with whom she would not otherwise form relationships:

I grew up going to a church right in [my] neighbourhood, and we always had a dinner once a month that would be for people who were homeless or street level....I mostly remember families there, but I assume that there were women, single women in the sex trade, who were coming as well. But it was very much on one side of the counter and the other, and [my workplace] was different. There was a—there was an element of that, but there was also very much an element of crossing those boundaries, at least during the time we were together. (Wendy, October, 2010)

Later, when I interviewed Genevieve, I asked her what she thought about the idea of “crossing boundaries”, and the idea of forming relationships, through front-line work, with people one would not normally meet. Her response was dismissive of the concept of crossing boundaries, “sounds like tourism to me...like being a friendly helper to the impoverished”. She added that in her work, women who call in distress or stay in the transition house sometimes return to join the work: “But they’re doing the moving, not me. Like it’s false if I pretend I’m becoming their peer. Better if I recognize that they already are my peer but they’re just in trouble.”

Developing Relations of Solidarity

While Genevieve expressed caution when commenting on the idea of peer relations with those women who seek out her organization’s services, others felt differently. It’s clear that

organizational structures affect the nature of relationships with colleagues, allies and the women who approach organizations for assistance. A staff group which has (or perceives they have) little opportunity to influence workplace policy or practice may experience challenges developing peer relationships with women they serve. Both Genevieve and Wendy worked in organizations that claimed a woman-centred and feminist orientation, but their structures and aims were different. Wendy was a staff member in an organization that was hierarchically structured—a board of directors and management team, full time, part-time and volunteer staff. The board and management rarely engaged in the front-line work, and the staff, while they could make recommendations and give reports on their work, had a peripheral role in agency decision-making. Genevieve was a volunteer member of a collective comprised of paid staff and volunteers, which met together once a month. While there is a hierarchy based on experience and individual commitment or interest, each woman has an equal vote, and can propose and argue for actions or campaigns or changes in practice.

Wendy may have agreed with Genevieve’s analysis about being “a friendly helper of the impoverished”. She expressed some sorrow and frustration with how little change she could effect in the lives of the women she worked with. She had hoped that she would develop relationships through providing meals, access to showers and a phone and other small comforts. But, for the most part, her hopes were not realized. She talked about another drop-in in the neighbourhood called “The Great Room”, which is run by a small Christian non-governmental organization (NGO) called Linwood House Ministries⁶³.

Yeah, and it was easy for me to idealize it because I wasn't there, so I'm sure there were a whole host of issues as well, but it felt more personal, it felt like they didn't

⁶³ linwoodhouse.ca

provide food and I'm pretty sure they didn't provide any kind of clothing and—if they had cookies and tea and things like that, they would occasionally, you know—if they had it, but it wasn't a place where women would come because they had a bunch of material needs, because they didn't want to be service providers in that way, they wanted to build relationships, and so people wanted to freely have relationships, they opened that space, and part of me felt like that might have been more helpful than this kind of warehouse of, like,...this production line...(Wendy, October 2010)

She noted there were many challenges to developing peer relations with the women in the drop-in who lived chaotic, unsettled lives. The hierarchical structure of their workplace conditioned their relationships both with each other and the members of the drop-in, and the difficult life conditions of the members added to the disjunctures between them. Wendy and her co-workers could not resolve the uncertainty experienced by women who used the drop-in:

To some degree the women are so used to being abandoned in a million different ways throughout their whole life that they're surprised if you stick around for any length of time, but then if you disappear—and I noticed this with other volunteers or other staff: If [workers] disappeared, like after, like, a week, they would just not ask about the person any more and act as if they were dead. (Wendy, October, 2010)

As well, women prostituting in the DTES, as Wendy said, don't have the “emotional energy” to think about where workers go or whether they will return. I think this is the primary contradiction Wendy may have experienced—she wanted to be “of service”—her motivation was not expressly to build political solidarity with the women she served.

It seems that it is much more challenging to develop peer relationships with the women who attend Wendy's drop-in than with women in Genevieve's transition house, in part because they were *always* in crisis. In addition, the goal of Wendy's drop-in was to provide short-term respite to women, not necessarily long-term, systemic advocacy that would improve the conditions of their lives. Women who seek the assistance of a rape crisis centre or transition house, on the other hand, are typically in a temporary crisis or transitional period, and have experience and expectations of more stability and connection. Also, according to the women who worked there, the goals of the anti-violence centres were different than those of the resources or drop-in centres.

Collective Action: Participants who worked in anti-violence centres all said the goals of their workplace was to end male violence against women, and to achieve women's liberation from patriarchal oppression, while women working in the drop-in centres described short-term goals—to provide safety and some physical comforts and resources. Doing the work as a volunteer and as part of a collective was important to many participants. As Genevieve notes:

And right from the beginning I was pretty confident I wanted to be in the decision making group, so I grew up working there, and my day job, the whole time. So, I have a Master's degree, which I tangled with some ideas of feminist scholarship, but I'm really into front line work as a volunteer. (Genevieve, February, 2011)

While she noted that "there are lots of good-hearted feminists doing social work", she said she was happy to be working at a job that was unrelated to her feminist work. As she said, "you can't rock the boat if you're sittin' in it! ...and I'm not sitting in it." She was also part of a collective of women comprised of paid staff and volunteers, each of whom has an equal voice and vote in regard to the organization as a whole.

Genevieve is in an increasingly unusual position, however, for a woman in Vancouver. From a working-class family, she nevertheless has a high level of education and a good paying professional job. Most of the other women I spoke to had volunteer experience as well as their paid work, and their discussions concerned both paid and unpaid work in women-serving organizations. All the women I interviewed were committed to using their positions and influences as workers, activists, advocates, nurses or activists to make positive changes for women.

Feminist collectives are also unusual, though many of my interviewees said, as did Genevieve, that being part of the decision-making in their workplace was important to them. The women who worked as part of a collective or a fairly flat hierarchy noted that structure contributed to their sense of satisfaction with their work and their relationships with colleagues. Sharing the leadership and power with other women, including their colleagues, was integral to their sense of meaning and belonging, and was an essential principle for their long-term goals of ending male violence against women.

Betty, who worked for many years as a member of a feminist anti-violence collective, and is currently a member of a collective of Asian women challenging the racialization and eroticization of Asian women and working to end prostitution. She noted that her membership in a group gave her access to power and influence that she would not have as an individual. Betty's collective shared a vision for their work, and made agreements together about how to achieve that vision. The kind of "big picture" agreements between staff and volunteers was not the norm in other women's workplaces.

For example, Muriel expressed some regret about the lack of political agreement between women of her staff and herself:

I think we⁶⁴ were the last of a particular generation that thought about these issues in a particular way, right? Like the younger generation now, the women that we hire [are] reluctant to call themselves feminist. . . . Although they subscribe to a lot of feminist principles and ideals and that, they don't label themselves as feminist. They don't necessarily talk in terms of anti-oppressive practice, you know, that kind of thing? So I think that—I don't know. It's important to keep that ideology alive, right? (Muriel, January 2011)

Though not entirely without hope, she seemed to be somewhat at a loss of what she could do to influence the direction her agency is taking. She admitted that she found it “really difficult from this place to actually guide an organization in a particular way”, and said that she has taken training for an entirely different profession—“something to fall back on”.

Summary and Discussion

The interviews revealed that women might have taken different pathways to their front line work, but there were common threads across these narratives. Many spoke to how important their families were in establishing particular values of justice and equality. In all narratives there was a desire to make a difference. Many yearned for connection, relations of solidarity, and collective work practices. For others, their engagement was a way to put their rage to work. Most participants described their work as having some positive influence in the lives of individual women, and placed it within a larger context of feminist anti-violence work, anti-poverty work or as part of their religious commitments. In their stories and analysis of their motivations and practices, a broader picture emerges, one that evokes a sense of (at least potential) powerful

⁶⁴ By “we”, Muriel was referring to herself, me and other women who were active in anti-violence work and feminism in the late 1980s through the 1990s.

solidarity and a commitment to identify, interrupt and resist violence against women. For these women, the personal is political; not one participant was ambivalent or bored. Although they may have felt frustrated, even despairing sometimes, each of them had passion for her work.

Working on this project has afforded me some distance from the urgency of the front-line work. In speaking with interview participants, and considering my theoretical resources, I was able to develop more fully an analytical critique of contemporary practices and ideology of harm reduction in relation to prostitution. I hear in these stories inherent contradictions between state-funded social services provision and feminist anti-violence activism. Over the years, women's services have experienced, on one hand widespread social acceptance, and on the other, increased state interference and constraints. "Today, in fact, women have become the principal subjects of the welfare state" (Fraser, 1987, p. 106), and comprise both the majority of social service recipients *and* paid social workers and other service providers. A 2009 Canadian study of anti-violence services confirmed Fraser's early analysis that state interventions "through funding restrictions and the elaboration of degendered and depoliticized policy frameworks, undermine the activist role of centres and privatize and individualize the problem of sexual violence" (Beres, Crow & Gottell, 2009, p. 135).

Fraser's "politics of needs assessment" (1987) provides means to understand depoliticizing trends of anti-violence and women's services. This depoliticizing affects women's relationships with each other and their sense of contributions and connection in their work. This work, the front-line work featured in this study, is predominantly performed by women and is symmetrical to the caretaking work expected of women in families. Superficially, the work that research participants engage in adheres to normalized notions of "feminine work", but each interviewee was a political actor, her workplace a public space of appearance and action. Each

woman discussed how their political analysis and activities developed through their work experiences.

Even as the front line work of research participants is symmetrical to traditionally feminine labour in the home, so too is there symmetry between the economic situations and activities of the prostituted and married woman. Beauvoir (1948/2009) addressed this unsettling symmetry:

For both, the sexual act is a service; the latter is engaged for life by one man; the former has several clients who pay her by item....In prostitution, masculine desire can be satisfied on any body as it is specific and not individual....The main difference between them is that the legitimate woman, oppressed as a married woman, is respected as a human person; this respect begins seriously to bring a halt to oppression. However, the prostitute does not have the rights of a person; she is the sum of all types of feminine slavery at once. (p. 600)

In the contemporary moment, actors on all sides of the debate about prostitution seem to agree that the prostituted woman is still, as Beauvoir says, “the sum of all types of feminine slavery”. Those who seek to reduce harm and decriminalize claim that such measures will remove this shame, the stigma—and restore the rights of a legitimate woman to the prostituted woman. Those who would abolish prostitution argue that the stigma will be removed when the prostitution industry is ended, and when women are no longer for sale.

The women in this study often occupy an “in-between” state (Arendt, 1958/1998) as a necessary condition of their work. In Arendtian terms, their work is in between the public and private realms, and constitutes both labour—tasks performed to maintain life—and action—political activity which is achieved by listening, thinking and acting with others in “the public

space of appearance” (p. 191). Their work necessitates listening—ensuring there is space and time for the women with whom they work to speak. In speaking each woman discloses herself as a certain yet intangible (and unpredictable) “who” rather than a collection of characteristics rendering her a stable “what” (Arendt, 1954). In speaking and listening to each other, each woman contributes a different and essential piece to the political thinking and action of the group. The movement and goals of political action are achieved through unity, not uniformity.

Each woman, the front line worker and the woman in prostitution, is responding to male violence, and so shares similar concerns even as their life conditions are very different. The women involved in front-line work and women in prostitution negotiate relationships with each other which are often mediated or interrupted not only by the conditions of their lives, but by the contrived situation within which they meet. They meet one another in a public space of appearance in order to achieve private necessities, and have to somehow understand each other through a thicket of imposed policies, funding or resource cutbacks, or other historical and political influences. Each of these women had great regard for the women with whom they worked, and deep concern for their well-being. Nevertheless, they recognized that there were forces that placed them sometimes in conflicted relations with each other. There is a lot of noise about which interferes with listening. Not all of the women I interviewed expected the eventual liberation of women from men’s domination, but all articulated hope for security, safety or freedom for women.

I leave Hannah with the last word for this chapter—when I asked her what she considered success, she replied:

I want to say that every woman who is daring enough to go to the police and demand that the state's agents hold the rapist accountable is a resistance. Any

woman who leaves the transition house and can maintain a life on welfare is a resistance. Any woman who joins a collective when the temptation of doing nothing or to hold what you already have is so strong, it's a resistance. So—it just—I think that the forces are so strong, so it's more like the Dutch child [with his thumb in the dike]—than general achievement, but I'm sure that in general many, many women are freer [because of anti-violence work and organizing].

(Hannah, November, 2010)

Chapter Six: Voices of Experience—Power and Work

This chapter engages in further analysis of findings from interviews with women in front-line work. Chapter five focused primarily on motivations, pathways, and conditions of work, and began to engage with women's considerations of the meaning and impact of their work. This chapter discusses in depth their perceptions of prostitution and harm reduction, and the theoretical and political implications of harm reduction policies and tactics for their work and the women they serve. I also discuss some of the pressures from the state and other funders to de-politicize and how women contend with these pressures.

The main sections of women's perceptions of prostitution and harm reduction are further divided into sub-themes concerning political structures, working conditions and expectations, and the disjunctures or conjunctions between the mission statements or goals of their work places and their own goals. Finally, I summarize these findings and offer a preface to the next chapter to place interviewees in a conversation with women who provided affidavits to the Pivot Legal Society in 2003.

Harm reduction approaches to prostitution are promoted as pragmatic, value-free and non-ideological. While harm reduction may be practical in the short term, it is also ideological, founded on a deeply held belief that prostitution is inevitable (Raymond, 2013, p. 127). In the long run, harm reduction interrupts praxis, reducing not the harms of prostitution, but the potential for a liberatory process. This chapter explores this troubling process through the experiences shared by interviewees.

Perceptions of Prostitution

Every woman I spoke to had met and worked with numerous prostituted women, most of

whom had engaged in prostitution in a variety of venues and contexts. Interviewees who worked in resource centres or drop-in centres saw a higher proportion of women who were engaged in street-level prostitution, and women who worked in rape crisis lines and transition houses met women who were mainly prostituted in their homes, through internet sites, or who turned a trick occasionally when their kids needed to go to the dentist or they were short on rent. None was engaged exclusively in either indoor or street prostitution, many had involvement in strip clubs and other forms of pornography as well.

Muriel talked about the generational cycle of poverty and degradation that traps women into prostitution, illustrating with this story:

You can almost see it happening....We had a woman who was a sex worker....she comes in the centre and she says, you know, "My daughter's got hot pants. She can't stay away from the boys, she's got hot pants," this and that, "How do I keep her away from the boys?"

Muriel said that the daughter came to her later, to talk to staff about her problems with her mother, "she's not, you know, really saying—she's just alluding to the fact that she may have problems with her mom". Muriel was shaken when, on her way to work one day, she saw the girl and her mother on opposite sides of one of the main streets in town. She noticed the mother gesturing to her daughter, directing her to attract male attention, and she put two and two together: "It was clear to me as day that that's what she was doing", said Muriel. She was disturbed by what she saw, and while she did not condone the mother's actions, she recognized that their lives were conditioned by a lifetime of male violence and poverty.

The mom was—was, is, a sex worker for most of her life—abused and passing it down. And I don't even know if she's actually the person behind it. There could be

some other dude in the background that's behind all of this. (Muriel, January 5, 2011)

Other women participating in this study, as indicated by their reflections further in this chapter, corroborated Muriel's analysis of the forces that push women to prostitution. Every woman talked about the prostituted women they knew who were conditioned from childhood by incest or other abuse, and how poverty pushed them to prostitution. They lacked financial resources or opportunities to imagine other chances for themselves. For these women, the choices they were making were most often that between welfare, (which is increasingly punitive and insufficient to maintain basic necessities of life), minimum-wage, dead-end jobs, or prostitution—which many believe generates a greater income than is the case. Hannah said that in fact, “women make very, very little money in prostitution,” and this is consistent with the observations of other interviewees. The woman that Muriel saw on the road “coaching” her daughter was also impoverished.

In the essay *Personal responsibility under dictatorship* (2003), Hannah Arendt wrote “There exists in our society a widespread fear of judging that has nothing whatever to do with the biblical ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged’ ...” (p. 19). She argued that morality, the ability to judge good from bad, and to determine which action to take, depends upon freedom of choice (Kohn, 2003, p. xiv). The girl's mother did not have that freedom. Those who promote full decriminalization of prostitution argue that women should be respected for the choices they make, even when those choices are constrained. In so doing, they are capitulating to the structures that remove, from the very people they claim to support, the freedom of making moral choices.

The person who *does* have the ability to choose in this scenario is the man purchasing

sex. And he is invisible. Muriel saw the woman and her daughter. She deciphered the code, and knew what they were doing. The three women, while “appearing” to each other, were nevertheless prevented from acting politically together because of the demands of the “invisible man” between them. Muriel knew that a man or men were to blame for the marginalization of the other two women, and the strained relationship between mother and daughter. Of course, their condition of poverty and marginalization is not the fault of an individual man—their trouble, *our* trouble, is due to the interlocking systems of domination—sexism, racism, classism, that give men power over women, and normalize men’s entitlement. This domination and entitlement is both all encompassing and invisible.

Muriel knew what they were doing because she could decipher the code with which women communicate to each other while engaging in the covert activities that are part of the essential condition of the lives of prostituted women. In order to live in capitalism while constrained by class inequality and the ever-present fear of sexist violence, it is necessary for prostituted women to capitulate to the demands of the oppressor. And in order to maintain some sense of self, some small shred of hope, they often do this capitulation and at the same time claim agency. In the words of one woman who was once prostituted in Vancouver:

At this time in my life, I thought this was my destiny, and I deserved no better....I was assisted by organizations that gave me condoms, bad trick sheets and false hope...I wore t-shirts that said ‘a blow job is better than no job’....This also confirmed that this was my so-called destiny”⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ Anonymous Member of the Aboriginal Women’s Action Network (AWAN), March 26, 2009 at *One is too many: A Citizen’s Summit on Human Trafficking at the 2010 Olympics and Beyond*. Asia Pacific Hall, Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. Her story was posted March 28, 2010 on PAR-L (Policy Action Research List, University of New Brunswick).

Muriel supposed that there was “some dude in the background of all this”. This supposition she based on both her past experiences and work with women, and her observations of the woman and her daughter. She heard the woman say she was worried about her daughter’s behaviour around boys, but then saw the dynamic between mother and daughter on the road that day, and all of these observations informed her analysis of the situation in which these women found themselves.

In this situation, the mother is not, in an Arendtian sense, either acting or belonging, and is “innocent”, as she does not have the necessary options with which to make moral choices (Herzog, 2004, p.47). This is not to say that this woman is in any way incapable of making choices. She does so, as do all women. Instead, I want to highlight the imposed restraints upon her that render her “innocent” in an Arendtian sense. Muriel demonstrated with her words that she had compassion for these women, her disgust was toward the men who bought them, and the conditions of impoverishment in which they find themselves.

Muriel knew that ultimately the mother had been abandoned herself, conditioned to a life of prostitution and marginalization. In many ways, like war refugees, these women are stateless, without political agency and living in conditions of “rightslessness” (Arendt, 1951/1994). The next subsection discusses this state of rightslessness in greater detail.

Rewriting the Script: Rightlessness and Appearance

Betty talked about the notion of “having a script” to follow. She noticed that women who have connections to a world outside of prostitution are more likely to make the break:

And if she’s got family or other connections who are not, um, if she’s got another set, another kind of... It seems like when you’re in prostitution, or in, in, when you’re in prostitution you’ve got this whole set of friends and expectation and a

lifestyle. Everything's...*the script is set*. And the way a woman can transition, can get away from that is if she's got *another script she can go to*. Another set of friends, family—some other thing that's a little bit predictable for at least a while. So she can just do that for a while, and know what to expect for a while. (Betty, March, 2011; emphasis added)

Mabel's story is illustrative of a state of "rightslessness" imposed upon refugees and diasporic populations as totalitarianism rises. Mabel's script, from her home reserve to urban, White foster homes, to the social services and charities of the downtown eastside, was one with a number of plot twists and structural flaws. She knew many other Aboriginal girls, including her sister, who were drawn into prostitution from foster homes, and she linked this with the sense of social and cultural dislocation from Aboriginal people, particularly her own nation. While Mabel herself did not become involved in prostitution, she experienced periods of profound depression, and sought to numb her feelings with alcohol for a time. She did not have a sense of belonging—there was nowhere she could really *appear* to others. "I don't speak my language," she said, "I didn't fit anywhere", and she spoke of being embarrassed of her people when she was younger. She eventually found another script, with the help of front-line service providers and women who became her colleagues. She took up responsibilities and found a place in a community where her actions mattered, where she belonged in a way she had not, in her recollection, since she was a very young child on her home reservation. "[My work] really supported me, you know? In a really non-judgmental way...so I still like to work that way...with the women" (Mabel, February, 2010).

Herzog (2004) quotes Arendt describing Jews in Germany at the rise of Nazism, "Their loss is absolute: 'We lost our home ... We lost our occupation ... We lost our language ... We left

our relatives ... and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps” (p. 39, citing Arendt, 1978). The main features of a non-political⁶⁶ condition are dissolution of family and community bonds, loss of language, home and occupation—refugees, or stateless people are “deprived of a place in the world, where their opinions are significant and their actions effective” (Herzog, 2004, p. 40, citing Arendt, 1979). These are the conditions under which Aboriginal people in North America have lived since European settlement, and I argue they are consistent with the conditions within which women live (to greater or lesser depending upon our location in economic or racial political categories) in patriarchal societies.

Hannah Arendt initiated a shift in thinking about power in political philosophy from instrumental to collaborative (Benhabib, 1993, p. 100). Political action, for Arendt, is taken up in collaboration and “the public space of appearance” (Arendt, 1958/1998). It is notable that the women I interviewed all talked about the value of recognizing the humanity and importance of the women with whom they worked, and of creating a space for them to collaborate in some way. It seems at this time that the potential of the shared power and imagination of women to affect broad systemic changes and substantive equality is particularly challenging in the contemporary moment, but this is only temporary. There is no doubt that no one is content with the dislocation and oppression dividing us from each other, and that this discontent can lead to shared and thoughtful action, but some organizational structures and externally imposed criteria tend to interfere with this potential.

Incest and Victim Narratives

In her book, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women said*

⁶⁶ Those who are in a “non-political” situation are those who have been rendered stateless. They do not ‘belong’ and become superfluous—they may have opinions, but their opinions do not matter; they may act, but their actions have no influence (Herzog, 2004, p. 40).

Incest (1994), Louise Armstrong described the process by which men's responsibility for incest was erased, serious inquiry into what causes incest became an exclusive focus on what incest causes. With *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* (1979), she was one of the first authors to write about her own and other women's experience of incest—to break the silence. By the time she wrote *Rocking the Cradle*, the silence was broken, but the ensuing din was not purposeful; it derided and blamed women, and through it all children's and women's voices are not, in any meaningful way, heard (Armstrong, 1994, pp. 6-7). Emphasis on relentless "trauma narratives" highlighting the anguish of the victims, the bravery of the victims, the victimness of the victims—effectively redirects attention away from the perpetrators, who simultaneously protect and are protected by systems of domination. "We have become a population of stories that carry no larger meaning, that imply no social issue, but are the...currency, that is the trade of the incest survivor identity" (p. 38).

The women Hannah knew who became involved in prostitution at a young age had experienced incest, "mainly incest,...girls ran away from home because of usually incest or rape, sometimes some other form of abuse, and in order to get a place to sleep would have sex with someone." These girls often become entrenched in prostitution, and it becomes very difficult for them to see a way out. Hannah noted that there are also women without this history: "the woman with a more ordinary way of life, and she can't pay the rent or the kids need dental or something for school", who will prostitute occasionally "usually for what the children need."

Muriel made the same observation when she asked, "Have you ever met a sex worker who wasn't abused or a prostitute who wasn't abused? In the home? Or by someone that she cared about?" I answered that I had not, and she replied, "Never."

Especially when you look at the whole continuum and you look at the— like, you know, I hate to say it, but you can almost tell, you—especially if you see a young girl, right? Let's say typical scenario would be some kind of series of sexual assaults for sure, by her boyfriend, really probably better described as a pimp, really, right? Because he's putting her out with all his friends, but it's all supposed to be fun and sexual liberation...and she's come from a family where either the brother or the father either physically and/or sexually abused her and/or the mom, it's just—you know, it's disgusting. (Muriel, January 2011)

Sarah, the women's centre advocate, also talked about the link between child sexual abuse and prostitution. She knows women who are deeply entrenched in prostitution, and other women who will turn a trick once in a while to get some extra money for her kids, or to make it to the end of the month. In all of the instances that Sarah related, she noted that sexual and physical abuse as well as poverty were ongoing in women's lives. Sometimes she knew women for months or years before they told her about the abuse they endured as children, but in almost every case, the common experience of women in prostitution was some variation of this story: "she had continued forceful sex by her father when she was a little girl as well" (Sarah, March, 2011).

You know—I just do my own private stats...I would have to say, 8 out of 10 have been sexually abused by family members in their childhood. That's huge! Huge. And there's no self worth because of that. It becomes a commodity because now it's got no value, but the only value it has is money. (Sarah, March 11, 2011)

Pascale corroborated Sarah's "private stats" in relating her experience:

I can't tell you how often I heard that sentence on the street. 'Well, might as well

get paid for it.’ These are all women who had the experience of having their bodies taken by whoever man damn well pleased, including their fathers, so at that point, why not get paid for it, right? So that’s where a semblance of control came from for sure and it was a semblance—it sure felt real at the time. (Pascale, June 2011)

Sharon also noted this background of sexual abuse:

I remember women coming to the first shelter I worked in, [in the 1970s] talking about incest and gradually admitting incidents of being prostituted. And I thought of [prostitution] as desperation—economic desperation—I thought of it as degradation,...And I gradually began to see...that it was the same women. That the women who talked about incest talked about prostitution. And I’m meeting them because they’re dealing with wife-assault. So in my mind they began to co-habit. And I didn’t really have an analysis about it—I just kind of knew that much. And didn’t talk about it very much at that point. It would come up...in Support Group. (Sharon, February 2011)

The foster care or so-called child welfare system is no haven for young people, either. Magda knows from her work that very often, girls leave their homes to escape sexual or other abuse only to be placed in foster homes where they are again victimized; as Magda notes, “a huge proportion run from child welfare placements” and end up trading sex for a place to live. Most of the women I interviewed acknowledged that the foster care system serves as a training ground for prostitution, and a hunting ground for pimps. When they do not have stability or protection at home, vulnerable girls are attracted by the attentions of an older boy or man who promises her affection and material goods, a life of excitement and escape in order to lure her

into prostitution (Dorais & Corrieveau, 2009).

In the present discourse there is very little discussion or revelation of incest. It is not that it does not happen any more, quite the contrary. It is, instead more likely to not be publically discussed because women do not want to take the risk of being regarded as damaged.

To declare oneself an incest victim...is to declare oneself slightly off-beat for the rest of your life....We didn't manage to make the talk about incest turn into, "what do we need to do with the men?" (Sharon, February 2011)

Indeed, neither did the talk about prostitution turn into "what do we need to do with the men?"

The Gravitational Pull of Prostitution

It seems that prostitution researchers across the spectrum of analysis, from feminist abolitionists to those who frame prostitution as a form of labour, agree that poverty is the reason that women engage in prostitution (Pivot, 2004, 2006; Living in Community, 2007; Benoit, 2001, 2009; Hallgrimsdottir, Phillips, & Benoit, 2006; Sharpe, 1998). Every woman I interviewed had met and worked with many prostituted women who trusted them with their stories. Many of their stories have similarities to Pascale's.

Her story is harrowing and inspiring. She is francophone, and when she came to Vancouver, she was 18 years old, her English was "pretty rusty at the time", and she had little work experience. She found some work here and there, but got fired or quit, and by and by she lost her apartment, then "couch-surfed" for a while, and at one point was homeless for a while. Eventually, she drifted into prostitution. "You know how it happens, right? The gravitational pull, right?" (Pascale, June 2011).

Other than the other young, marginalized people with whom she was acquainted through

the party scene, Pascale did not “appear in public”, so to speak. She experienced some discrimination because she was Quebecois in Western Canada, and that contributed to her marginalization, “so a lot of factors came together and I ended up on the street and I ended up in prostitution out of sheer necessity”.

It wasn't difficult for her to find her way to prostitution. She was, as many women are, caught in the cycle of expectations and chances that Bourdieu characterized as positional suffering. Some of her friends were in prostitution, and one of them, a transsexual (whom I will call Darla), who “took me to his corner, and said, ‘Here, you can use this corner.’” Pascale thought of it as “a leg up” at the time, and explained, “It's very territorial down there....you don't just get to step onto a street corner, right.” Darla protected her. “She took a shine to me, I had some protection. So there was a bit of bravado there, too.” She said, “I was already acquainted with um, the physical space, right?” So the field of prostitution, and the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 25) were already familiar to her. While at the time she might have said she chose the life, it is clear she was pushed to it. She worked both on the street and in escort agencies and brothels, “I can tell you it's no safer inside. If a guy wants to do something, he'll damn well do it”. She said that in the years before the 1985 injunction which drove prostitution east to the less-public light industrial areas, there was more camaraderie among prostituted people:

Just think of Davie Street and how bright it is. No fuckin' murderer would be seen there. ... You don't go where fuckin' 200 people could identify you. And it was really—it was funner! It was dynamic. I don't know. Somehow the sting was taken out of it. We were more sort of together too. Everybody knew each other, all the girls and the trannies and we were all working together and all looking out

for each other.

E: And you couldn't do that so much after?

Pascale: No. As soon as we were, first of all, as soon as we were shoved away from there, that's when the tranny-women split occurred, right? It was a real physical split, right? We work here, you work over there, and it just became weird. (Pascale, June, 2011)

All the women I interviewed saw that women they worked with were sucked into prostitution from the gravitational forces of poverty and sexism.

I know a lot of women who have been in prostitution at some point.... Like they might start out with the idea that this is to get away from this situation, this is temporary,...But it becomes a trap. For all of them. Very hard to get away from the pimps, the Johns, the drivers, the boyfriends who know about it and take advantage, that wanna be the new pimp or—or use it to exploit her, use it to rape her, essentially use it to sexually assault her. (Gillian, February, 2011)

Positional Suffering and Maxwell's Demon

Elizabeth Bullen (2006) describes Bourdieu's term *positional suffering* as the social marginalization experienced by impoverished people, on top of the material suffering caused by poverty. There is a subjective experience of hardship that “produces disappointment, disaffection and low self-worth” (Bullen, 2006, p. 46) among people who occupy “an inferior, obscure position in a prestigious and privileged universe” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 4). Though one could hardly call urban centres of poverty such as the DTES “a privileged universe”, it is located in Vancouver, one of Canada's wealthiest cities. To be living in such degraded circumstances in this beautiful city is to definitely occupy an “inferior, obscure position”. The women who access

the services available in the DTES know they will be regarded as abject, arousing either pity or suspicion when they venture out of the boundaries of the area, and this knowledge shapes their perceptions of themselves and their worth.

Using material poverty as the sole measure of all suffering keeps us from *seeing* and understanding a whole side of the suffering characteristic of a social order which...has also multiplied the social spaces (specialized fields and subfields) and set up the conditions for an unprecedented development of all kinds of ordinary suffering (*la petit misère*). (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 4)

When Pascale was engaged in prostitution, she talked about masking her suffering with bravado, of her pride of being a renegade, not under the control of a pimp,

I bought into that whole hierarchy thing...I was much higher than all those women who had pimps. [T]here was some pride about that—that we didn't have a man that took our money and that we were free. Some freedom right? (Pascale, June, 2011)

Because she could compare herself favourably to women who were controlled by a pimp, Pascale could minimize her suffering. She could think of herself as having achieved a position of some status and that judgment served to mask her own suffering somewhat.

An experience or idea may be unfamiliar or frightening but just because it is beyond the capacity of the dominated to imagine, doesn't mean that it is beyond what they may deserve or be capable of. Nevertheless, their lack of opportunity is conveniently misperceived, even, as Pascale's example shows, to themselves, as their choice.

Bourdieu used a metaphor borrowed from the physics of thermodynamics to describe the function of schools to separate students into classes (not schoolrooms, but their place in the

socio-economic hierarchy). James Clerk Maxwell, a physicist, used an image to explain how the Second Law of Thermodynamics could be suspended:

Maxwell imagined a demon who sorts the moving particles passing before him, some being warmer, therefore faster moving, others cooler, therefore slower moving; the demon sends the fastest particles into one container, whose temperature rises, and the slowest into another container, whose temperature falls....The educational system acts like Maxwell's demon...it maintains the preexisting order ... the system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 20)

Though Bourdieu used his metaphor to broadly describe schools functioning in cultural reproduction, Maxwell's demon can have application in the case of women in prostitution.

Bourdieu acknowledged that the metaphor has limitations—to be sure, women in prostitution, young women in foster care, or poor people are “not particles subject to mechanical forces and acting under the constraint of *causes*; nor are they conscious and knowing subjects acting with full knowledge of the facts” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 24; emphasis in original). However, it is important to understand that life experiences, family and educational influences, and powerful social conditioning are continuously structuring our habitus, and our tastes and dispositions shape our expectations of ourselves and our assumptions about what is possible for others.

As an example, Magda's organization is often part of discussions with other organizations that offer services and housing to young people. Magda talked about one meeting where some service providers argued that a proposed housing project for young women should be located in the Downtown Eastside because, “Stanley Park is as far away as Australia for them.”

“And I thought, well, that's wrong!” said Magda, “if Stanley Park seems so far away,

then you should help these young women gain that entitlement, or help them imagine better or live better.” She saw that by accepting at face value what these girls were saying about what they wanted, these service providers are abandoning the girls.

It’s ludicrous to say that a young woman who maybe has never experienced safety or entitlement to being safe or having a decent place to live, and stopping there and then saying ‘well that’s all she can see so that’s all we can see too’. (Magda, May 2011)

This is an example of the kind of chauvinism Bourdieu (2000) decried when he described the rationalizing of the dominant to refuse responsibility for the suffering of others and to characterize the deprivations of the dominated classes as an expression of their choices (p. 76). When the service providers and policy makers accept the view of those they wish to help that “Stanley Park is as far away as Australia”, they are also reinforcing positional suffering and the disappointment and disengagement of the dominated classes.

Muriel seemed less optimistic than Magda. Her attitude was one of resignation, and she was ambivalent about the potential for social change. She was clear that prostitution is a coercive and exploitive industry, and she believed women have a right to control their bodies. However, she held these beliefs in contradictory positions:

Fundamentally, I think that women have the right to control their own bodies....And yeah, I do believe that women choose. From a damn awful set of circumstances that leave no other choice, right? For me that's not a choice, right? ...I'm so conflicted about it, right? (Muriel, January, 2011)

Muriel talked about how important the issue of prostitution is in the lives of the women at her centre, and explained that she used the term “sex work” because she thinks it is perhaps more

respectful of the prostituted women she works with. She despairs that many of the women her organization serves will find a way out of prostitution: “I’m so hopeless that it’s ever going to change that I would at least like women to have some sort of—you know, like why shouldn’t they have access to EI [Employment Insurance], okay?”

Homa had a similar view. At the time of our conversation, she oversaw facilitation of support groups for women. She called prostitution “the oldest oppression” and agreed that it should be illegal, but, she said, “Who should it criminalize? The woman or the person who is renting her?” Women currently bear the burden of criminalized prostitution, she said, “usually it’s the woman who gets the stamp of prostitution and it will follow her for the rest of her life”. For Homa, even though she was against prostitution, she said, until such time as social support systems are in place, she was not in a position to be critical of women working in this way.

No one has to sell their body, so that no child goes hungry, so nobody's homeless.

So until we get to that place, I don't have the right—or I don't think I have the right to say that this woman should not be prostituting. (Homa, November 2010)

She talked about obstacles women face, and the impossible choices facing women. In the eleven years she worked at the rape crisis centre, she never met a woman who was proud to go on welfare, nor met a woman for whom welfare improved her life. She saw significant parallels between welfare and prostitution, and she was angry that the women she supported often had so much in their way:

There’s a lot of things that, as a society we should be offering her in order for her to be, you know, living the right life or whatever that means, but we seem to just say, like, she's prostituting herself and that's wrong. Well, her not having a home, her children being taken away, living in poverty, dealing with addiction and

racism...if a woman is doing this, it's not because she's choosing to do this, it's because it's the only thing left. (Homa, November, 2010)

When Pascale spoke about her time in prostitution, she talked about having a sense of pride because she and her other friends were not controlled by pimps. They were renegades, she thought:

We thought because we weren't controlled by a man that took our money and that we were free. Some freedom right? So um, I never felt the need to go and ask for help or to tell you the truth it never even dawned on me. It's kind of like, "Okay, I'm in this pickle. It's my own damned fault. Might as well make the best of it.

Try to make it as temporary as possible. (Pascale, June 2011)

Pascale's account had both bravado and shame evident, "we were renegades!" and "try to make it as temporary as possible." Her story echoes in a certain way Mabel's revelation of her youthful internalized racism, proud of the resourcefulness and community bonds she noted of her childhood home, but hurt and ashamed of the alcoholism and abuse shot through her life and the lives of her relatives, and further demoralized by the racism she experienced in the foster care system.

Other interviewees noticed this apparent contradiction in women's attitudes about their own lives. Several interviewees mentioned that it was initially difficult for women in prostitution to ask for help, or to talk about their experiences. Wendy told me that she knew of some women who would not use the services of the drop-in because they did not want to say they were involved in prostitution. Gillian said that women in the transition house were more comfortable talking about having been battered by their husbands or raped than to disclose having been involved in prostitution. Pascale talked about her reluctance to seek help as part rebellion and

part shame:

But, the reality of it was that I was stuck like everyone else. I mean, I wish back then that I had realized how much in common I had with all the other women. I think that might have made a difference somehow....But you know...it's a survival thing, right? ...I think these are the little tricks that our mind plays that literally allow us to get up everyday, otherwise why go on, right? I think there would be a lot more suicide. (Pascale, June 2011)

After she left prostitution, Pascale came to realize how much she had in common with other women. She went from “public woman” to “public actor” —in concert with others in the public space of appearance (Arendt, 1954; 1958/1998). Front-line work is inherently political, and potentially offers more than immediate comforts—When that work is informed by a theoretical commitment to women’s substantive equality, there is a possibility for alliance. Women in feminist anti-violence and advocacy work offer women not only the interventions that may benefit them in the immediate, but also an opportunity to join, eventually, in the work. Pascale’s practice was, when she finally could, to tell women, “This is outrageous, what is happening to you”, and it relieved them, and established a sense of solidarity with them. In articulating her outrage, and naming their victimization, she made a beginning of helping them reframe their experience.

Angela said, agreeing with Pascale, “Women are always making up stories to make it okay to stay with an abusive man, [and] make it okay to be in prostitution. I see it as the same thing, and we are always making up stories to help ourselves survive those experiences”. Like the other women I talked to, she rejected the notion that prostitution is a choice for women, but, “if I felt like that was my only option, and I had to go there, I’d make it okay. And I’d probably

resent people saying I wasn't making a choice.”

“She’s not making a choice”, is the accusation many women in prostitution, and others, *hear* when front line workers and feminists say, “she doesn’t have enough options”. The story that “women make real choices, even if they are constrained” is the flip side of “making up stories to survive our experiences”. In fact, most people, on all sides of the debate, seem to think women are perfectly capable of exercising agency—what is ignored are the consequences to women who exercise this agency to say “no”. Maxwell’s demon, in women’s lives, is patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism, and the container for the faster moving particles is very small and far away.

Misrecognition and Representation

A few years ago, Magda participated in a workshop about how to prepare affidavits. She realized before long that it was specifically to train people to gather affidavits for Pivot’s Charter challenge case as evidence to present to the special subcommittee that was at the time preparing the report on Canada’s prostitution laws.

Years ago, I went to do affidavit training...we just wanted to learn how to do it so that if we work with young women, you know, it’s a useful tool, affidavits....it turned out it was for [Pivot’s ‘sex work project’]. And so I ended up there accidentally...it was a room full of law students and one woman who was a professor or something like a PhD in Law. (Magda, May 19, 2011)

At one point, Magda raised her hand, told the facilitator where she worked and said, “I know when we are taking some kind of a plan like an affidavit, or advocacy, we have an idea of where we’re starting and where we’re going and we have a perspective, right?” She asked the

professor what her perspective was for these affidavits, what she hoped to achieve.

So I said, “What’s yours, where are you? What are you doing?” And it was kind of funny because the woman, the PhD, the professor in law, a white woman, um, looked at me and went, ‘We will let the women speak.’ Or, ‘we will let the experiential women speak’ or something along those lines, and I was looking at her in this room, and it wasn’t only law students, I think there were a few women in the room who had been in prostitution and maybe were currently, but it was just such a weird moment....(Magda, May, 2011)

At the time, Magda remembers thinking, “of course they have a plan!”, but they would not admit to it. Later when she read a draft of the report, *Voices for Dignity* that had been sent to workshop participants and remembers thinking, “Oh yeah, it doesn’t say that. The women are not saying ‘Don’t do anything to the men.’” The report recommends decriminalization, but as I will discuss in the following chapter, the evidence of the affidavits can easily be read to support a quite different argument.

At the same workshop during a break, Magda overheard another exchange: “one of the law students, I think, a white woman, said to another woman, ‘Yeah, you know we need to fight for these women’s rights because this is our sexuality that we’re fighting for.’” Magda found this remark disturbing. The woman’s remark normalized male demand for women in prostitution as a natural expression of *women’s* sexuality. In fact this contradictory notion is a form of misrecognition, taking for granted something that is part of structural inequality—normal, perhaps, but not natural or “as things should be”. Magda doubted that the woman speaking those words had ever been in a position of having to sell sex.

This example is another version of misrecognition—of prostitution as an expression, not

of male dominance over women and entitlement, but of women's sexuality. In the face of such proclamations from non-prostituted women as "it's my sexuality I'm fighting for", women in prostitution are erased as agents. As the affidavits discussed in the following chapter show, none of the women from whom these affidavits were gathered considered prostitution an expression of their sexuality. Indeed, when Magda read the draft report to which those workshop participants contributed, she saw that "none of those women [the affiants] said they didn't want anything to happen to the men!" (Magda, May, 2011).

Women in prostitution (in exploitive relationships with many men) and women in a marriage or similar relationship with one abusive man are caught in the trap of making excuses for these relationships. This behaviour is inextricably tied to social devaluation of women⁶⁷, and clearly indicated when the question is asked of *women*, "why doesn't she leave?" or "how could she prostitute, has she no self respect?" Questions that could turn this devaluation inside out would interrogate the causes of conditions that leave her such constrained choices, and why men act with such entitlement to women's bodies.

In 1999, Betty's organization became familiar with the work of Sheila Jeffreys (1997), an academic in Australia who is a noted abolitionist and radical feminist. Influenced by her work, and that of Andrea Dworkin (1974, 1987, 1996), the women of her organization agreed to stop using the term "sex worker", and "then we spent time and money trying to tell people about what we had figured out." It was during that time period, the early 2000s, that harm reduction really began to get some traction in the public imagination and in social policies. Larry Campbell was elected mayor of Vancouver in 2002. Betty and her group were optimistic: "we thought he was interesting, that he would...stand by his convictions and that he wasn't tied to the usual players".

⁶⁷ S. Butterwick, personal communication, February 5, 2014.

Betty said that they were initially interested in the idea of a supervised injection site: “and we started foolishly to invent what we thought was the safe injection site, but it [Insite] wasn’t what we had in mind”. Betty and her colleagues imagined that the site would first offer people an option of detox, “and that there would be a whole range of alternatives to doing the injection.”

The operation that Larry Campbell wanted, however, “... turned out to be completely different”, said Betty. At the time of the municipal election campaign, Betty and another of her co-workers decided to meet with Mr. Campbell. “We got like about three minutes each around this big round table at their new headquarters when they were running their campaign. He told us how good he was going to be at his job, and how he knew how to use the media. He was like a real alpha male, and I came out of that meeting still feeling pretty hopeful.”

And then, this sounds really goofy, and then I started watching Da Vinci’s Inquest, [a popular TV show filmed in Vancouver] which he was supposed to be a co-writer on—it’s based on his career—and I realized that they were pro expansion of prostitution. They were pro full legalization. They wanted a red—, there was like, the main character based on him [Campbell] was lobbying for a red light district, in his program every week he got to make the arguments for why a red light district would be a good thing. And I realized that I’d made a mistake! ...And, it just sounds so paranoid. I mean, anytime that I brought it up people would say, “That’s just TV, that’s not real life.” But he was a co-writer!

(Betty, March 2011)

This was in the early 2000s, and Campbell was elected in the fall of 2002, the year that Willie Pickton was arrested and charged for the murders of 26 women of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. Betty’s organization further developed their opposition to a form of red light

district, countering the promotion of harm reduction as an approach that would make women safer. “I don’t think it will,” said Betty, “It will help create the illusion that women are safe because the violence that happens to them, uh, will be more shrouded. It’ll happen behind closed doors.”

The activist group that Betty co-founded and with whom she now works is a coalition of Asian women organizing to end prostitution and trafficking. When she left the anti-violence organization, she and other Asian women, including former co-workers, started working together in their present coalition.

We knew the massage parlours...the police were conducting raids on massage parlours. And somehow, there was no challenge among the general population, the white or mainstream population here about *that* [Asian women in brothels disguised as massage parlours] being a bad thing. It was being constructed to *us* as ‘part of our culture’.

Betty and her allies reject that construction, of course, “I mean, *maybe* it’s part of my culture, as a Chinese woman, but it’s not like I have to accept it!” (Betty, March 2011)

She called this racialized misrecognition ‘paternalism’, and drew parallels between the sexualization and objectification of Asian women and Aboriginal women, and warned that regulating prostitution and moving street-entrenched women indoors would not ensure their safety or promote their participation in public life:

There was that paternalism going on, ...like the solution of putting women indoors...Like, [proponents of decriminalization of prostitution] saying to the Native women, “Well, we’ll just put you inside and you’ll be safe inside, inside a licensed establishment with a bodyguard.” That’s what the Asian women were

already in—that was their situation, they were under lock and key in houses across the Lower Mainland. They were inside, and there was no safety for them. They're still being raped, they're still being beaten, they still have no status,... Yeah, we don't know how legal, illegal... they're not visible... know, that's a flash of what the future might be for Aboriginal women. They're hidden away. Everybody knows. Nobody cares. (Betty, March 2011)

Expectations and the Victim as Avenger

Sharon talked about the changes she has noticed since she started this work. In her estimation, women now expect something from a rape crisis centre, expectations that have been informed by media or educational institutions, rather than from direct contact with feminist activism or theory. There is a current of mistrust and derision directed toward feminists by some proponents of harm reduction and decriminalization (for example, Weitzer, 2010; Agustin, 2007, 2013). They often accuse feminist abolitionists of portraying all men as johns and all johns as violent, and all women in prostitution as “helpless victims”. Cecelia Benoit (2009) cautions readers to have respect for the agency of street-involved youth:

Nevertheless, it is important for all researchers to strive to capture the true diversity of street-involved youth, if only to avoid tarring all of them with the same brush—helpless victims. The “victim” label not only stigmatizes them but also deprives them of a sense of self. Young people's agency in organizing their lives, on the street or elsewhere, has important implications for the implementation and delivery of effective programs and interventions. (Benoit, 2009 p. xvi)

Just as the refugees of Europe in the inter-World War period, though living in de-politicized conditions of statelessness, found community together, so women in prostitution find

community together—as Pascale described:

We really were tight, you know. It was really an attitude of, ‘Check this guy out and that guy out and this one looks pretty shifty.’ And we would talk to each other and prior to all the bad trick sheets and all of this stuff, we would just talk to each other, right? (Pascale, June 2011)

Pascale was proud of being a renegade, “we were so proud of that,” she said, “and I think, at the time, that served me well.” She and her friends on the street could look after themselves and each other, they did not see themselves as victims. But at the same time, she said, “I knew that prostitution was garbage for women, [and that] prostitution wouldn’t exist if men didn’t fuckin’ demand women’s bodies. We all knew that.” She and the other prostituted people she knew were fairly contemptuous of men, and operated with bravado to protect themselves.

The emergence of highly processed and cheap stimulant drugs in the last fifteen years has had a deteriorating effect on the abilities of prostituted women to form communities together, “[But] there was no crack, none of that crap yet. Who knows what would have happened to me?” mused Pascale, after talking about the community she joined while she was in prostitution with other “outsiders”.

Feminist anti-violence centres reject the “helpless victim” trope, and, as Sharon explained, when first answering women who call, “It’s important to never reduce your response to just what she is asking for, but to have an agenda of your own, and to be as honest as you can about that—it is part of why they call us” (Sharon, February, 2011). In validating that the woman calling *is* a victim, the women answering her not only offer the caller the support, intelligence and collective action of a women’s group, but also direct attention toward the victimizer, and name him as responsible.

A victim is by definition not only one who is oppressed but one who has no language of [her] own, one who...is robbed of a language with which to articulate his or her victimization. What is available to [her] as language is only the oppressor's language. But in the oppressor's language, the abused will sound crazy, even to [herself], if [she] describes [herself] as abused. (Felman, 2001, pp. 228-229; [Felman's text used male pronouns]).

Some critics claim that feminist abolitionists deny women's agency when they frame prostitution as a form of patriarchal domination of women (see, for example, Benoit, 2009, p. xiv). But expressions and feminist analysis of agency can be more nuanced, as Janell Hobson (2010) argued in a discussion about women's agency to Women's Studies List-serve (WMST-list):

What I find curious about many of the "agency" positions in feminist discourse is the way that they have overlooked the actual "agency" in discussing oppression and that there is "agency" in articulating victimhood ...James Baldwin once said that the victim who speaks about her/his victimization is no longer a victim. S/he is a threat⁶⁸.

Feminist anti-violence centres similarly reject the "helpless victim" trope, and offer women, as Sharon says, more than what they may know they can ask for. Sharon's practice, and the practice of her collective, is to understand women where they are, meet them there and then offer her the collective wisdom and strategies of now two generations of feminist anti-violence

⁶⁸ Electronic mailing list message retrieved from WMST-L, a list-serve from University of Maryland for academics concerned with teaching women's or gender studies. Hobson, J. (2010, March 13) "This is in response to Chithra's questions..."

work. In this way the aim is to work together to improve the conditions of her life and her opportunities.

Women are often victims of male violence, but they are almost *never* helpless, and certainly not when they take the action of calling up a women's organization. The ubiquitous claim that feminists or abolitionists condescend to women exploited in systems of prostitution by treating them as "helpless victims" is false, but it sounds scary—whoever wants to be known as helpless? But when women call to report a rape, or ask for help getting away or accountability from an abuser, they *are* fighting back. In the next section I explore my participants' views and experiences with harm reduction policy and its impact on their practice.

Harm Reduction and the "Hierarchy of Pain"

Harm reduction, as described in Chapter Two, is touted as a pragmatic, evidence-based approach to social problems. Bonisteel and Green (2005) critique "evidence-based" approaches, saying they serve to contradict and undermine feminist anti-violence advocacy and activism:

Evidence-based policy-making has been adopted as the primary mechanism of national policy decision-making, based on claims that an evidence-based approach is superior to direct public input. The shift to an evidence-based approach is forcing compliance with outcome evaluation regimes throughout the feminist anti-violence sector. Funder-driven outcome evaluation regimes put pressure on feminist anti-violence workers to obtain credentialed education and to acquiesce to medicalized models of service delivery. (Bonisteel & Green, 2005, pp. 1-2)

"Practice-based evidence" on the other hand, may be another way to frame feminist praxis by which the orthodoxy of harm reduction is challenged. Praxis is a process, an upward

spiral of practice and theory development with a potential to broaden horizons of expectation. Harm reduction may be a point in that process, but in current practice in Vancouver, it is the only point. Instead of being a contribution to a road, this practice makes a deep muddy rut. Rather than deploying strategies such as condom and resource list distribution, crisis intervention and outreach on “the stroll” as a harm reduction and an end-in-itself, the participants all talked about the need for a range of solutions in the long term.

The pragmatic story of prostitution is of one controlled by a benevolent sex industry in which pimps, traffickers and brothel owners protect their “employees” and are monitored through a regulatory regime....It preaches salvation through regulation. It’s a solution that claims to reduce the risks to women—not eliminate them. Most of the time, it fails even to reduce those risks. (Raymond, 2013, p. 127)

Most interviewees experienced harm reduction as a failure in the long term although some could see the merit of its application as a first step. Grace said that she thought harm reduction was the best approach for her work in a suburban women’s resource centre. As she met women in prostitution who used the services of her work, she became convinced that:

The same [harm reduction] policies, the same practices can apply very easily [to sex workers], and that just allowed for me to engage really non-judgmentally with the women and just talk safety, because that was something that you don’t get the resistance around...I’m not making a judgment about, um—how you choose to make income and I’m not making a judgment about how you choose maybe to cope with the trauma in your life. We’re just gonna talk safety. And, so, I just found it a really non-threatening way to engage. (Grace, March 2011)

She also talked about the process of becoming “an insider” with the women who came to her workplace. She said that, for her, her personal experience of loving and trying to be a support to someone who was an addict taught her how to listen:

And, that is what allowed me to like, to you know—start working with women that are involved in street level trade, because before then I didn’t have any right to comment. And, and, I would have said the wrong thing. I would have said, “Just criminalize it and get it over with.” And not realized the implications of just decriminalizing something, right? So now it just, you know—walking with people and listening to their story really just makes me go, (sigh) there’s gotta be so many nuances in any policy that we do, and we have to think about this group of people and that group of people, and how’s it gonna affect—what are the latent impacts of putting that policy in place, right? So—it’s that back story that keeps me um, a bit humble too in going, “Okay, let’s—we’re gonna try this out and I’m gonna get behind it, but you know—at some point, if the women tell me this isn’t working for them, I’m gonna listen to that and we’re gonna have to come back to the table again and re-strategize. (Grace, March, 2011)

Bronwyn also discussed the importance of viewing harm reduction as one of many interventions along a continuum. She said many of the people who use the services of her current workplace face many obstacles to integrating, in great measure because “when you look at their history of trauma it’s atrocious”, and helping them get out of addiction and into better circumstances is challenging. While they do claim a harm reduction approach, “it’s pretty mushy...it’s also a treatment centre, so the goal is abstinence”. She described the treatment model as “strength based, we really try to focus and find out what is this really hard-to-connect-

with person, what are their strengths?” Bronwyn did not see this as inconsistent with harm reduction, but along a continuum of implementing a structure of increasing expectations of and for people using her services. She saw some merit in how prostitution has been framed from a health perspective:

If you take a health perspective on that, like smoking, there is a lot of emphasis right now on smoking cessation. And in healthcare, there’s kind of an emerging understanding and assumption that actually, the squeaky wheel does help to incite change. Always asking, “So are you still smoking these days?” You know, it takes one question, in your 10-minute visit. (Bronwyn, May 2011)

This approach is different from the kind of harm reduction practiced in Vancouver. There is a judgment contained in the question, “are you still using?” It is a judgment that the person is capable of reducing or stopping their drug use, and their well-being is important to the questioner. This approach can be seen as consistent with a Bourdieusian commitment to “interfere with the downward spiral of expectations and chances” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 217), and is also a form of recognition. When someone with relatively more power or privilege than “the other” asks a question like, “are you using less?” or acknowledges the injustice of their circumstances, cumulatively, these small events make a positive difference in how women gauge available opportunities. As Pascale said, “No one said to me, ‘this is outrageous, what is happening to you!’” That would have relieved her, she said. Sharon also talked about the importance of telling women the truth:

Our job, you know, can be seen as a fully developed exit service, except I’m not sure what one is anyway, but we can tell you the truth—we can say, “Why don’t you quit?” We can say, “It’s okay to tell me what you need to quit.” We can say,

“No, people around here don’t think it’s great that you’re doing it, or that you should revel in it or enjoy it, or anything of the kind”. We can deal with some of the practical realities like hiding you for a while, or helping you get what you’re entitled to, which isn’t much anymore, for anybody. And we can try and insist that police respond. (Sharon, February, 2011)

Wendy also talked about the importance of recognition, of developing sustaining relationships with women using the services of her workplace, “I think that is what’s needed for people to actually move forward. I think [real harm reduction] needs real friendships and real family and it’s not just about organizational services. I don’t think that changes anyone’s lives” (Wendy, October, 2010).

As Grace and I talked more about her work and her conception of harm reduction, it became apparent her understanding of harm reduction hinged on recognitive redistribution. Her ideal was in fact much closer to that of harm elimination, but she, like other interviewees, was frustrated by the lack of comprehensive and varied options for people living in addiction or women in prostitution:

For me, it’s always just been people will have what they need when they need it. I don’t think it’ll be like everybody’s miraculously clean or not involved in sex work. What I would wanna see is that, you know—especially women in sex work, are informed enough to know it’s not actually a choice they’re making. ‘It’s a choice—it’s my choice to sell my body’. But then they’re actually informed about all, you know—the societal kind of things that happened to them that actually lead down a road in which they’re gonna discover, “Hold on a second—I had no choice. This is just where I ended up.” It would be like when they make those

realizations, and we go, “So do you want out? Do you want something different for you?” That they’d be like, “Yup.” And we go, “Cool, these are, these are all your options! What works for you? The 12 step program? This program? This program? What works for you?” Right? And that they’d actually be able to have, like, informed choice here, and real options. [But] right now, there is still no choice...that doesn’t feel good to me. (Grace, March, 2011)

During the time Pascale worked with street-entrenched youth, she began to notice the rise of harm reduction rhetoric and a discourse of “choice” in regard to homelessness and addiction:

There was the idea that being on the street was a choice, right? That whole thing started to emerge, of choiceThe more we talked about harm reduction, the more the word choice started getting thrown around, and I don’t think that’s a coincidence. (Pascale, June 2011)

Pascale noted the inequity of the concept of harm reduction, “I think the concept of reducing harm is discriminatory,” she said, “Because it says the goal is to *reduce* harm, thereby *some* harm is okay”. Who, she asked, gets to decide what is harmful? Who decides how much harm is okay, and how much harm should be reduced? “You know, so, I think that the concept of harm reduction, not necessarily invented, but further gelled the concept of hierarchy of pain, right?” (Pascale, June 8, 2011).

Mabel was also suspicious of the function of harm reduction. She described Insite⁶⁹ as a site of reproduction of inequality. The “they” to which she refers below is the organization that operates, among many other shelters and services, the safe injection site, and promotes a harm

⁶⁹ Canada’s first Supervised Injection Facility (SIF) for users of intravenous drugs, which opened in Vancouver’s DTES in 2003.

reduction approach to social services. In her analysis, harm reduction works as part of a social services system of classification, rather like Maxwell's demon (Bourdieu, 1998) again, categorizing people as "drug users", "addicts", "sex workers"—in a sense, as she describes below creating the problem (or maintaining the problem) in order to get money to provide the assistance for the problem they've created:

In my mind, ... I think they've created a lot of the problems in the community so that places like the injection site could be—they could create jobs and they could—you know, people have become like a commodity. The drugs and alcohol are not the problem. It's stuff underneath and I keep saying that, right? I mean setting up an injection site is not the solution to the problems down here, you know? I think it's contributing to the problems. (Mabel, February, 2010)

I return to Naomi Zack's (2005) notion of "identity" as relational and structural, rather than things that one may take up or discard.

What does it mean to be a kind of human being or have a kind of self that is constituted by a relation to a category? Such a relational identity is not a substance or an essence in individuals, and neither does the category itself have a substance or essence because as a category it is a social construction. The relational nature of women's identity entails that the womanhood of all women is located somewhere outside each woman. What all women share is no more than this constructed identity. (p. 23)

Zack proposes that it is only when identities are understood as external and situational rather than within women themselves, that individuals may change their identities--not one at a time as single individuals, but together in collaboration as they change the shared conditions of

their lives. What needs to be imagined, says Zack, is not some internal identity, but common situations—“What feminists, especially intersectionalists, have been imagining as identities needs to be exchanged for descriptions of social circumstances. *Feminist social theories need to view identities as external to real persons*” (Zack, 2005, p. 75; emphasis in original).

The identity of “drug addict”, Mabel argued, is one that was imposed on people in the DTES and she saw the label was durable and constraining. The individuals were viewed as integrally drug users—“You become,” she said, “first and foremost a drug user, a commodity rather than the person underneath”.

Hannah has worked in anti-violence women’s organizations since she was a young adult, and understands harm reduction approaches to both drug use and prostitution as reinforcing harm. “I think if someone is addicted, it’s better they use a clean needle, but I want to fight for a society that people do not resort to addiction.” On the other hand, she said, “the problem that I have with harm reduction in prostitution is that...it’s like raping in an alley or raping on a nice clean sheet, you still sustain the rape.” In her experience, harm reduction is promoted instead of working to end harm, but it is popular because it’s relatively inexpensive, and “it numbs the public conscience—it’s disguised as choice”. Increasingly, addiction is regarded by service providers and medicine as a form of disease, therefore not a choice. Harm reduction is nevertheless put forth as a solution—a choice for people “who are not ready to quit”. Such a choice serves to treat some of the symptoms of addiction, but offers them few alternatives to continued drug use⁷⁰, and maintains them in a state of dependence (on both the drug AND the

⁷⁰ Vancouver Coastal Health, which provides funding for Insite claims that this facility provides addicts with access to detox and recovery options – but available detox beds in Vancouver have increased only by nine by 2013, ten years after Insite opened. On the other hand, in 2013, the PHS, which operates the safe injection site and several ‘low-barrier’ shelters and other services in the DTES, installed vending machines in a couple of their

agency providing the ‘harm reduction’). Harm reduction, to Hannah, was a short term measure that has become a solution, but “the door to prostitution is getting bigger and bigger because it’s not exiting, it’s condoms.”

At the time of our interview, Dusty said that over the past year, she had facilitated support groups for Aboriginal youth, and had, through this work, succeeded in helping several young women go from the streets to shelters, then detox or treatment and permanent housing. Dusty’s analysis of harm reduction revealed the contradictions inherent in these approaches. On one hand, she said, “anything that can open up a safer space can help”, but on the other hand, she too recognized it as a band-aid, not a solution, and “I think it will take a lot more than harm reduction to help women to exit the sex trade,” and, echoing Mabel, Pascale and Hannah: “in the long run, I think it does more harm than it does good.”

I asked participants whose agencies claimed a harm reduction approach what they imagined for the women they served *after* harm reduction, “So, a woman comes in”, I said, “and you have a harm reduction approach, you meet her where she’s at, and then what? What do you do?”

Well, not much, right?—it’s a very, very basic level of service. I mean where do you refer them to? ...our closest connection probably in working with sex workers, the one place where we will get referrals is the hospital, the same program at the hospital, the nurse examiners, because... they’ve got a really strong harm reduction approach and a lot of their clientele are sex workers, and we will get some referrals from them as well. (Muriel, January 2011)

facilities which dispense crack pipes (Mark Howell, Feb. 11, <http://www.vancourier.com/news/vpd-won't-crack-down-on-vending-machines--1.846124> accessed August 14, 2014).

When I asked what “a strong harm reduction approach” meant, Muriel listed some of the services that the nurses, and her agency, provided for women—some assistance accessing health care, advocacy with the Ministry of Social Development (welfare) and referrals to shelters and housing services. In short, her agency could provide very short-term interventions, and there were very little resources for long-term planning or follow-up. In a real sense, then, these short term interventions have the effect of maintaining the recipients of these interventions in a “diminishing cycle of expectations and chances” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 218). In theory, harm reduction seems like a humane and careful approach to those harmed in prostitution. When investigating the practices and the effects of the practice, it becomes clearer that harm is not reduced—it is at best postponed. As Muriel said during our discussion, “you can only reduce the harm till the next time”.

Muriel had a vision, however, to facilitate systems of peer support, and to develop relationships among women who had different experiences and opportunities. She remarked several times during our interview that the “sex workers” and the women from more privileged class positions “did not mix well”.

“I definitely think that the sex workers should be in positions of leadership and support and all that...” she said, but that they also need to build alliances and gain support and guidance from women who have more access to resources and opportunities—who can provide them with broader horizons of expectations. “But in all the years I’ve worked here, I’ve never seen it work”, she said with resignation.

In the early years of PEERS in Victoria, as evidence in an early publication, the collaboration of prostituted and non-prostituted women did work to get women out of systems of prostitution and into “straight jobs”, education, and even positions of some influence

(Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001). These collaborations appeared to achieve some measure of success because the women involved shared power and resources, not because funders imposed criteria and standards.

Transition houses can provide structure for women who are leaving or getting space from individual violent men, or from prostitution. From the house, women can sometimes imagine something different, even if it is only a brief respite:

When women call us, they're usually in a crisis situation, [of] almost personhood collapse, because they're so inundated with oppressive forces. So respite is part of what they get from us. I think usually they need desperately for somebody to believe them, about the conditions of their lives. And to believe that they can sort it out—often they're in a situation of not quite being able to ground themselves, not quite sure what part they're making up, or what part is actually happening to them, and what part is changeable and what part isn't... And so, they get a kind of temporary membership in a group, and that gives them psychic space, kind of, to decide what they think. And you know, it may not be what they continue to think, but it gives you a place to rest your mind, and begin to analyze everything, and then decide who's there with you. (Sharon, February, 2011)

Membership in a group, solidarity, belonging—these are important conditions for women to decide what they think and how to act. But in the face of devastating cuts to social supports for women, transition houses for battered women are facing enormous pressure to become all things to all disenfranchised people: Current pressure “from above” on transition houses and other women-serving organizations to become “low barrier” or “barrier free” in fact limits opportunities for women to organize and provide mutual aid.

The Limits of “Barrier-free” Service

Because harm reduction is cheaper than housing subsidies, livable welfare (or a guaranteed livable income) and other comprehensive social supports, it has become, as Hannah said, the “approach du jour” to social problems. Consequently, there is increased pressure on transition houses and other women’s services to become all things to all people, and “reduce barriers”, in effect changing their mandate:

There is huge, huge pressure now since there is a collaboration between B.C. Housing and the B.C. Society for Transition Houses and there will be strong pressure to standardize—we're not afraid of standards. We offer very, very, very good services, but very good feminist services, and I think there will be pressure on transition houses to lose our autonomy and to offer services that have nothing to do with violence against women or women’s autonomy, at the expense of [our existing] service,...the pressure is on and it will be tied directly to the funding of the transition house. (Hannah, November, 2010)

The pressure to de-politicize felt by transition houses and anti-violence services is tied to harm reduction. Professionalizing services, imposing criteria and standards for staff and agency practices serve to both pathologize women fleeing violent men, and medicalize aspects of support services, particularly those aspects concerned with emotional support. Susan Schechter’s 1982 book, *Women and Male Violence* describes this process in the feminist anti-violence movement in the United States: “Programs with access to government and foundation funding quickly began specializing and acquiring expertise in areas defined as important by those who were providing funding” (Schechter, 1982, p. 243). Several of my interview subjects talked about contemporary experiences of this phenomenon, as well. Gillian noted the pressure put on

transition houses by the BC Transition House Society to “break down barriers to access” for women to transition houses. As she remembered “it kind of boils down to “Transition Houses should not be able to refuse any woman on the basis of mental health issues or drug addiction”. For Gillian, this breaking down of barriers meant that transition houses for battered women are pressured to “pick up the slack” for the state abandonment of women. In the ten years since she started working in anti-violence feminist organizations, women’s services such as women’s resources centres have had their funding cut, or had to close entirely, welfare rates have not kept pace with the increasing cost of living, housing costs have increased, and other services such as detox and treatment centres and mental health facilities have become more difficult to access. And now, she said:

There’s this moralistic pressure of this harm reduction model at the same time as there’s all this...direct policy, state, funding pressure, [that] results from the absence of all of these other services and ends up coming onto transition houses...And if you turn over transition houses, if you make them into detox recovery centres or mental health centres, then where do the battered women go? (Gillian, February, 2011)

The success, then, of transition houses may now prove to be their undoing:

[We] succeeded at convincing society as a whole that transition houses are good things and so now they are very hard to do away with, [it’s very hard to] do to transition houses what you did to welfare, for example. So what’s the alternative form of pressure you can put on transition houses?...We’ll pick up the slack. (Gillian, February, 2010.)

In picking up the slack, however, as Sharon, Hannah, Muriel and other women noted as

well, women's anti-violence services lose the possibility of not only facilitating mutual aid and cooperative living with other women escaping male violence, but also organizing politically with other battered women is much diminished.

They can't keep the door locked, they can't come for dinner, they can't make dinner. The other women are a bit afraid of what they're going to do. They have a whole other set—kind of a whole other agenda that you can't influence in any way and is not going to kind of flex up enough to accommodate the needs of the house. (Gillian, February, 2011)

The increasing pressure to adopt government-imposed standards and criteria for staff training and to reduce barriers to access in effect forces women's anti-violence services out of the "public space of appearance". The stigma and shame that should mark abusive men, including men who buy sexual access to women's bodies, remains with the women as they are shifted from welfare office to shelter to six-week program and back to shelter again. Since the inception of women's anti-violence services, the pressure to capitulate to a pathologizing discourse and analysis of women seeking escape or connection with other women has never relented (Schechter, 1982; Faludi, 1992; Lakeman, 2005).

Pascale again:

I think that a time will come, I hope anyways, that a time will come where we can look back on the concept of harm reduction and realize that we caused more harm with it than without it. I hope for that day because that's what I firmly believe.

And it's also been my experience—it's not just a belief. From experience as well, I do believe that the entire concept of harm reduction is just wrong. And is actually causing more harm than going to...the source of the problem! We

wouldn't need a place for people to shoot up if we had more detox beds. And if we had decent housing for everybody and if those people were fed. Come on now! We wouldn't need it—it's guaranteed! You know? Fine, call me a dreamer, but what would be the harm in going, "Okay, well tell you what, let's try it and see what happens"? Come on now. (Pascale, June, 2011)

Summary and Discussion

Women are always operating within complex webs of relations with power and social/political structures (Smith, 1987). They engage in collaboration or opposition within these social structures with their peers and colleagues, supervisors and the women to which they provide service. In this chapter I attempted to reveal these webs and the links between "the ruling relations" (Smith, 1987) and feminist interventions to undermine systems of domination. Women's resource centres, anti-violence services and transition houses have a history of being, in the Arendtian sense, "public spaces of appearance", where women take action together as political agents. These spaces, however, are under threat due to state pressure to adapt to shrinking social programs and become "harm reduction" and "low-barrier" services. In the voices of women on the front lines, this chapter describes their engagement within the ruling relations.

Their stories disclose their analysis, explorations and the actions they take to interfere with the "downward spiral of expectations and chances" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 217) characteristic of late modern society. Each woman's interview reveals deep critique, principled resistance against oppression and inequality, and nuanced intellectual analysis of prostitution and harm reduction. The fundamental misogyny which is the source of prostitution and the governance and social control aspects of harm reduction function as linked processes in the lives of all women,

and particularly racialized and classed women.

Chapter Seven: Pivot Affidavits

In this chapter, I continue to explore the problematic associated with the concept of harm reduction and turn my attention to an existing source of data, specifically affidavits from street-involved prostitutes that were gathered by Pivot Legal Society (hereafter identified as Pivot) in their constitutional challenge to Canada's prostitution laws⁷¹. Pivot was founded in 2000 in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. It is a legal organization which campaigns to reform legislation in relation to policing, housing, and poverty-related issues. "The Sex Work Project" is an area of their work initiated during the early 2000s when the Special Subcommittee on Canada's Prostitution Laws heard submissions and gathered information as they prepared *Challenge of Change*. In 2003 they gathered 94 affidavits, 90 of which they used to form the basis to challenge the constitutionality of federal prostitution laws. Until 2009, the 90 affidavits were posted on their website.⁷²

An examination of these affidavits serves an important function in this dissertation as a complementary resource to the interviews I conducted with front-line workers. Pivot's affiants are the women who are targets of harm reduction—they are the women anti-violence organizations and women's centres seek to help. A comparison of the insights and analysis of the women I interviewed with those of Pivot's affiants shows that these two groups of women encounter and contend with similar issues and concerns which operate across their varied social locations. They form an overarching narrative that challenges the present orthodoxy claiming

⁷¹ Pivot launched this case in BC Supreme Court 2007, but then suspended it as *Bedford* proceeded. Given the outcome of the final level of appeals in *Bedford*, they may use their evidence in an attempt to influence the Federal Government as they come up with new legislation regarding prostitution. The judgment striking down Canada's prostitution laws was suspended for one year to give the Federal Government time to draft new laws.

⁷² www.pivotlegal.org

decriminalizing and regulating prostitution (which Pivot claims are ‘harm reduction’ approaches) will achieve anything for women.

This examination paid particular attention to deciphering how harm reduction functions as a key strategy of governance. It also shows the processes of (and obstacles to) the dialectical praxis by which women in front-line work and women in prostitution engage with each other and the regulations of the field of social policy and law enforcement. I approach this comparative analysis in an effort to create a kind of conversation across these differences that I hope can help to reveal the potential for connection and solidarity, and what impact harm reduction policy and practices may have on that potential.

The following section introduces both *Bedford* and the Pivot constitutional challenge cases. Pivot’s “Sex Work Project” was developed to build a case that Canada’s prostitution laws were unconstitutional. I then outline the process Pivot used to collect the affidavits and then revisit these affidavits in light of my overarching question: how do women interpret and engage with harm reduction policies and practice?

Constitutional Challenges

In September 2010 Judge Susan Himel of the Ontario Superior Court ruled on the case of *Bedford v. Canada*⁷³, which challenged the constitutionality of Canada’s criminal laws on prostitution. In this ruling, she struck down four sections of the Criminal Code that address prostitution. These laws are: Sections 210; 211; parts 1 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (h) and (j) of section 212; and section 213. Sections 210, 211, and 212 are commonly known as the living on the avails, procuring and bawdyhouse laws, respectively; and Section 213, “the communicating law”, criminalizes communication for the purposes of prostitution in a public place, effectively

⁷³ Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford, 2012 ONCA 186

criminalizing street prostitution. On March 26, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld part of Judge Himel's ruling⁷⁴. The Ontario Court of Appeal agreed that Sections 210, 211, and 212 did violate the right to security of the person guaranteed by Section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. A majority, however, held that the communicating law (section 213) did not violate the Charter (Ontario Court of Appeal, March 26, 2012). Both parties appealed and cross-appealed these decisions to the Supreme Court of Canada. On December 20, 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed with Justice Himel's decision that all of the impugned laws violated the Charter.

While there was much attention given to *Bedford*, at the same time, Pivot's case brought on behalf of Sex Workers United Against Violence (SWUAV)⁷⁵ and Sheryl Kiselbach, was moving through the courts of British Columbia⁷⁶. Until September of 2012, this case was stalled in a dispute over public interest standing⁷⁷, which was resolved in Pivot's favour by the Supreme Court of Canada⁷⁸. Pivot, meanwhile, was granted intervenor status in support of the applicants in the *Bedford* case. Pivot argued that Canada's prostitution laws violated Charter rights of sex workers (Pivot, 2004, p. 4). Specifically, the sections of the Charter Pivot claimed were violated by prostitution laws were: Section 2 (b) and 2 (d), which are the rights to freedom of association

⁷⁴ <http://www.ontariocourts.ca/decisions/2012/2012ONCA0186.htm>

Bedford v. Canada, (2010) ONSC 4264 (CanLII), <http://canlii.ca/t/2cr62>

⁷⁵ SWUAV is an anonymous group of mostly street-involved prostituted women, most of them living in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

⁷⁶ *Downtown Eastside Sex Workers United Against Violence Society (SWUAV) v. Attorney General* (Canada), 2008 BCSC 1726 (CanLII), <http://canlii.ca/t/21x7v>.

⁷⁷ "Public interest standing" is required by the court in order to proceed in a case that challenges the constitutionality of a law. The complainant must prove their constitutional rights have been violated because of the law they are challenging. In this case, Ms. Sheryl Kiselbach has been out of prostitution for many years, and was not charged under the impugned laws; also the members of SWUAV are anonymous, and could not therefore prove standing. The BC court of appeal overturned this ruling, however, and Pivot was thereby granted leave to proceed. Since the Supreme Court Ruling in favour of Judge Himel's original ruling, it appears highly unlikely that they will proceed with their challenge. It is more likely that they will wait to see what laws are introduced in response to *Bedford*, and then challenge those laws.

⁷⁸ *SWUAV vs. Attorney General* (Canada) Court of Appeal, October 2010.

and freedom of expression; Section 7, security of the person, and Section 15(1) equality rights.

Unlike *Bedford*, which argued on behalf of women who wished to operate brothels, the Pivot challenge focused on women in street prostitution (p. 8). The case they launched depended chiefly upon the evidence provided by affidavits from women (and some men) engaged in street-level prostitution in Vancouver.

Pivot’s Sex Work Project

Pivot Legal Society engages in legal and political actions in order to bring attention and reform to law enforcement, housing and social issues adversely affecting impoverished people in the DTES, and other urban areas of poverty in the Lower Mainland. Some of the many initiatives Pivot has undertaken include: pushing for an independent audit of the Vancouver Police department (VPD) (resulting in a public apology from the VPD for abusive and harassing policing practices to residents of the DTES, and changes in their practices of arrest); the distribution of “rights cards” for residents to show police in the event of arrest or questioning; ongoing research and advocacy to improve access to safe housing for people in the DTES; legal and political support of the Portland Hotel Society (PHS) and Insite, the supervised injection site; and research into the rates of child apprehension and social services interventions against Aboriginal families.⁷⁹

In the summer of 2003, Pivot launched their “Sex Work Project”, the purpose of which was to prepare a submission to the Special Subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. As noted in Chapter Two, this subcommittee produced *The Challenge of Change: A study of Canada’s Criminal Prostitution Laws*. Pivot’s project resulted in two reports: the first, *Voices for Dignity* (2004), argued for decriminalization of prostitution, using the

⁷⁹ www.pivotlegal.org

affidavits as evidence; and the second, *Beyond Decriminalization* (2006), presented an array of regulatory suggestions in the event that prostitution is decriminalized. The affidavits they gathered during that summer also formed the basis of Pivot's Charter Challenge to Canada's Prostitution Laws, and were presented as a body of "expert witness" evidence.

In all, Pivot researchers collected 94 affidavits, 90 of which they placed on their website for a time and used for their research. The remaining four did not speak to the questions of prostitution laws, and were not made available on the Pivot website.

The Process of Gathering Affidavits

The affidavits were stories of women in prostitution, all of whom lived in or frequented the DTES. All had engaged in prostitution, and many were prostituting at the time of the interviews. Women they knew and loved were disappearing; police surveillance was intensifying and the social services system was becoming more punitive. They were frightened, angry and grieving. Pivot hoped their project would help them voice their concerns and make some changes. Pivot offered something that looked like hope, as well as an immediate reward of a shared meal and \$15 dollars (Pivot, 2004, p. 6).

Prior to taking affidavits, Pivot Legal Society conducted focus groups with small groups of people involved in street-level prostitution to explain the mandate of the special subcommittee on Canada's prostitution laws; the wording and meanings of these laws; details about Pivot's project; and information about confidentiality, compensation and consent (p. 7). Pivot researchers then conducted one to one interviews for the purpose of writing the affidavits. The researchers asked the affiants to answer any or all of three questions about the three impugned laws: "if you were speaking to someone about the [communicating, procuring or bawdy house] law, what would you say to them about this law? Can you describe an experience you had that

made you feel this way about the law?” (pp. 7-8). The third question was an invitation to provide any contextual information about their backgrounds or life conditions. They did not specifically question women about their drug use, age of entry into prostitution, educational attainment or their family backgrounds.

The legal interns, students and lawyers who conducted the research and gathered and signed the affidavits on behalf of Pivot were young (in their 20s and 30s), of European ancestry (most of them, if not all), and highly educated (all of them were law students or lawyers). In these ways, they shared more in common with the advocates, outreach workers, social workers, and other service providers through whom they gained access to prostituted people than they shared with the affiants themselves. To be sure, these researchers may have experienced male violence or abuse, including involvement in some aspect of the prostitution industry, but such information was not divulged in Pivot’s reports. Therefore I assume that researchers did not share their experiences of male violence with the women from whom they gathered affidavits.

Of the 90 affiants, 82 were women, seven were men and one was a transsexual male-to-female. All of the affiants prostituted on the street, but a number also had experiences in other aspects of the prostitution industry, including stripping, working as escorts, in brothels, or “on call” centres. Age of entry into prostitution was consistent with other studies (Farley, 2003a; Farley, et al., 2004; Høigård & Finstad, 1992; Brents & Hausbeck, 2005), with half of the affiants (46 in total—constituting 50.5% of the affiants) indicating they entered into prostitution before they were 19. The number of affiants who entered prostitution between 19 and 25 years old and those who entered after the age of 25 were about the same (18/90 and 19/90 respectively). All of the women who began prostituting after the age of 25 stated they did so because of a drug habit, and/or because they were turned out by a boyfriend.

Seven affiants did not indicate age of entry. Fifty eight affiants (64%) said they used drugs and/or alcohol, only one said she did not; and the other 31 did not mention substance use at all. Close to half of the affiants identified as Aboriginal, and about one-fifth identified as white. Three affiants identified as mixed-race (stated as Black+White) or Black. More than 1/4 of the affiants did not disclose their race or ethnicity. Of those few who disclosed educational background, their formal education ranged from having a Master of Arts degree to leaving school at grade 6. However, there were so few who offered this information that discerning a comprehensive view of their educational levels was really not possible. Of the handful of affiants who disclosed details of their history of arrest or criminalization, only one had been charged under the bawdy house laws and a few were arrested under the communicating law. Some mentioned involvement in other criminal activity such as shoplifting or dealing drugs, but these aspects of criminalization were not a focus of the Pivot project. See Appendix D for a table which provides some demographic information of the affiants.

Stories of Despair and Resilience

Pivot's expressed aim in gathering these affidavits was to give these women a forum in which their voices could be heard, and to gather evidence to make a case for legal reform to prostitution laws. The affidavits were compelling and varied in their expressions of women's lived experiences in prostitution and their expectations for themselves.

“This report's conclusions reflect the principle of harm reduction. With respect to the criminal laws, affiants demanded that immediate measures be undertaken to reduce harm to sex workers...” (Pivot, 2004, p. 3). Pivot used the affidavits, then to construct their argument for decriminalization. Their observation that affiants demanded immediate action is consistent with my research in that everyone concerned with prostitution-related problems seeks

immediate relief, reduction of harm, increased safety and support for women in prostitution. Pivot's argument is that such relief and support can be achieved, in part, by decriminalizing prostitution. They further assert the state should adopt the demands of the affiants in regard to the law, and furthermore that their demands are to decriminalize prostitution.

The interests of the affiants are chiefly immediate, for many their circumstances are dire. They need money to make the rent, they need money to buy enough food to tide them over until food bank day, or they need a fix. The affidavits clearly show that they understand they are unfairly criminalized by law enforcement agents' application of the laws. They resent bearing the burden of criminal sanctions, and yearn for safety and respect. To conclude, however, that these affidavits provide strong evidence that the affiants support decriminalizing the purchasers of sex as well as the sellers is a superficial conclusion. There are many indications in their statements that they would appreciate legal protections from men who target them for abuse, as Magda noted from her reading of the draft report. They resent being criminalized but "they're not saying they don't want anything to happened to the men" (Magda, May 2011).

The next sections of this chapter provide excerpts from the affidavits that show the analysis and experiences as women in prostitution and address their interpretation of law enforcement. In my re-reading of the affidavits through a different lens, common themes emerge which challenge Pivot's interpretation. These themes include: types and effects of symbolic violence, conceptions of freedom and choice, perceptions and understandings of the law and engagements with structural racism, sexism and class inequality in these documents, as they did from the interviews of front-line workers.

Symbolic Violence/Male Violence

For their constitutional challenge, Pivot gathered affidavits and thus to some extent

created an opportunity for prostituted women to give voice to their experiences. These affidavits are legal testimonies that are not (nor can they be) concerned with structural and contextual analysis. Such an analysis would shed light on how these affiants' desires are significantly constrained by the conditions in which they live and by the dominant story about what is possible. This was not the goal of Pivot's project, so the contextual information contained in the affidavits is meagre. A project that would have historicized and politicized the experiences of the prostituted women would have specifically looked for, for example, information about how the affiants came to become involved in systems of prostitution, what was their age of entry, reasons for engaging in prostitution, what they gained from prostitution, whether and in what manner they have left, and what role law enforcement or involvement with the criminal justice system may have had on their experiences.

Pivot is an organization concerned with legal reform, so it is not surprising that their focus was on reform, not subversion. The orthodox view that prostitution is inevitable is never challenged in the reporting of their work. Affiants' desires are articulated within ideological structures of harm reduction which promote the idea that prostitution is inescapable. As Katrina Pacey, lead lawyer of the project said, "[Pivot] supports decriminalization of sex work—we have a sex industry in Canada; and it's a busy industry, it's a booming industry in Canada, and whether you like it or not, the industry exists—it always has existed (Pacey, 2007)"

Thus these affidavits must be considered in relation to the dominant harm reduction ideology argued clearly by Pivot's leaders. This ideology claims to meet people where they are, and to offer supports that are minimally interventionist, provide some comfort and preserve their lives until such time as they become willing to seek treatment, or to leave prostitution if they wish. Yet the argument describing prostitution as inevitable precludes the prostituted from

seeking alternatives—“It has always existed”, said Pacey, and so it must continue.

The women I interviewed talked about the increased difficulties of women’s lives in this time of social retrenchment, with attendant diminishing social assistance including a lack of addiction treatment options, and the punitive nature of welfare. These factors, combined with reproductive and structural sexism and racism serve to render men’s entitled demands for paid sex invisible. This deliberate erasure of men’s responsibility for women’s misery, and the notion that prostitution is “the oldest profession” constructs the contradictory idea that prostitution is something women choose. In fact, women have increasingly limited choices, but they have to find a way to survive. Proponents of the choice discourse do not see their complicity in the humiliation of other women. In order to claim alliance, without actually having to do anything (or give up anything, more to the point) to change the structural conditions of women’s lives, they frame prostitution as a noble (if misunderstood) profession.

Yet the affidavits tell a different story. Much of the content of the affidavits describe the men who purchase sex as violent and unpredictable. As one of the affiants remarked, “pretty well every woman has a story of a guy who literally tried to kill them” (Affidavit 69, para. 22).

The affiants often commented that they lived constantly with a high level of fear and some noted that street-involved prostitution contributes to the fear and violence.

Two years ago, I was working on the corner of Gore and Hastings in the early morning hours. A drunk man came up to me and started punching at me and said, “I’m tired of you bitches ripping us off!” He continued shouting insults at me as I ran away from him. I was very scared. If I did not need to work outdoors, I would not have to put up with such lewd behaviour. If I had been working in my room, someone would have been able to help me if I had screamed. Also, the person

working at the front desk in the hotel I live in would have intercepted him and prevented him from even entering the building. (Affidavit 7, para. 6)

*

I started working in the sex trade when I was thirteen years old in Edmonton, Alberta...I used to work around Broadway and Fraser, in the City of Vancouver, in the street level sex trade. I stopped working in the sex trade because the streets were getting too crazy and dangerous. I was scared because of the number of girls that were going missing.

(Affidavit 14, para. 2)

*

About two and a half years ago, one night at around 1:00am, I got picked up in a car from Main and Hastings... The guy that picked me up was an older white man. I got into the car and after about five or ten minutes of driving he started to call me names. He said he wasn't going to give me any money. I told him that I wanted to get out of the car but he wouldn't let me....He stopped in a secluded area, I don't know where it was because it was dark and he had been driving for about twenty minutes.... before I knew what was happening he put a belt around my neck and started to strangle me. He told me I could try to scream all I wanted but nobody would hear me. The more I struggled to get free, the tighter he pulled the belt. I was very scared. (Affidavit 27 para. 3-6)

*

About three years ago, I had a date that raped me and tried to strangle me with a rope. We had gone to Victoria and Franklin, which is a residential area. It was late

at night and he was driving a camper, so we were going to do our business there.

He became violent, but I escaped, with no clothes.

(Affidavit 40, para. 6)

The evidence provided in these affidavits indicates that many men who buy women for sex believe they have also bought the right to threaten, insult, as well as physically and sexually assault them. Most of the affiants indicated they would be safer when they can go indoors. However, women know that many of the johns deliberately choose *not* to go to escort agencies or other indoor venues.

Women experience male violence on many levels, including as symbolic domination. Bourdieu says “symbolic violence is the violence which extorts submission, which is not perceived as such, based on ‘collective expectations’ or socially inculcated beliefs” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 103). Though Pivot’s affiants experienced terrible physical violence, they are also subject to symbolic violence, which is more subtly exerted, systemic and naturalized. “One of the effects of symbolic violence is the transfiguration of relations of domination and submission into affective relations, the transformation of power into charisma...” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 102). Another phrase that may be appropriate to describe effects of symbolic violence is “Stockholm Syndrome”, which is when the dominated develops affection and loyalty for the dominator, which partly explains the dynamic between women and tricks or pimps. The affective relations between the dominant and the dominator also characterize many of the relations between the human services industry and the recipients of the human services. The Pivot researchers and lawyers appear to have regard for the women in prostitution and other marginalized people of the DTES, and from my observations, the affection is reciprocal—but it serves to blunt the pain of

inequality, it does not offer a challenge to the hierarchical relations maintaining the dominance of one class over another.

Several of my interview participants spoke of the affection they have for the people to whom they provide service, and how there is a kind of territorial dynamic that runs through the agencies and charities that operate in the DTES. The operations of symbolic violence function in relation to the physical and sexualized violence directed against prostituted women in a kind of “anti-praxis” or “reverse dialectical” process. The violence of men who buy sex is horrific and maddening, and the charismatic promises from the drop-in staff or outreach worker of respect and listening seem soothing—but in neither scenario (with the trick or with the worker) is the prostituted woman expected to act or speak as a peer—her submission is extorted. I understand well how that happens, I worked in the DTES for many years, and it was difficult to imagine peer relationships with the people who use the services my workplace provided. It is tempting to just cave in to affection without expectation, to hand out condoms and sandwiches and withhold judgment. But then you become, as Genevieve said, “a friendly helper of the impoverished”, not a collaborator in a political movement. Promotion of a decriminalization framework is also a form of symbolic violence, which, by advancing the notion that prostitution is a form of labour chosen by women, in fact reinforces the *doxa*⁸⁰ of men’s sexual entitlement at the expense of women’s autonomy.

⁸⁰ Doxa refers to the beliefs and values taken as self-evident among particular “universes”, or fields of practice. “Each relatively autonomous universe develops its own doxa as a set of shared opinions and unquestioned beliefs” (Wacquant, 2008, p. 261). Doxa works to distinguish the thinkable from the unthinkable, so that courses of action that seriously challenge established relations become literally unthinkable” (Webb et al., 2003, p. 119)—thus protecting the accepted social order.

Relations with Police

Some women stated that the police “...generally left me alone...” (Affidavit 66, para. 6). Municipal police arrests for prostitution were going down in the year that Pivot gathered these affidavits, and this decrease has continued to the present. Year-end total arrests for prostitution in 2003, for example, in the Strathcona neighbourhood were 55; and the next year for the same neighbourhood arrests were down to 19 for the year (Pacey, 2007), and by 2009, there were only 2 arrests, both of juvenile girls. It is clear the police are arresting far fewer women, but neither are they arresting johns or pimps. This is because prostitution is normalized, not because it is decreasing.

The affiants’ descriptions of actual every day engagement with those who are meant to enforce and interpret the law (including police, lawyers, judges) revealed sophisticated and nuanced structural analysis of relations within social and political structures of power. While many of the affidavits contain opinions that the laws should be changed or repealed, the narratives reveal that the affiants understood the laws in terms of their relationships or experiences with police officers, and with law enforcement tactics, rather than the legislation itself. A number of affidavits indicate that women’s experience of the law was mainly contained to sexist and racist abuses of police. Only a few affiants revealed they had been arrested for prostitution related activities, and of those, only under the communicating law. One affiant said she had faced charges in another province, under the bawdyhouse law.

Police are the first line of law enforcement, and in these affidavits, police were variously regarded as exploiters, customers, enemies or allies by the affiants. They often used the power vested in them by their uniform in concert with their power as male in order to enforce not only individual dominance, but also the dominion of the state over a woman’s body. These women

learned early that often the best they could do when such a powerful man is attacking them is to disengage in some way. Their affidavits describe their disengagement, and in concise and poignant detail, the intricate connections between sexual abuse and policing practices—and between policing and prostitution.

Many of us in the sex trade are survivors of sexual abuse. I would like to see us more protected through law. When I was younger, I was abused by the police...I feel that the police harass the younger, inexperienced prostitutes....I also believe that native sex trade workers are more harassed by the police... (Affidavit 80, para. 3)

*

A 26 year-old woman from the Carrier Nation of BC, said:

People who write the laws need to understand we are out there. Even so, there are police officers and lawyers out there who are clients and even on shift the undercovers drive and pick you up and have sex with you. They pay good money. The cops pay \$150 for a blow job, and that takes five minutes. And you are asking about “law”? What do you want me to say [*sic*]. (Affidavit 4, para. 9)

*

“I’ve known police who came to me off-hours or off-duty. That’s why they don’t want bawdy houses, because they would be noticed going in” (Affidavit 57, para. 4). The 55-year-old affiant quoted below had been prostituted since she was 8 years old. Her father sold her to pay for his drug habit. She related this story about some early encounters with police officers:

I had a cop say that I could give him a blow job instead of being charged. I told

him to “fuck off”. He didn’t charge me, I was only 13, I started yelling and screaming and making noise in the car with him and he kicked me out. That was at Robson and Granville. When I was 11 a cop took me to his house. I didn’t know he was a cop until I got there. It was a normal date, he was giving me money to go to his place. He started beating me, he raped me, and he showed me his badge and gun. He picked me up in Vancouver and his home was in Burnaby. I didn’t do anything about it because he was psychotic and he was a cop.

(Affidavit 84, para. 9)

Another woman, also a long-time survivor of prostitution, related this attack, and her subsequent analysis of police responses to and uses of their power over women in prostitution:

I used to work out of hotels and bars, but was never arrested for anything to do with prostitution. I was assaulted once, by a police officer in Winnipeg. This was about 40 years ago. The police officer was my sister-in-law’s john. I met him at my sister-in-law’s place, and then I ran into him on the street. I was not working at the time. I was drunk, and was heading home. He offered to drive me home, and on the way, he attacked me while his partner drove. The partner did not participate, but he didn’t do anything to help me, either. He just sat there like nothing was happening. I managed to get away...I believe that the laws against prostitution give police officers power over sex trade workers. They think they can get away with abusing them and assaulting them. (Affidavit 10, para. 5)

Women reported other incidents of police abuses, and yet still they hoped for protection from them.

I have tried to report bad dates to the Vancouver Police Department a few times.

Each time, the response was that it was likely my fault because I am a working girl. One time they went and got my jacket from a client who held it, but other than that, they have never really helped me. (Affidavit 65, para. 27)

*

I would like to work in a place where I am safe. I don't mind the police being available if I have a bad or violent date. I want to be able to report violence to the police and I want to have someone there to make sure I come back safely from a date...When the police are around I don't make any money. This affects me in serious ways because I can't feed myself and I can't buy the cocaine I need to keep myself from being dope sick. (Affidavit 34, para. 10, 11)

*

The women who provided these affidavits often reported being cautious around men, particularly groups of men. They feared violent attacks from men, and feared arrest as well. They understood that the VPD could not be relied upon to "serve and protect" them.

I normally don't approach a guy when I am working on the street. I am always leery of approaching a guy. The guy will normally approach me first and the subject will come up. I heard lately that they have been busting girls for communicating for the purposes of prostitution. Under cover cops are busting girls. These laws make me more worried and extra careful....I never talk to guys if there's more than one...There have never been any incidents where the police were violent towards me. I have experienced violence at the hands of clients but have never gone for help. I would not approach the police because I am afraid that it will backfire on me, I am afraid the police will find out I am involved in

prostitution. (Affidavit 56, para. 8-11)

*

Some women talked about cops or judges who were clients:

When I worked in a massage parlour, I was busted for working without a license... Luckily the judge was a client from the massage parlour so he dismissed the charge. (Affidavit 58, para. 7)

In this case her relationship with the judge worked in her favour, other than, of course, had she not been prostituted in the first place, she would not have had to face him in either context. Women said the cops “paid good money”—others reported that police would threaten them with arrest if they didn’t give them sex.

The sections of the chapter to follow are about the affiants’ responses to the questions Pivot asked about specific sections of Canada’s prostitution laws. I have added insertions from the 1985 Fraser report and the 2006 Special Subcommittee report to offer historical context to the stories of their experiences.

Affiants’ Views of the Law

Procuring (Section 211): One-third of the affiants (30 of 90) mentioned the procuring law, and every one of them said some version of “no one should talk anyone into prostitution”. Their voices are represented by such comments as: “it’s good that the government wants to stop pimps from taking advantage... [but] it is not very well enforced” (Affidavit 47, para. 8), and “people who convince people to enter the sex trade or convince people to see a sex trade worker should be charged with procuring” (Affidavit 50, para. 9).

I do agree there should be laws to punish pimps, but those laws shouldn’t be used to punish people in a relationship with a prostitute. The laws against procuring

and living off the avails should stay on the books, but they should be used with more compassion. (Affidavit 68, para. 5)

In 1985, the Fraser Committee recommended the procuring law be repealed and replaced with a more limited section that would criminalize obviously coercive and threatening means of procuring; and another that would sanction exploitive behaviour, such as threats of punishment or withholding of shelter or food in order to live on the avails of prostitution. While the current section of law that addresses procuring, Section 210, is still broader than the commissions' recommendations, it does not address the more subtle forms of coercion as referenced by affiant 32, above, or the systemic forces of racialized, sexed and classed domination which interviewees for this study also observed.

Pivot used the affidavits to support their argument that women in prostitution would prefer to prostitute in an atmosphere of acceptance, and in more comfortable surroundings than the streets or dirty, cheap hotel rooms. Certainly, given the option of prostituting in a stranger's car or in a clean room with a bed and running water and so on, the latter seems a better "choice". But the evidence of the affidavits also supports the view that women would prefer to get out of prostitution altogether, and they do not enjoy selling sex. None of the affiants said they wanted to stay in prostitution, and 37 said specifically that they would leave prostitution if they could, no matter if there were "improvements in working conditions". "I am so ashamed of what I am doing now...I would like to get out of the sex trade..." (Affidavit 1, para. 13, 16).

It would be better to help the women establish their lives, their families and themselves. Self respect is very important. Leaving prostitution will make you feel less suicidal. Once you are in the sex trade you get into drugs and alcohol because you feel so ashamed....A criminal record makes it much more difficult

[to leave prostitution]. (Affidavit 50, para. 4)

All of the affiants who spoke about the procuring law argued that some version of the law should be maintained; indicating that they recognized women must be protected from coercion, which is exercised by men upon vulnerable women in often subtle ways. Affiants talked about constantly feeling fear: “I always walk in fear” (Affidavit 62, para 16), and made suggestions that police should act as spotters and provide protection against violent johns, (Affidavit 75, para 8). Affiants’ accounts indicated that they expected men to be violent, that it was an inescapable condition of prostitution. As these affiants reveal, the conditions of women’s lives, and the tense and conflicted relations prostituted women have with police serve to further entrench the deep-rooted relations of power which operate to define and constrain women’s opportunities. Meager legal protections the law claims to provide are inadequate to address these constraints. As the quotes below suggest, law enforcement agents use the law to further punish prostituted women or women living in poverty:

I don’t think that undercover sting operations are right. I was standing outside the Carnegie Centre in the summer of 2001 with a woman I knew was not a working girl and a man approached her on the street [...] when I came back she told me that she was going to go with him and do a date. [...] I watched her get into the car and watched her get arrested. Turns out he was an undercover officer. He talked her into it and she had never worked in the sex trade before that. (Affidavit 81, para 16).

*

I have tried to report bad dates to the Vancouver Police Department a few times. Each time, the response was that it was likely my fault because I am a working

girl. One time they went out and got my jacket back from a client who had held it, but other than that they never really helped me. Affidavit 65, para 27.

Many of these women have a boyfriend-pimp who is violent, threatening, and/or verbally abusive. These men use any number of manipulations and techniques to maintain her dependence upon him: including withholding drugs, threatening her children, isolating her from and/or threatening her family or friends.

In my experience, I was coerced by a partner in ways that could never be observed by the law into doing sex work: through suggestions, coercion within the relationship, or by withholding the drugs to which I was addicted. (Affidavit 32, para. 6)

The affiants' testimonies are similar to other studies that reveal that most women are conditioned by male violence to consider prostitution, usually but not always through child sexual assault or incest (Farley, 2003a; Farley et al., 2004). Women are often further trapped in prostitution through dependence upon drugs or alcohol (Shannon et al., 2009b; Surratt et al., 2004; Benoit & Millar, 2001), and maintained there by the coercion of individual men and a dearth of systemic supports, including inadequate and inaccessible detox and treatment options.

In my opinion, the procuring law is not effective to protect women and young women from being coerced into prostitution. The law does not address the way that women are urged, in more subtle ways than the law can address, to work in the sex trade by partners or people who are close to them. (Affidavit 32, para. 5)

*

When I was still living in Toronto, I began working full time in the sex trade because of a

pimp. I had been working in the sex trade occasionally, as I had run away from my foster home and needed money. I was working one night, when a pimp came up to me and told me that I was working for him. He threatened me, saying that if I would not work for him, he would kill me. I was working for him for the next year and a half, until I fled the area and moved away. (Affidavit 7, para. 8)

*

Other women tell about “boyfriends” who coerced them to prostitute:

When I started in the sex trade I was seeing this guys [*sic*] for two years. He used to beat me and threaten me saying one way or another I will make you work the street for me. He would say if I left he would find me one way or another. He almost threw me out of a four story hotel saying, “Are you going to go to work for me or not?” I cried through the whole time. I will never forget it. (Affidavit 74, para. 4)

Pimping—an Exit Strategy: In the absence of social and economic supports for women to leave prostitution, one exit strategy for some women is to become pimps themselves. That is to say, they turn to “managing” the prostitution of other women, and taking a percentage of the money they receive from johns. Scarlett Lake is one Vancouver woman who has stopped prostituting in favour of prostituting other women. She operates “Scarlett’s House” in Vancouver.⁸¹

Now she has up to 20 women on her list between Vancouver, Victoria and Whistler. Her own hands-on work dwindled more than a decade ago as she

⁸¹ www.scarlettshouse.com

became busier getting other "gals" work. "It was pretty hard to answer the phones and keep things flowing while there was somebody lying on top of me," she says with a chuckle. (The happy hooker, 2009, February 27)

The lead applicant in *Bedford*, Terry Jean Bedford, was first prostituted at 16, according to her affidavit in the case, by a boyfriend in his thirties:

Ms. Bedford has been convicted of both keeping and being an inmate of a common bawdy-house for the purpose of prostitution. Although she is not currently working in prostitution, Ms. Bedford wishes to resume work as a dominatrix. Ms Bedford...had a difficult childhood, and was subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse. At the age of 16, she was sent to a boarding house in Windsor....Shortly thereafter, she met an abusive 37-year-old drug dealer and drug addict who became her live-in boyfriend. He introduced her to drugs and she became addicted. Ms. Bedford says that she began prostituting as a "necessary evil" to fund her and her boyfriend's addictions. (*Bedford vs. Canada*, 2010, p. 11)

When Ms. Bedford was 33, she "...decided to become a dominatrix and stop working as a prostitute" (*Bedford vs. Canada*, 2010, p. 11). Similarly, Amy Lebovitch, another of the lead affiants, operated an escort agency after a few years as a prostitute herself (Himel, 2010, p. 12).

Some of Pivot's affiants describe this as "a step up", and suggested that only women should pimp for other women;

Procuring is okay as long as it's done by a woman – chicks before dicks.

Sometimes I act as a pimp in my hotel...Other women and I watch and protect each other with payments of money and drugs. Many girls come to my room

crying, I clean them up and give them medicine. Pimping should be done by women—a woman should run the show. (Affidavit 006, para. 4)

This kind of activity may be seen as peer support more than pimping, or “living off the avails”. They are women in difficult circumstances offering some small comforts to each other. Other affiants said that women should be able to spot for one another, make referrals for each other, and should not be criminalized for providing each other with whatever protection they can (Affidavit 08). While apt to be less critical of women in these situations than men, I see them as, still enmeshed in the structures of domination. Essentially the woman who becomes a pimp has become a *parvenue* (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 56) no longer as despised as the women she turns out, and enjoying some social power— but still shut out of real political power—she is still *woman*, after all. She will never assimilate in the social world of men, and the small power she enacts in her dominion of the brothel serves only to maintain other women in positions of submission.

The women who provided affidavits to Pivot are on the whole living more constrained lives than Scarlett Lake or Terri Jean Bedford. Yet Lake and Bedford are examples of the best that prostituted women could hope for in terms of, to put it cynically, “career advancement”. Certainly prostituted women should not be criminalized for providing each other with protection from men’s violence. Nevertheless, the pimp or the madam is profiting from the degradation of other women—perhaps it is, to them, “the lesser evil”, in that they are not themselves as subject to rape, but it is a hopeless capitulation to a downward cycle of symbolic reproduction:

[In] which the dominated among the dominant, supply to the dominated, by a sort of embezzlement of accumulated cultural capital, the means of constituting objectively their vision of the world and the representations of their interests in an explicit theory and in institutionalized instruments of representation—trade-union

organizations, political parties...etc⁸².

(Bourdieu, 1991, p. 245)

Women who become pimps are still dominated in patriarchy but supply the women who prostitute for them a false vision that because their pimp is a woman, she represents her interests.

The Communicating Law: The communicating law, Section 213, is one of the laws struck from the Criminal Code in Bedford. Affiant 01 says that the law “doesn’t help”, because there are always new women on the street, and always new men to buy them. She is clearly not talking about how the law could be helpful to her career in prostitution—her words indicate that she thinks a helpful law would instead decrease the male demand for hers and other women’s bodies, and decrease the need for women to prostitute to gain income.

I think that the communicating law does not help. For every girl that gets arrested and taken off the street, there is another girl to replace her. For every trick that gets arrested, there is another one to replace him. It just goes in circles. (Affidavit 01, para. 3)

Other women said they didn’t like the communicating law because they had been arrested under that law. A few women said they would prefer to have time to assess whether a trick was a potential threat, but many also described situations when they had time for a conversation, but the man attacked them. But many of the affiants said they would prefer to prostitute indoors for reasons other than safety from physical violence (though the perception of increased monitoring and control of the johns’ behaviour was primary). These reasons included protecting non-prostitute women from being approached by johns: “[Indoor, legal prostitution] would be easier for other girls who are not working girls...if girls can work indoors, then they can take their

⁸² In this case, also brothels.

work off the street where all girls get seen as working girls” (Affidavit 50, para. 9).

Other affiants thought indoor prostitution would shield children from prostitution, and help prostituted people escape insult and public harassment on the street.

I believe that sex trade workers should be allowed to work indoors. That would resolve another public concern which is the public nuisance issue. People are worried about their kids seeing people working on the streets and the traffic that causes. Having it indoors would be peachy. (Affidavit 78, para. 17)

[T]here should be zero tolerance zones where prostitution doesn’t happen, like where there are children, such as school zones...I always work in the same location...not near schools or libraries, which I feel good about. (Affidavit 66, para. 22 & 25)

From long before the time of CROWE and the *Shame the Johns* campaigns, the moral outrage or disgust of “normal citizens” has been directed at women in prostitution in the name of protecting children. “Legitimate” inhabitants of an area protest or restrict prostitution activities in areas where moral and social training of children takes place (schools, churches, playgrounds). Women internalized these judgments, as the above quotes indicate. Blaming prostituted women for the presence of prostitution in such areas of moral training is misplaced. All of the women in this study who mentioned prostitution in such areas, including the affiants and women I interviewed, said they, and women they knew, stayed away from schools and playgrounds.

A Public Health Problem

Many of the affiants indicated that their health is compromised. Over two-thirds of the affidavits revealed drug and/or alcohol use, most of those referred to addiction. A significant number disclosed their Hepatitis C and/or HIV-positive status. There are “at least 30 health care

providers, covering mental illness, addictions, detox/recovery, HIV/AIDS and methadone treatments⁸³” (Culbert & McMartin, July 2, 2014, para 5). Many of the other 230 agencies in the area also employ public health nurses to provide health care in addition to the services that area residents use during the day. From my experience as a mental health worker in the Downtown Eastside, I know that even with so many health care providers in the area, often women who are addicted and prostituted will only access medical treatment when they are in a crisis. Such crisis may include a badly infected abscess, a drug-induced psychosis, or an injury from a particularly vicious attack. Most often, these women have not been able to prevent the crisis. The affiants name access to health care as a benefit they understand will be available to them if prostitution is decriminalized. “If prostitution was legal, sex workers would have better access to health care....If prostitution were legalized and regulated, sex-trade workers would have regular appointments with physicians as part of their job” (Affidavit 3, para. 8).

The woman who provided Affidavit 63 (para. 6) said that she would like to see a place for prostitution “like the safe injection site...a place where girls could go with their dates and pay a fee and...they would be taken care of.” The governmental role of harm reduction as a means of caring for (containing?) “illicit people” (be they drug addicts or prostituted women) is clear, as it is in some other affidavits. The discourse of the dominator, framing prostitution as “a public health problem”, as in *Challenge*, has been now taken up by the dominated.

I think that prostitution should be legal. There is obviously a need for the service.

If it was legal, it could be health regulated. That is the main concern for the public, that prostitution will cause the spread of HIV and Hep C and STDs and

⁸³Culbert, L., McMartin, P., (July 2, 2014). Downtown Eastside: 260 agencies, housing sites crowd Downtown Eastside, *Vancouver Sun*. <http://www.vancouversun.com/touch/story.html?id=9983274> accessed August 16, 2014.

that's a scary thing. If it was health regulated, then it would be easier for people to accept it, if people knew that sex trade workers are healthy people. (Affidavit 78, para. 16)

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I think prostitution should be legalized. The laws should be changed to legalize it. It would be a lot safer for the women if prostitution was legalized. For example, if prostitution was legalized there would be protection from violence and other harms. It would be good to have a health nurse on site to deal with issues surrounding sexually transmitted diseases and sexual health. (Affidavit 56, para. 15)

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I believe that having legal “bawdy houses” would be much safer than it is for women to work outdoors. There could be a doctor around and safe-sex could be enforced as a house rule. The men would be less inclined to argue about condom-use if there were staff around. Also there would be much less risk of clients assaulting women would not be such a risk [*sic*]. (Affidavit 09, para. 6.)

In this analysis, male violence is framed as a health risk, as if the men themselves are like cancer cells or viruses, attacking at random without agency of their own. Of course this is inaccurate—if men were indeed incapable of controlling their violent impulses, they would be attacking anyone, including their bosses or leaders, men with the same or greater social and political capital and power than they. Even though the affiants said they thought indoor prostitution would be safer, they described experiences that indicate they know men who buy sex are still dangerous even under the greater regimes of surveillance: “I think that girls should be

allowed to work indoors. There is more privacy. In some ways it would be safer for girls to work indoors, but still would not be totally safe. It depends on the guy” (Affidavit 44, para. 4). The affiants, it should be noted, were not in indoor prostitution themselves, even though such venues already existed at the time, (they have since expanded), and there is a lower risk of arrest.

The affiants recommended interventions from health care professionals or other workers but noted that the presence of staff would only reduce, not eradicate, the threat the johns would pose. While there is evidence to show that indoor prostitution is safer than on-street prostitution (Krüsi et al., 2012; Brents & Hausbeck, 2005), it is also the case that the constraints and surveillance women must endure are damaging both physically and psychologically (Brents & Hausbeck, 2005; Farley et al., 2004; Høigård & Finstad, 1992) and do not increase their autonomy or opportunities.

The fact that these arguments for legalization turn on concerns about health reflects a doxic thinking (Bourdieu, 1998), tied to assumptions of the inevitability of men’s entitlement to sexual access, and women’s position of submission to these demands. In the next section, I further discuss this contradiction as a form of misrecognition.

Misrecognition and the “Expert Witnesses”

One can describe the women represented by Pivot’s Charter Challenge not as silenced or forgotten, but rather misrecognized in the social world within which we live. Misrecognition does not mean “unrecognized”, or “misunderstood” so much as it means a way of knowing others, and the world, in a sense, “too well, without objectifying distance” (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 142-143). The researchers for Pivot, for instance, who gathered the affidavits and facilitated the focus groups, occupied positions of relative power and influence in comparison to the women they interviewed. Though they share with the women they interviewed belonging in the category

“woman”, and share the common condition of gendered oppression; they are racialized and classed as the dominant group. Their view of the world, their way of interacting with the social and political world is quite different from, perhaps in some ways opposite to the women who provided the affidavits. This differential between the social locations of the interviewers and the affiants should be taken into account when considering the narratives. It is likely that the women who provided the affidavits were influenced by what they thought the researchers wanted to hear. Similarly, the researchers were operating (as are all researchers) on a number of deeply held assumptions to which they were trained, and through which they filtered the affiants’ stories. These are methodological risks Pivot did not attend to.

Dorothy Smith’s analysis of the everyday negotiations of women within the “relations of ruling” provides another way to engage with the disjunctures of thought and experiences. Both groups of women, the white, university-educated law students; and the Aboriginal, impoverished welfare recipients; are entrenched in the relations of ruling, though in different ways. Both groups operate in relation to the “boss text” of regimes of legislation and law enforcement, though with quite different expectations to understand, engage with and shape these texts. The researchers, I think, tried to approach the affiants as peers, and to engage the women they interviewed as equals (albeit equals who had fewer opportunities and social supports)—but the researchers did not operate as if they could influence the chances available to the women who provided the affidavits. The “sex work project” is meant to legitimize prostitution, not to question why it exists, or to challenge and interfere with men’s choices to buy sex.

Pivot’s report *Beyond Decriminalization* makes the case that “sex workers” must have a prominent role in the process of law, policy and social reform:

Above all, law and policy makers should listen to sex workers in order to

understand how the laws affect them. This is a necessary step in ensuring that Canada's laws comply with the guarantees and protections enshrined in the Charter and other human rights instruments. (Pivot, 2006, p. iii)

Pivot's project is a strategy almost wholly related to recognitive justice claims. "Here the goal [of the politics of recognition], in its most plausible form, is a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect" (Fraser, 1996, p. 3). The women who were affiants for the Pivot project were separated out from the political category "woman" to a de-gendered cultural group "sex worker".

Pivot volunteers indicated to the affiants that their opinions as well as their experiences were essential to the affidavits (Pivot, 2004, p. 6). Affidavits, however, are meant to be mostly factual evidence for a court case in contrast to legal opinion, which is the jurisdiction of the lawyers and judges who analyze the evidence⁸⁴. The women who provided their experiences in the form of affidavits are experts in their own lives, and that is consistent with how women are treated by anti-violence workers. Pivot rightly suggests that the affiants are experts of their own lives, but erroneously extends that assumption of expertise to matters relating to prostitution law:

This report [*Voices for Dignity*] contains front-line accounts from individuals who work under the highly regulated criminal law frame- work. It presents the expertise of sex workers to law and policy makers in order to ensure that the views of those most directly affected by the criminal law's application are taken into account. (Pivot, 2004, p. 3)

Certainly the knowledge derived from the experiential learning of women in prostitution

⁸⁴ Benedet, J. July, 2012, personal communication.

must be integral in any legislative or social reforms. However, the affiants are “misrecognized” as experts in legal structures by which they are actually dominated. Their expertise lies more in the arena of how to operate “under the radar” of law enforcement, and minimize the risks presented by law enforcement and more dangerous “johns”.

The aim to ensure that law and policy makers take into account the views of women in prostitution is laudable, but they cannot be considered experts in law. In *Bedford* the court did not consider the affiants “expert witnesses”, but accepted the evidence of their affidavits as that from “lay persons” (*Bedford*, ONSC 2010, p. 24).

Pivot offered participation in this project to these women as a forum to have their voices heard by a system that has historically been inaccessible to them—the Canadian legal system and in particular the adjudication of a claim under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The context (legal system) within which the affidavits were gathered is a powerful frame that shaped how the affiants’s stories were heard and utilized. It is important that women’s experiences under the law and social policy are heard and understood, but it is also important that the legal representatives and researchers understand their own taken-for-granted assumptions and deeply held values and beliefs with a broader social and historical context. Though the women told their stories—their words were filtered through the perceptions and locations of the interviewers and Pivot’s overall project, which left part of their stories unheard and unrecognized.

Aboriginal women, in particular were misrecognized in the process of gathering and writing the affidavits. As the Aboriginal Women’s Action Network explained in a 2009 flyer:

Historically, prostitution was never part of Aboriginal culture. On first contact with Europeans, brothels were established around military forts and trading posts

because European women were not allowed to emigrate for the first 100 years of European occupancy. So, European men forced Aboriginal women into these brothels to service their sexual demands.

(Aboriginal Women's Action Network, 2009)⁸⁵

Pivot acknowledged that Aboriginal women are over-represented in street-level prostitution, but did not place the experiences of Aboriginal women in a historical context. From a feminist perspective of prostitution as a form of male violence, prostitution is fundamentally gendered and racialized and a form of ongoing colonization which imposes central constraints upon women's choices. In some sense, Pivot positioned itself as allied with the affiants, however their promotion of decriminalization and regulation will serve instead to benefit those who profit from prostitution.

Furthermore, what the Pivot researchers failed to notice was the knowledge these affiants have regarding the pathways that lead women into prostitution and that prostitution is a form of violence. There is ample evidence in these stories of this kind of expertise as well as the spoken desire to leave prostitution. This evidence was not taken up in the report, given that the focus of the project was to gather affiants' testimonies favourable to legalization.

Choice and Agency

Central to my critique of Pivot's project is an analysis of the constraining functions of harm reduction and choice as symbolic violence. Pivot's challenge to these laws is fundamentally shaped by their presumption that women choose their lives in prostitution, and wish only to be safer in it, and to be less stigmatized because of their choices:

An underlying premise of this project is that difficult choices made under

⁸⁵ www.awanbc.ca/AWAN_May09_Flyer.pdf

constrained conditions are still choices and, indeed, many of the sex workers that worked on this project felt insulted by the repeated accusation that they are not capable of making “real” choices. Furthermore, choosing to be in the sex trade does not nullify the right of sex workers to contest the current conditions of their work, where they face violent attack, stigmatization, inequality and are treated as criminals. The affiants expressed critical and analytical opinions about the states of their lives and laws affecting them. They are in the best position to describe what it is like to work and live under the current social and legal framework.

Legislators and the public must acknowledge this expertise.

(Pivot, 2004, p. 7)

In my reading of the affidavits, I see little evidence that these women thought of prostitution as a job they chose that has aspects of risk associated with it. In describing their reasons for entering prostitution, by contrast, they reveal conditions outside of their control that shaped the decisions they made in this regard. Their stories provide evidence against Pivot’s claims about “choice” and leave open the question: would these affiants have chosen decriminalization rather than some other legal change to oppressive laws and law enforcement? Clearly, they would not have entered prostitution if not faced with threats of violence and crushing poverty.

Had Pivot described alternatives to prostitution in their report, alternatives that were available to the affiants, and which carried less stigma and many fewer risks, perhaps that could be taken as evidence that the affiants “chose” prostitution. There was no evidence of any alternative, other than death and continued deprivation, despite Pivot’s assertion as outlined in the quote above.

Evidence provided in the affidavits speaks to how prostituted women have much resilience and ability to survive difficult circumstances.

I feel that I'm more empowered in a lot of ways than many women. Women who are accustomed to living a normal nine-to-five existence and are married and perhaps have kids would find it extremely difficult were they to find themselves in circumstances like those that I have to live with.

If an ordinary middle-class woman were to find herself in a hotel room in the Downtown Eastside with no money, no food, the rent due, their belongings stolen and the landlord banging on the door they would likely slash their wrists, or at the very least need psychiatric help, since it's the only type of help they could get.

If I were to find myself in their position, on the other hand, I could easily adapt to their circumstances. However, I've only lived in the Downtown Eastside for 7 years. If I'd lived here much longer, I don't know that I'd be alive. (Affidavit 03, para. 14-16)

While this testimony shows this woman's pride in her resourcefulness and resilience, this form of agency is simultaneously and paradoxically disempowering. Note that she talks about the lack of real support available to her (psychiatric help), and her concerns that her life may be in danger were she to stay in the area much longer. She does not describe the circumstances of her life as what she would choose. The following affidavit also speaks to this conundrum: the affiant sees prostitution as inevitable and calls for DNA samples to be taken "as a form of protection" (although a DNA sample does not prevent a john from attacking a woman; and does not serve to identify him—once again, it is the victim who is under scrutiny).

...Prostitution is one of the oldest trades there is. It should be legalized, but

controlled for health and safety reasons. The law should recognize that prostitution exists, and look after the safety of the workers and the johns...If there are street workers out there, their DNA should be taken and used as a form of protection. It could also be used to keep away workers who are out to rip off people and cause trouble. (Affidavit 76, para. 4)

This affiant discusses prostitution in terms of its inevitability, not in terms of women's choices to engage in it. As I have argued previously, the two concepts cannot exist together—one cannot understand something that is inevitable as the product of choice.

The affidavits indicate that women in prostitution are in grave danger from the actions of johns. Both of these affiants, like others in Pivot's sample, expressed desires for safety, and suggested some ways that women might find some recognition of the risks with which they live. As noted by Høigård and Finstad (1992,): "Many prostitutes have resources and attributes that make the average seem colourless and weak. Being in the position of victim is a structural and relational attribute, separate from individual characteristics" (p. 183).

Like the women in Høigård and Finstad's study, Pivot's affiants are justly proud of their resourcefulness in the face of ever-present danger and uncertainty. They bristle at the appellation "victim", and tell stories to prove they have the upper hand—at least some of the time. Affiant 76, for example, claimed some form of control through arguing for legal sanctions against "workers who are out to rip off people and cause trouble". The (inaccurate) notion that there was a significant incidence of "sex workers" ripping people off and causing trouble, helped this affiant reframe her experiences of prostitution as a form of power over johns. Affiant 03 framed hers as a form of empowerment as well.

In general, however, the affidavits suggest that engagement in prostitution is not

something they prefer. It is something they endure. A feminist analysis defines prostitution as an activity that *men* do—a form of coercion that men impose upon women. Men’s demand for sex in a context of women’s poverty form the conditions that restrict women’s choice to a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea. Pivot’s adherence to the theme of “choice”, and their claim to be respecting the choices of women in prostitution was privileged throughout *Voices for Dignity*, and in the subsequent report *Beyond Decriminalization*: This analysis of choice needs to be revisited from the perspective of consent. Consent that is purchased is not a valid form of consent. Women who are mentally ill, drug addicted and/or conditioned by a lifetime of male violence or neglect cannot freely consent in the context of poverty and ever-present prostitution.

I started working in the sex trade when I was 13 years old in Edmonton, Alberta.

At that time, I had run away from home and was living on the street. Working in the sex trade was how I supported myself.

(Affidavit 14, para. 2)

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I am 29 years old. I live in the Downtown Eastside. I started working in the sex trade when I was 13 years old. I am from [blacked out] First Nation. I am HIV positive. I am a heroine [*sic*] user. My habit costs me \$300 day. I work about 8 hours a day, on most days. Sometimes I work for days in a row without sleeping. I do not have a pimp (Affidavit 43, para. 2)

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is one way to understand this acceptance of prostitution as inevitable, and a form of labour. Bourdieu challenges us to investigate our taken-for-granted assumptions of “the way things are” and to figure out how they got that way. *Habitus* is best understood as a structuring structure (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2008, p. 268), both

durable and malleable, but the most enduring features or dispositions are those laid down in childhood. Understanding the habitus of prostitution, in both the formation of entitlement of the demand side, the johns, and the resignation of the supply side, the prostituted people, can therefore illuminate some of the processes whereby these ideological and practical harmful practices are reproduced and defended. These are processes of reproduction, enduring, yes, but also malleable—consider the processes and arguments that reproduced and reified the practice of slavery in the United States, still less than 150 years ago. While the abolition of slavery has not yet been achieved, there is widespread censure of its practice, international laws: “No one should be held in slavery or servitude, slavery in all of its forms should be eliminated” (UN Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 4). Yet the arguments put forward to legitimate prostitution are similar to those for the maintenance of slavery.

The habitus is reproduced in the family, and also by the education system and the class strata within which we live. Our tastes, habits, manners and bodily dispositions are shaped by past events and structures and also shape our current practices and structures (Bourdieu 1984, p. 170). In the case of Pivot’s affiants, then, the habitus of these women is shaped by experiences such as child sexual assault and other forms of male violence, poverty, and, particularly in the case of Indigenous women, the racist legacies of colonial policies and practices such as residential schools and the reservation system. These powerful forces reproduce low expectations for educational attainment and objective chances. Pivot’s Charter Challenge, while ostensibly seeking to support and give voice to prostituted women, is limited because it focuses primarily on those things that women have rights to be free *from* (violence, police harassment) but not those things that women have a right *to* (housing, health care, adequate income, control over their bodies) and which have been undermined through the symbolic violence of the increasing

state retrenchment of social and educational programs. Pivot acknowledges some aspects of social inequity which constrain the options of these women, but their project does not (and perhaps cannot) undertake an exploration of what needs to occur to expand their opportunities. Nor do they consider any other legal reform that might better protect prostituted women, ie. the Nordic Model. It thus remains captured by structural constraints and engages in measures to make “one of their few options” (Pivot, 2004, p. 11) more palatable.

Anti-violence feminist activists agitate for such social reforms as a guaranteed livable income (GLI), and argue that this measure would more effectively ensure greater options and more safety for prostituted and non-prostituted women. As Hannah said, “If you offer women another source of income, the answer is so simple...and it’s a very small amount of money. Women make very very little in prostitution” (Hannah, November, 2010). Affiants echoed Hannah’s assertion that prostitution generates very little when they told Pivot that they used the income from prostitution to supplement welfare, or pay for their drug addiction.

Through their campaign to reform prostitution law Pivot’s sex work project operates in a field in which features of the *symbolic* violence of male domination is taken for granted. In their campaign to address structural changes in the law, they do not frame prostitution as something that *men do to women* that naturalizes the social order of male domination. By describing it as a form of labour which carries certain hazards or risks, the Pivot project is inherently limited to legislative reforms that might alleviate these risks and hazards, but leave the social structures of inequality firmly in place.

The sex worker population in this neighbourhood [Vancouver’s DTES] is characterized by disproportionate numbers of women, many of whom are Aboriginal. The severe reduction of BC’s social services and cuts to social

assistance income continues to aggravate this situation, leaving growing numbers of increasingly disadvantaged women with sex work as one of their few options for income. (Pivot, 2004, pp. 3-4)

Though Pivot does work on reforms to welfare and other governmental social services—including ‘child protection’, their work on prostitution law reform seems disconnected from their other advocacy work. To make this statement that welfare rates are unlivable, and that cuts to social services disproportionately punish Aboriginal women, yet to then argue that the reasonable thing to do is to legalize prostitution is profoundly cynical. Knowing the social and political conditions that limit choices for women, yet not making the cognitive link that these conditions, coupled with entitled and relentless male demand for sexual access to women’s bodies, effectively increases women’s vulnerability to prostitution. Pivot’s definition of consent falsely levels both agents in a transaction they characterize as business. There are power differentials between the buyer and the seller, with the buyer having the power. The context in which the agreement is given is deeply problematic. One cannot consider consent without considering coercion, inequality and privilege⁸⁶. Pivot, rather than referring to their own work on these issues of poverty and racialized domination, instead capitulates to the *status quo* of domination and proclaims: “All sex workers deserve to have their choices respected and be able to work in safety, without fear.”⁸⁷

The fact remains, however, that the lawyers who work at Pivot occupy a very different social position than the women they represent. They are members of the dominant class, and, cynical as it may sound, it is easier for members of the dominant classes to accept that conditions

⁸⁶Benedet, J. personal communication, December 18, 2013.

⁸⁷<http://www.pivotlegal.org/our-work/sex-worker-rights>

they may find unendurable could be at least tolerable for the dominated. Describing the process by which women find themselves in prostitution as a “choice” absolves the dominating class of responsibility. This definition of choice indicates an adherence to a neo-liberal world-view that denies the influences and constraints imposed upon women living as gendered, raced and classed in a capitalist patriarchy. We are left with, as Bourdieu says, “conversion of privation into choice”:

The cult of popular culture is often simply a...(pseudo-revolutionary) inversion of the class racism which reduces working class practices to barbarism or vulgarity. Just as some celebrations of femininity simply reinforce male domination, so this ultimately comparable way of respecting ‘the people’, which, under the guise of exalting the working class, helps to enclose it in what it is by *converting privation into a choice* [emphasis added]. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 76)

The circumstances that condition women’s ideas of what choices are available are both durable and historically entrenched (though not inevitable or even necessarily permanent). Pivot asserts that the women interviewed for the affidavits made “real choices”—but those choices demonstrate “positional suffering” (Bourdieu, 1999)—the process of calibrating their expectations to match what they could see as their best chances. When the Pivot researchers accept women’s statements that they choose prostitution, they are enacting “a pseudo-revolutionary inversion” (Bourdieu, 2000) of the same kind of conservative sexism which blames women for immorality and social problems associated with prostitution. The prostituted women’s unwilling acquiescence to privation; and their resilience in the face of degradation is observed and re-defined by Pivot (and many others) in the name of progressive alliance, as a choice.

Summary and Discussion

The affidavits provide a poignant complement to the experiences and analysis of the front-line workers. Taken together, these stories form a compelling argument to develop formations of support, alliance and solidarity between and among women. Entering and leaving prostitution are both processes, not events. Most of the affiants for Pivot have experienced the process of entering prostitution, (though some of them had begun a process of leaving, or had left prostitution). Most of the front-line workers had supported, sheltered or advocated for women to move out of prostitution; and one had found her way out before beginning anti-violence work.

There is, among all of these women, great potential for shared action to establish clear routes out of prostitution, and powerful methods to prevent prostitution and sexual exploitation. The women from whom Pivot gathered affidavits provided compelling accounts of their experiences of the pathways into prostitution and their relations with law enforcement and other representatives of the power structures within which they were engaged. What is striking in the affiants' testimonies is their abuse at the hands of police. While the legislation might have aided and abetted such abuse as policy made their demands for sex through threats of arrest, the police can be seen as profiteers and exploiters of prostituted women. The solidarity offered by Pivot researchers and the initiative to decriminalize prostitution are limited to an intervention that provides a very limited notion of safety and some measure of comfort. From the perspective that prostitution is a form of violence by men towards women, legalization provides no safety. It's not enough, Pivot acknowledges, but it's *something*.

Ending the criminalization of sex work is an essential step toward reducing the harms experienced by sex workers. However, the safety and well-being of sex workers will not be secured through criminal law reform alone. Affiants also

proposed a number of important policy changes. They emphasized that sex workers lack access to fundamental benefits and services. Poverty, inadequate housing, violence, poor health, addiction and law enforcement are major areas of concern. There is an urgent need for policy change in each of these areas as part of a comprehensive approach to improving the lives of sex workers and ensuring alternatives for those who wish to leave this occupation⁸⁸. (Pivot, 2004, p. 2)

Substituting the word “women” for “sex workers” reveals how all women are affected by men’s demand for prostitution, and how all women may benefit from the policy changes Pivot suggests here.

Pivot’s aims are on the face of it laudable, and the affidavits do provide compelling testimony to the punitive and ineffectual protections afforded these women by law enforcement especially in those circumstances where it is police who are the abusers; however, the affidavits also serve as compelling evidence for a more comprehensive set of reforms that would broaden expectations for and of these women. The need, as Pivot here acknowledges, for housing, treatment, and protection from violence, is urgent—yet the legislative reforms Pivot seeks will not interfere with the sex buyers, who are in truth, the only drivers of the sex trade market.

While it is essential that women who are presently involved in prostitution gain comfort and safety right now, it is also true that there are already a number of immediate aids available in the DTES⁸⁹. There are not enough comprehensive, coordinated and effective exit services for

⁸⁸ Pivot makes this nod to exiting but never articulates how they would do it in such a way that the exited woman would not be replaced by another girl with the same history who also wants to get out (J. Benedet, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

⁸⁹ In fact, an article detailing the number and type of services available to people in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver found no less than 260 different services for residents of the DTES, the population of which comprises approximately 6500 people.

<http://www.vancouversun.com/news/Downtown+Eastside+agencies+housing+sites+crowd+Downtown+Eastside+w>

women in prostitution. As Affiant 50 said, "...leaving prostitution will make you less suicidal" (Affidavit 50, para. 4). So why not work for *that* end? Enforce the laws against the exploiters and abusers; obstruct men's demand for paid sex; and use the power of the legal system to ensure women's autonomy as well as choice; freedom as well as safety.

Women in prostitution deserve to have their voices heard, but they also deserve listeners who are informed and politicized and willing to act. Such listening is informed by Dorothy Smith's approach to a sociology *for and with*--not about--women, an orientation that would consider these affidavits in relation to the social and institutional relations shaping these narratives. Without this analysis of the ruling relations of prostitution, that recognize the violence and abuse of power organizing these relations, we are left with harm reduction ideology. The everyday world of prostituted women is problematic. However, a feminist approach to solidarity is within our ability to achieve—a solidarity that understands prostituted women's voices of hope and resistance as shaped by relations of ruling and from that standpoint moves towards achieving women's autonomy and freedom.

Pivot states that they adhere to "harm reduction principles" in their sex work project. While the affidavits do not speak directly to their experiences or understanding of harm reduction, their stories nevertheless revealed how state-sanctioned harm reduction is shaping these women's understandings of their experiences. I suggest that the version of harm reduction promoted by some organizations (especially those operating in the DTES) has produced two categories of women who are operating in somewhat tense or conflicted relations with each other. One group of women are the workers – the women with the keys; and the other group of

women are the ‘service recipients’ – the women with the needs. While their relations are not necessarily adversarial--often there is genuine affection between women who occupy these different places--there is a tension. Women in street prostitution often rely on social service providers and advocates and that reduces the potential for mutual aid and organizing between them. Because of the unequal dynamic and the palpable feeling of urgency, it seems there is not much time to find common ground or common cause between women. The women with the keys – the advocates, shelter workers and rape crisis workers are often working more to help women navigate the increasingly labyrinthine social services system to help women get what they ought to be entitled to—that the broader vision of solidarity and liberation from men’s dominance is lost.

I hope that the alternative analysis of the affidavits that I have begun here can help create some common ground; these two groups of women could be strong allies. Using a critical feminist framework to examine these affidavits reveal meanings that are both embedded and extrapolated from what the affiants said about their experiences of prostitution, social services and women’s organizations and of the criminal justice system, including Canada’s current prostitution laws.

Chapter Eight: Reflecting Back and Moving Forward

In the dialectical perception, the future of which we dream is not inexorable. We have to make it, produce it, else it will not come in the form we would more or less wish it to... We have to make it with the materials, with the concrete reality, of which we dispose and as a dream for which we struggle. (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 1994, pp. 100-101)

If there were actual options there, I'm telling you, people would exercise those options way more often... Now who's the cynic? I don't think it's us abolitionists. I think it's the harm reduction nuts, who really believe that given a choice, people would *not* choose a better life [and] *we're* being called the cynics or the utopians—it's either one or the other, right?

(Pascale, June, 2011)

In this final chapter I first review some of my journey that brought me to the beginning of this research adventure. This section includes a brief narrative account of the tensions and contradictions I encountered in my graduate work, and notes the development of my critique of harm reduction and other social services, medical and governmental approaches to prostitution. The second section outlines the research questions and aims, and in the third, I summarize findings and theoretical insights. I revisit here also my theory that feminist interventions and harm reduction follow an opposite and oppositional logic. Then I discuss implications of my study for future research and practice, and suggestions for application of these findings and

engagement with these ideas in collaboration with feminist anti-violence activists and scholars. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary of limitations of my study, and some closing reflections—the surprises, new insights, and inspirations I encountered which will affect my own praxis as a feminist, activist, and educator.

My Route to the Research Problem

This dissertation sought to describe, define, analyze and understand the notion of harm reduction policies regarding prostitution as an ideological phenomenon and regulatory force of the state, especially as this force operates on and in relation to feminist praxis. In order to do this, I investigated the contributions and liberatory vision that emerged from women's (especially feminist) anti-violence and front line work. My aim for this work is to foreground feminist praxis as an alternate path to ending women's oppression and achieving substantive equality. While likely some time away yet, a hopeful vision of a future collaborative form of freedom is central to feminist praxis. The specific focus of this study was the apprehensions of harm reduction held by women who work in front-line women-serving anti-violence organizations, particularly regarding their work with women in prostitution.

When I started graduate school in 2003, I had been working in front line work for fifteen years. There were many aspects of that work I found stimulating and enriching, and I built relationships with women “on both sides of the counter” that were sustaining and enjoyable. However, there were also daily reminders of increasing divisions between social classes, and the devastating material effects on women's lives of structural racism and sexism. It often seemed that my colleagues and I were putting out fires and slapping on Band-Aids. We became experts at organizing and hosting memorial events to honour people who had died far too young. There was little time to figure out a longer perspective, to discuss a vision we could share, much less to

strategize ways to achieve such a vision. Graduate school, I imagined, was an opportunity to take a different perspective, interrogate some of the “why” questions, and broaden my horizons of understanding and expectations.

However, initially this step felt like a retreat or a capitulation, as if I was taking the easy way out and abandoning the women who used the services my work provided. On top of that, I had spent quite a few years mocking academics, and now here I was, becoming one. The awareness of my hypocrisy was sharp and uncomfortable. Then there was the discomfort of learning to navigate a new culture and language—in the nearly two decades between my BA and the beginning of my MA the academy had changed in a number of ways. I didn’t know whether or not I belonged. Of course, “imposter syndrome” is the name for this feeling, indicating that it is a common phenomenon. A friend of mine said, “might not be so bad to think of yourself as an imposter. Might make you a better academic.”

At the time, Vancouver implemented a new drug policy. *A Framework for Action* (MacPherson, 2001) presented the four pillars of this new policy: Education and Prevention; Treatment; Law Enforcement; Harm Reduction. This document contained a number of recommendations and goals for each pillar. While initially listed and discussed last in the *Framework*, harm reduction quickly became the primary focus of municipal drug policy. Activist groups, community and social service agencies, and non-governmental organizations began to take up the notion of harm reduction and make it policy. Insite, North America’s first legal “safe injection site” opened in 2003, and was sanctified by the progressive left and demonized by the conservative right. It is the flagship of the harm reduction movement, saving lives, reducing disorder, and maintaining a level of harm with which everyone can live. In the meantime, Vancouver’s commitment to the other three pillars seemed to significantly falter.

By the time I began my PhD, harm reduction had spread from an intervention specifically related to drug use to other aspects of social services work, including problems related to urban concentrations of poverty and to prostitution. At the same time the commitments of the all levels of government—Federal, Provincial and Municipal—to social, medical and educational supports for its citizens was degrading rapidly, and women’s services and resource centres were forced to severely reduce services or close altogether. I intuitively understood that the rise of neoliberal global capitalism was linked to the promotion of harm reduction. The promotion of harm reduction in turn was a contributing factor in reduced resources for women. I decided to address these two concerns, harm reduction and women’s anti-violence work and activism, in my PhD research.

Research Questions Revisited

This study sought to reveal the essential contradictions between harm reduction ideology and feminist praxis, in relation to women working in front-line feminist, social services or health organizations with women in prostitution. I gathered data by interviewing 16 women who were front line workers. In an effort to create a kind of conversation between these women and prostituted women, I also analyzed the 90 affidavits gathered by the Pivot Legal Society for their sex work project and Charter challenge case.

Here, then, are the questions I meant this project to address:

1. In what ways do front-line workers understand and interact with harm reduction policies, popular apprehensions of the meanings of harm reduction, and the promotions of harm reduction by state bodies to which their workplaces may be accountable?
 - a. How did women find their way to working in these organizations, and in what ways did their path to that work affect their practices and analysis?

- b. What are their experiences of government influences on their workplace policies and practices? In particular, what is their view of the relation between harm reduction and devolution of federal funding?
 - c. What are their views on how harm reduction impacts women in prostitution?
2. How can these understandings and negotiations contribute to feminist action, service provision and the relationships between public discourse and feminist praxis?

Findings and theoretical insights

The interview participants talked about the importance of sharing with their colleagues and management team a common understanding and vision for their work. Of the sixteen women I interviewed, nine had worked as part of a collective, three worked in organizations that were ‘modified’ collectives, though they were operating under a union or board (or both) structure, four were employees who had little access or influence on policy; and two were employed as supervisors or directors of their organizations. Three women discussed their experiences in different work places, hence the total of workplace structures women experienced exceeds the number of women I interviewed.

The organizational structure had effects on women’s perception of their efficacy and value to the organization and their peers. Women who were invested in the success of their colleagues and their shared project, they had some influence in their work environment and often in the world. They maintained hope that their work, and the work of colleagues and allies had, and would continue to, improve the conditions of women’s lives in some measure. Women who did not share goals or mandate with their colleagues or organizational leadership expressed a measure of fatigue and sometimes hopelessness that things would change for the better.

This is an important insight from my research—when women work as a team, a collective, or otherwise in an environment where their opinions and expertise are sought and encouraged, they experience themselves as effective and powerful. They are likely, therefore, to have expectations of the women who come to them for assistance as well. When they worked in an environment where they were heard and their leadership encouraged, they were also more likely to take the lead from other women, and extend their trust to them.

Many frontline workers named their awareness of sexism, racism and related violence as a significant motive in their decision to engage in front-line work and/or feminist organizing. All of the women's lives were shaped, their decisions informed and their life trajectories conditioned by inequality reinforced by male violence. They all saw, too, that the prostituted women with whom they worked had experienced incest or childhood sexual assault, as well as male violence as adults.

When and by whom women were attacked seemed to have bearing on their subsequent life choices. Some of the women I interviewed told me they had been sexually assaulted as well, but as adults, not children. Thirteen interviewees talked about the profound link between incest or child sexual assault and prostitution, as did many of the affiants in their signed affidavits. There may be a similar link between sexual harassment and assault in adulthood and women's involvement in anti-violence organizations. Providing assistance and intervention to battered women and other women responding to male violence is an act of resistance, as well as a way to repair the damage of men's violence.

Common Cause, Belong and Movement: Each of the interview participants found their work meaningful and important. They were drawn to the work because they were angry about the restraints imposed on them, or the damage they had experienced or seen from sexist violence,

out of a sense of justice and fairness, or because they wanted to engage with other women in a shared political project. Their stories disclosed their regard for women, and the satisfaction they felt when women in the transition house, support group, training group or drop-in centre told each other the truth about their lives; when women *saw* each other and acted together in solidarity.

The kitchen of the transition house may not be public in the same way as the bus stop or the grocery store; these places are most often not Arendt's idea of the public space of appearance. The kitchen of the transition house *is*, however, where women appear to each other, and where they speak and act together with common cause. It is a political space wherein women create freedom.

Many of the frontline workers were volunteers for a period of time or had careers and volunteered after work. All worked more hours than they were paid for. The organizational structure influenced women's connection with each other, and with the women they served. Four participants expressed some frustration with the management staff or their colleagues, and said they thought they did effective work in spite of their colleagues or managers. In contrast, the women who worked within a fairly flat hierarchical structure or a collective believed they were successful because of the expectations and support of their colleagues, and the opportunities to try new things and develop ideas into action. Provincial and Federal regulatory schemes impose "top-down" structures as conditions of funding in some cases, which constrain the autonomy of an agency, and their ability to provide effective systemic advocacy.

Insights About Harm Reduction: Harm reduction does not so much reduce harm as maintain it. Many interventions now known as harm reduction were initiated as stop-gap measures by members of marginalized groups on their own behalf, or in addition to political

actions such as demonstrations, sit-ins, or lobbying. This constellation of political and social tactics functioned as a means to achieve recognition.

Addiction and prostitution are not precisely parallel phenomenon, nor is harm reduction exactly the same in explanation or practice for addicted people or prostituted women. For example, an identity as ‘drug user’ is a product of harm reduction. Loss of the identity ‘woman’ is a product of harm reduction--they become sex workers. Harm reduction tactics are also related to redistribution; poverty and social dislocation (often related to trauma, especially childhood trauma) pushes people to use drugs. In many cases, the trauma of childhood sexual abuse or physical abuse or neglect conditions women to prostitution, and poverty then pushes them to it. Women are vulnerable to prostitution because of gendered unequal distribution of power and influence which is reinforced by male violence against women.

Harm reduction is now considered part of medical practice, a taken-for-granted set of assumptions describing a route to pharmacological and other interventions of the institution of medicine. It is also tied to legal frameworks, such as the Bedford case. These intricately connected institutions take up the notion of harm reduction, but it has become delinked from a long-term goal to end oppression. Eventually, techniques of short-term intervention and mutual aid became an end in itself. In contrast, feminists initiated tactics of resistance that appear at first glance to resemble harm reduction, but, combined with other actions and interventions informed by a dialectic of praxis, they function to advance a political agenda.

In the main, women who are engaged in street-level prostitution, (disproportionately Indigenous women) are subject to harm reduction. These women, after all, are most visible to the public (not IN the public, mind you, as in appearing together acting and speaking—but merely visible), and they make the public uncomfortable. The “high-end” (usually White, North-

American born) escort is not the target of harm reduction. She is already mostly inside, mostly not out there making “normal” people uncomfortable, yet easily accessible to the man who wants to rent her body for sex. She is already the end result of harm reduction. Then there are the trafficked women who are also not targets of harm reduction, the women who are trafficked and mainly prostituted inside massage parlours or brothels. They are often from impoverished Asian or European countries, and sometimes they knew they would be prostituted, other times they were told they would be employed in food service or cleaning, or some aspect of the hospitality industry (Malarek, 2003; Jeffreys, 2009). Women and girls are trafficked domestically, too—Indigenous women move from impoverished reserves to pathologized urban neighbourhoods, and “boyfriends” move women from one town to another during exhibition season.⁹⁰

Some interviewees expressed suspicions of harm reduction interventions from the beginning; others were either ambivalent or positive. Opinions ranged from “it’s a really good place to engage, when you just talk safety, you don’t get push-back” to “it’s better than nothing”, to “it does more harm than good”. Sometimes women expressed all of these opinions in the same interview.

Prostitution is the Oldest Oppression

Prostitution is regarded by many, including those proponents of harm reduction and decriminalization, as inevitable—a “service” that must be available to men either because they are encouraged to think of sexual access to women as their right, or they are incapable of resisting their desire for sex. Men are not in control of this impulse. Women, on the other hand,

⁹⁰ In the summer of 2008, a member of the Aboriginal Women’s Action Network searched Craigslist in Calgary during the Stampede, Edmonton during Klondike Days and Vancouver during the Pacific National Exhibition. She found the same advertisements for the same women in each city (Personal communication, August, 2008).

are held as both responsible, (because they have agency, and they choose prostitution) and as sacrificial stand-ins for wives or daughters, and thereby compelled. This is a hopeless view of humanity.

The double bind that prostituted women experience challenges the argument that prostitution is a choice made by the prostituted—“one cannot choose or reject that which is not an act of will but which is imposed from without” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 81). Taken to its logical conclusion, the discourse of choice and inevitability becomes an absurd and contradictory double-bind. If women are capable of making real choices, even if her choices are constrained, and if she “should be respected for her agency” (Pivot, 2004, p. 6), then it follows that it is disrespectful to fail to recognize that prostitution is only a decision born from constraint and desperation (so not a choice).

All of the women I interviewed, no matter their degree of enthusiasm or disdain for harm reduction, understood that prostitution was something to which women were pushed, not something women embraced. Some allowed that because of the context of their work, they had little contact with women who may have become willingly involved in prostitution. But they all thought of prostitution as a trap for women, not something that would be a long-term goal or career choice, no matter the circumstances.

Arendt’s examination of the process of “transforming crime into vice” (1958/1998) by which European society descended into lawlessness in the early 20th century (p. 81) has application to this argument. To consider that prostitution is “the oldest profession” shows no respect for the human dignity of either the victim or the perpetrator. Arendt’s reading of Proust describes what may appear to be tolerance: “judges are more inclined to pardon murder inverts and treason in Jews for reasons derived from...racial predestination” (Arendt, 1958/1998, citing

Proust, p. 81). She then shows how this apparent tolerance can become murderous—if some particular groups of people are predestined to certain behaviours, it becomes understood that they are not to blame, but then, “such perverted tolerance can switch to a decision to liquidate...all who are “racially” predestined to commit certain crimes” (p. 81). The state becomes in this argument, if not morally obligated, at least justified, in seeking to eliminate such people because rehabilitation is not possible.

Framing prostitution as inevitable is a contemporary example of this kind of “perverted tolerance”. Like Bourdieu’s description of the benevolent chauvinism of the dominating class, attitudes or acts that normalize prostitution, whether meant to aid or punish prostituted people, ultimately condemns and dehumanizes them. The operation of this dehumanization can be seen in the sharp decline of prostitution-related arrests in Vancouver. After all, if it is true that rehabilitation is impossible, then punishment is pointless—men are compelled to take sex from women, women are “choosing” their only option for income—so the best that can be hoped for is some form of containment.

The decriminalizing and harm reduction “tolerance” for prostitution and pimping, to apply Arendt’s analysis, “if allowed to establish its own code of law will invariably prove more cruel and inhuman than laws, no matter how severe, which respect and recognize man’s independent responsibility for his behaviour” (p. 81). In this light, the recent Supreme Court decision to invalidate federal prostitution laws could prove disastrous for women, unless new legislation is drafted that provides “hedged laws” that recognize “man’s independent responsibility for his behaviour” (p. 81).

Limitations

This research project revealed the analysis and concerns of women engaged in front-line

anti-violence or social services work. Participants represented a variety of racialized and class backgrounds, and different length and type of work experiences. The interview transcripts represent a rich body of experience, information and descriptions of praxis that I found I could not adequately explore.

Most of my interview participants knew me, or at least knew of my work in mental health or feminist anti-violence organizing. This familiarity was at once a benefit and a limitation. In some cases, because we knew each other so well, during the interviews I made assumptions about our shared understanding and interpretation of events. There were moments as I reviewed the recordings and transcripts that I thought I ought to have invited deeper investigation and clarification. I may have arrived at perhaps more nuanced and sophisticated interpretations of women's stories.

I earlier described resistance I encountered from some of the agencies I approached. I suspect this resistance was because of what they knew about my political stance, and they may have been apprehensive that I would misrepresent them. Looking back, I regret that I did not just ask them if they had such concerns, and try to engage in a discussion about the research process and methodologies, and perhaps thereby find more ground for agreement and potential for shared action in the future.

Implications for Future Research

Prostitution is a deeply racialized practice, the structures and effects of ongoing colonialism and racism as embedded in prostitution merits focused interrogation and analysis. Women in front line and political work contend with operations of sexism that are racialized, racism that is sexualized, and have complex and sophisticated analysis of the effects of these oppressive forces in women's lives. Many of my research participants mentioned the over-

representation of Aboriginal women in street level prostitution, and of Asian women indoors and on the back pages of the *Georgia Straight*. Further research is necessary in order to further confront issues of racism and the operations of colonialism, patriarchal domination and class inequality on women's lives, opportunities and dispositions. The women who contributed to this research project were themselves racialized⁹¹, and most referred in interviews to the effects of these processes on their own lives and the influence on their analysis and practices.

I initially had hoped to conduct focus groups with study participants to discuss with each other their understanding of harm reduction, systems of prostitution and their political goals and activities. The interviews revealed there were many more points of agreement between women than not. While this may have been at least partly due to women's previous knowledge of my own views, nevertheless I think that further study with these participants (and/or other women) has the potential to create space for feminist action in collaboration, and to provide opportunity for women no longer members of an organized group to re-engage.

This study made an attempt to begin a process of listening to women who work on the front-lines, and there is much more to be learned about how to bring their analysis into broader policy discourse. The feminist movement is one of the most influential social movements of our time, yet many of the gains achieved in the 1970s and '80s have been eroded. It appears that the feminist notion implied by the phrase, "the personal is political" of the connection between revealing to each other lived experience and then engaging in collective analysis and resistance has been reshaped by reproductive forces of systems of governance, education and medicine into "the political is personal". Pressure to accept government standards and criteria for staff

⁹¹ The dominant class are often 'blind' to our position of dominance at the expense of women racialized as Aboriginal or of Colour.

credentials has increased the class divisions between the service provider and the service recipient. Research that investigated the reactions or adjustments of agencies to these external forces and the effects on agency policies and practices could open discussions about how dominant structures are reproduced—often with the cooperation of the dominated (Bourdieu, 2000a).

To these, the addition of further research on the enduring effect of feminist legacies and institutional memory, and tactics of erasure or backlash will be valuable additions to feminist thought. And in the interests of “knowing one’s enemy”, investigations into the external institutions and systems that reproduce structures of domination may lead to insights for effective organizing in the interests of expanding public political space for feminist anti-violence and equality-seeking interventions.

Another possibility for future research could be an exploration of the experiences of the recipients of front-line services. How do they perceive the political potential and practical supports provided by women-serving organizations? Several interview participants were also past callers or otherwise recipients of the services they now provide to women, their perceptions and recollections of these services could provide more useful insights.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Everyone involved in this research is committed to improving women’s lives, and working to expand the horizon of expectations and chances. The stories they told of their work and their relationships with the politics, governmental structures, and of course the women with and on behalf of whom they worked all contain a range of possible interventions.

Although I found that among the women I interviewed there was significant agreement, it is my experience that in general among interested parties including feminists, front-line workers,

activists and social services agencies there is significant discord and conflict. The topic of this research is emotionally charged, and the public discourse can become heated and hurtful. When I first discussed the potential of a focus group with Muriel, she expressed reservations. She does think that prostitution is one of the most urgent problems facing women today, “But you know,” she said, “I just don’t have the stomach for it”. She is reluctant to engage in a discussion that could become hurtful. Her agency came into some strong criticism a few years ago when they provided support for a report that promoted legalizing prostitution. The discourse is polarized and heated, and often disrespectful. There are those on the political left who claim to support women’s right to choose, and seek to legitimate “sex work”, often accusing abolitionists of silencing, marginalizing or endangering women. There are those on the other end of the political spectrum who advocate a “law and order” agenda, with a focus on more punitive measures against men who traffic and sexually exploit youth.

Every one of the women I spoke to, however, either implicitly or explicitly indicated that they believed their work had the potential (and sometimes achieved) to gain a little more traction for women in a quest for not only safety or harm reduction, but freedom from violence, fear and degradation. The organizational structures, their obligations to funders or boards or governing bodies may be different from each other, but a shared strategizing to refuse the divisive restrictions of the state may open the way for women’s groups, (or individual members of those groups, at least), to form alliances and take on shared political projects that build on existing agreements to influence public policy and action.

There is some discussion now of the potential to establish the Nordic Model in Canada, and the fact that it is discussed at all is the result of the intervention in the Bedford case of

feminist groups across Canada⁹². In order for the Nordic model to be effective, it is necessary to not only criminalize the buyers of sex and decriminalize the sellers, but to implement meaningful and comprehensive interventions to ensure adequate standards of living, safe, affordable housing, educational and employment opportunities, nourishing, supportive community bonds, and the means contribute to public life and to be responsible for the well being of others.

Long-term solutions include subsidized and co-operative housing, long-term transitional housing for battered women (including, of course, prostituted women) and their children, long-term addiction recovery centres for women, including women with children, guaranteed livable income (GLI) instead of welfare, educational opportunities, and communities where each member's contribution is expected, encouraged and valued.

Many of Pivot's affiants and the women I interviewed talked about the degrading effects on women of welfare, and several women recommended the implementation of a GLI⁹³. In the 1970s, economists in the US and Canada conducted several studies, all of which indicated that educational attainment and social cohesion may have improved with some form of GLI (Rourke, 2009, October).

It is crucial to revive feminist discussion and interventions against incest and other forms of child sexual assault. Strategies must be introduced to prevent and halt child sexual abuse and address the long-term damage of this most egregious form of male violence against women and children. Reports of past incest and sexual abuse from women in prostitution and the women who provide service and supports to them are significantly higher than incidents reported by non-

⁹² Personal Communication, Anonymous member of Women's Coalition to Abolish Prostitution, January, 2014.

⁹³ Livable Income for All describes a Guaranteed Livable Income as a federally administered fund available to everyone such that "no person's income falls below that which is required to live with health, life and dignity" (livableincome.org, n.d.).

prostitute women. Meaningful and varied supports and interventions for children and youth, and the women parenting them must accompany strong community and legislative sanction against men who sexually abuse the children in their care. Again, safe and accessible transitional and permanent housing, community bonds, educational and job training opportunities and an adequate income constitute some of the supports to enact.

These are not short-term solutions. But we are not dealing with a short-term problem, either. The long-term consequences of continued abandonment of women and inaction in regard to prostitution are much more expensive and devastating. This devastation can be observed in jurisdictions like Amsterdam and Germany where organized crime has increased, along with many associated problems such as increased trafficking, including child trafficking, since legalizing prostitution.

The Debate Continues

During the course of my research there has been a great deal of activity in Vancouver about prostitution. Since the final decision in the Bedford case that Canada's prostitution laws are unconstitutional, the Federal Government has one year to develop new legislation. Proponents of decriminalization claim "evidence-based" approaches to decriminalizing all aspects of prostitution will reduce stigma to prostituted persons, and ensure their safety. On March 27, 2014, the Gender and Sexual Health Initiative at the University of British Columbia (GSHI) released an open letter signed by 300 "academics and researchers to the Government of Canada"⁹⁴. The letter urged "the Government of Canada to follow the Supreme Court of Canada's decision and support decriminalization of sex work as a critical evidence-based approach to ensuring the safety, health and human rights of sex workers" (para.1). Among the

⁹⁴ <http://www.gshi.cfenet.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2014-03-27%20Open%20Letter%20-%20English2.pdf>

signatories there were no front-line anti-violence workers (or any who identified themselves as such).

One month later, a letter signed by over 800 “women who work in different capacities to end violence against women and to protect and advance women’s rights to equality” (para.1) sent an open letter taking a women’s equality stance in arguing for the Government of Canada to adopt the Nordic Model⁹⁵:

The use of the term “evidence-based” has become a smear used by those supporting the sex industry to suggest that those who oppose it in the name of women’s equality are arguing from a position of nothing more than anecdote or opinion. The list of signatories [of the letter promoting decriminalizing] implies that only those with formal credentials can “research” or interpret evidence. We reject both of these premises. Evidence about the harms of prostitution is gathered by academic researchers, survivors of prostitution and those working on the front-line. That evidence proves that prostitution is violence against women. (para. 3)

The letter addresses the points made by the GHSI letter, and argues for legislation based upon a framework of women’s equality, rather than harm reduction and regulation of prostitution. “Any new approach to prostitution must be set in a women’s equality framework and reflect the fact that equality for women is a fundamental principle of Canadian law, enshrined in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms...*” (para.6). This letter is signed by 800 people, including front-line workers, feminist activists, academics, activists, health professionals and researchers.

⁹⁵ Open letter calls for Nordic approach to prostitution in Canada (April 23, 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.straight.com/news/632301/open-letter-calls-nordic-approach-prostitution-canada>

The Government of Canada is at present dominated by right-wing conservatives and tends toward a “law and order” agenda. The accusation from agents such as the writers of the GHSI letter is that feminist abolitionists are the same as right-wing state agents. However, research and writing that presents the arguments of abolitionists shows strong opposition to a law-and-order approach. I hope that the research and analysis presented in this dissertation makes the distinctions clear.

Final Reflections

It is tempting to romanticize the work of women in the anti-violence arm of the women’s liberation movement. Even when we talk to each other as allies we may make women’s situation in the contemporary moment sound better, more hopeful than we think it is. But it may not be such a bad thing to believe that, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, women’s lives will improve, that slavery will end, that one day, we will achieve an egalitarian society—that eventually no woman will be forced to “choose” to fellate a stranger so that she can make the rent that month, or stick a needle in her arm so she won’t have to feel the pain of her anger and grief and loneliness.

During the course of my studies, I have often had occasion to talk to people about the topic of my research. When people ask me what I’m studying, they often assume I am promoting harm reduction—one woman of my acquaintance said, almost in apology, and almost ready for an argument, “I was a front line worker for many years, and I’m not a fan of harm reduction”. She was relieved to hear that neither was I.

At a coffee shop one sunny morning, I found myself standing beside a woman who had the job at the inner city drop-in centre that I got after she left. I think her politics are terrible, and she thinks the same of mine. We have a somewhat adversarial (but oh-so-polite relationship). I

don't know why *she* wanted to know about my research—but I told her. I gave her the “I'm not getting in an elevator with you⁹⁶” really short version and ended by saying that harm reduction is harmful. She said to me, “We don't agree about anything do we?”

We agreed about *that*.

Just the other night, I was at a meeting, and a fellow asked me what I was working on. When I tried to describe it in brief he asked, “Is it about the sex workers who were killed by Pickton?”

“Well...kind of” I said, and told him it was more about the women who work in transition houses and rape crisis centres what they knew, because they had been shut out of the Pickton inquiry, and other public forums.

“Ah,” he said, feigning understanding, “do they think it should be legalized, then?”

I said, “Not exactly,” and described the idea of decriminalizing the women and the other sellers in prostitution, to which he answered,

“Like Amsterdam?”

I kind of sighed, reminded myself to be patient and said, “No. More like Sweden”. He hadn't heard of the Nordic model, and when I told him about it, he brightened right up.

“That's more like it!” he said happily.

Then the meeting started.

That's how a lot of my conversations go with people. They want to know if I've talked to “sex workers”, or they might think I want to promote harm reduction and legalizing prostitution. Most of the time when I explain a little more fully people relax, like my buddy at the meeting,

⁹⁶ As opposed to the “elevator statement”, a prompt for describing your work in the time it takes to ride an elevator with someone.

and they say something like, “you know, I always kind of wondered if it was that good...” or “the way you explain it, that sounds reasonable, I thought abolitionists were, like, ‘throw ‘em all away!’”

These conversations have been both encouraging and, well, not. There is still a lot of misinformation circulating, and if one declares themselves an abolitionist, one opens herself up to being called “anti-sex” or “anti-choice”, “moralistic”, “anti-worker”, or a “whore-phobic bigot” and so on. I have a pretty easy time of it, over all. The women on the front lines, and the women I know who used to be in prostitution, they take the most heat. This dissertation, I hope, will serve as a contribution to an informed and principled public political conversation that moves us toward a feminist future wherein no man even *thinks* of buying sex.

Cornell West distinguishes hope from optimism:

Hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism adopts the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better. Yet we know that the evidence does not look good. The dominant tendencies of our day are unregulated global capitalism, racial balkanization, social breakdown and individual depression. Hope enacts the stance of the participant who actively struggles against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair. Only a new wave of vision, courage and hope can keep us sane - and preserve the decency and dignity requisite to revitalize our organizational energy for the work to be done. To live is to wrestle with despair yet never to allow despair to have the last word. (West, 1997, p. xii).

While I don’t want to be a prisoner at all, whether of hope or despair—I am game to live

hopeful, in public and in solidarity, determined to reverse the downward spiral of expectations and chances. We can do much better than provide condoms and sandwiches and thin reassurances of women's "agency". We are all living and acting together in a rambunctious, contentious, dialogic, messy and often conflicted world—not always comfortable—but living in hope and practicing freedom.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment and Consent Letter to Participants

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational Studies

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Principal Investigator: Dr. Shauna Butterwick, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Studies, UBC,.

Co-Investigator(s): Erin Graham, PhD Candidate, Department of Educational Studies, UBC.

Looking for Research Participants for a Study about Prostitution and Harm Reduction

Who are you?

You have worked for at least 5 years in an organization (or organizations) that provide social services to women.

You have thought about some of the policies of your work place, and what your work means in this time, and to the women you work with. You may have noticed some shifts in public policy, and in the accepted practices of your agency, or in women-serving agencies in your area. I hope you will be willing to explore some of these insights with me.

Who am I?

Erin Graham, PhD Candidate in Educational Studies, UBC
I want to hear about your work, your analysis of your work, and what changes you've noticed over the years.

I have worked myself in front-line services (rape crisis counsellor, transition house worker, mental health worker, outreach worker, advocate) for more than 20 years. In all that time, I noticed several researchers interested in the lived experiences of the people our agencies served,

but not very many who were interested in those of us who did the serving.

What is this study about?

There is a lot of talk about harm reduction, and about taking a “pragmatic, evidence-based” approach to numerous social problems and phenomena. The first thing that was addressed by harm reduction was public drug use. Vancouver is home to this country’s first needle exchange, and North America’s first safe injection site. Now many agencies advertise that they take a ‘harm reduction’ approach. This study is concerned with the ways in which front-line workers and activists like you understand these policy shifts, and how they affect the way your work.

We will talk about what you think about social services and political organizing (including, but not limited to your paid and/or volunteer work); harm reduction, and what you think of prostitution, and your agency’s responses or interventions on behalf of women in the prostitution industry, including those called harm reduction.

Your contributions will be confidential and you will be given opportunities to read and comment on transcripts of our conversations. We anticipate no harm to you during the course of this research, or as a result of the findings. *You can decline to participate at any time, and your contributions thus far will not be used in the study.* There will never be any cost to you to participate or to withdraw your participation. I promise.

This study will consist of one interview of no more than two hours in length, or two of no more than one hour each. It is possible that we may decide to invite you back for another interview to clarify or further explore some aspects of our previous conversations. In addition, you will be invited to participate in one or two focus groups, each of them no longer than three hours in length. These groups will be an opportunity to explore in more depth some common themes that emerged during the interviews, and to introduce participants to each other. We anticipate that people in these groups will respect the confidentiality of the other participants, and everyone will be reminded of this agreement at the beginning of the group sessions.

Study Procedures:

We will meet in a mutually agreeable location, ideally someplace quiet and private, such as your office or home. The questions you agree to answer are about your understandings and perceptions of your work and the mandate and policies of your workplace. I am chiefly interested in learning about your understanding and analysis of harm reduction in regard to prostitution and how you think harm reduction policy and practice has affected your work, especially with women who are engaged in prostitution. The interview will take approximately two hours of your time. It will be audio-taped (with permission) transcribed. If you wish, a copy of the tape and transcription will be provided to you.

Potential Risks:

There are no anticipated risks for participating in this interview, or in the focus groups.

Potential Benefits:

You may find the experience of talking about your background, experiences and ideas to be

helpful to your practice. The focus groups, in particular, may be opportunities to gain some support and strengthen alliances with other women who do work similar to yours.

Confidentiality:

All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Subjects will not be identified by name in the final dissertation or in any reports of the completed study. The data records will be kept on a memory stick and a portable hard drive and kept in a secure location, accessible only to Erin. In addition, no other research participants (of the larger project) will have access to this material.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Shauna Butterwick, and/or Erin Graham at

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to you in any way.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Printed name of subject _____



Study about Harm Reduction and Prostitution

Are You—

- 1. A front-line service provider, advocate or activist?**
- 2. A woman working in a women-serving organization for at least 5 years?**
- 3. Interested in talking about your experiences and perceptions?**

This study may be interesting to you.

What is harm reduction?

What do you think of taking a harm reduction approach to women in prostitution?

What changes in both policy and practice have you noticed over the years?

What would you like your work to do?

**If these questions appeal to you, and you want to know more,
please call Erin Graham, PhD Candidate, at**

All information is completely confidential.

This research is approved by the UBC Research Ethics Board

Appendix C: Harm Reduction and Prostitution Interview Schedule

Background : Please tell me about yourself, and your history in the work you do, and in your current job.

Describe a bit about your background, where did you grow up, what did your parents do, what brought you to this work, who or what inspired or galvanized you.

Practices and Approaches (personally and agency mission statement):

What are some of the overall goals of your present workplace?

Please describe the ways (tactics) your workplace uses to reach these goals.

What are your goals for your work within this workplace?

What do you do at this agency?

One way to think about this is to describe what you did yesterday and over the past week, what do you have planned for the rest of today, or this week.

Workplace funding sources, criteria, protocols and statistic collection: Do you know how your workplace is funded? Can you talk to me about some of the funding sources for this workplace? Do you have to provide some form of statistics or demonstrate certain standards? If so, what kinds of statistics you are required to provide and how you gather them.

Possible expanding questions: Please tell me how your workplace establishes and standards of work and criteria of evaluation. To whom are you accountable, and to whom do you report (peers, administrator, management team, board of directors, other?). What kind of training and evaluation processes does your workplace provide?

Thoughts about prostitution:

Do you know of women engaged in prostitution who use contact your work? Can you tell me, in a general way, what you know about reasons or ways they entered prostitution?

Again, in a general way, what are some of the challenges these women face that may be particular to women in prostitution?

Workplace or Agency policies and practices regarding prostitution:

Does your agency/workplace have policies specifically for what to do with/for women in prostitution?

What are those policies and what do you think of them?

Do you refer to them in your work, are they helpful?

What are some issues facing women in prostitution that are common among other women you serve who may not be engaged in prostitution?

What are some issues that you think of as unique to women in prostitution?

Other Agencies/Services and/or Allied organizations:

Do you, in your work, organize actions or otherwise share work with other women's groups?

Are you aware of other agencies in Vancouver that provide services specific to women in prostitution, and does your agency, or do you yourself, help women to access those services?

Is there a formal relationship between your agency and others?

Thoughts about harm reduction, including the policies of the agency for which they work:

Now I would like to talk about harm reduction. Harm reduction began as a pragmatic approach to problems related to public use of illegal drugs. Recently, it has become a favoured approach to other social problems including prostitution.

What are some tactics you can think of that might be called 'harm reduction'?

Does your agency practice it and if so, how and to what purpose?

What do you know of other agencies and their application of harm reduction?

What kinds of strategies can you think of that could be called 'harm reduction' in relation to women in street prostitution?

What do you think of these; do they help to meet the overall aims of the work done by your organization?

Appreciations and Suggestions for change:

Thinking of some of the reasons you chose this work, at this workplace, can you describe what success looks like to you in relation to:

your job

the women you work with

women who come here for help

women who work here.

other workers/allies in other groups/agencies

If we haven't explored this in the previous question, please tell me how you might achieve and measure this success?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix D: Table Two Pivot Affiant Demographic

Age/race	Age of entry	Drug or alcohol use	Foster home/education	Childhood abuse
34/Aboriginal	19	Pot, then crack from age 31	7-12 homes	Not recorded (nr)
55/Aboriginal	Nr	Crack	NR	Nr
54/nr	20	Heroin (19)	NR	Nr
53/White	19-21	Speed	NR	Yes
36/Aboriginal	Teenager	Crack, heroin alcohol	NR	Nr
31/White	14	NR	Nr	Nr
26/Aboriginal	20(+/-) (bf turned her out)	NR	NR	NR
48/NR	20 or so	NR	NR/MA UBC	NR
60/Aboriginal	20 or less	Alcohol (stated as caused by prostitution)	NR	NR
Adult/NR	Few weeks ago ("lowest thing to do")	Cocaine (clean 2 yrs)	Psych diagnosis/gr. 12	NR
35/nr	15	NR	Nr	Nr
45/Aboriginal	13	Drink/occasionally drugs	Ran away at 13	NR
51/White	15	Heroin (now methadone)	NR	NR
44	Recent	NR	NR	NR
22/Aboriginal	12 or 13	NR	NR	NR
29/Aboriginal	17	NR	NR	NR
41/Aboriginal	18	Heroin, cocaine, t's & r's	MR	MR
38/Aboriginal	16	NR	NR	NR
40/Aboriginal	13	Heroin	NR	Nr
40/Aboriginal	20 (short time) again at 38	Alcohol & crack	NR	Yes, 10yrs old
43/nr	36 (coke addiction named as cause)	Cocaine	NR	Nr
Nr/nr	12	Nr	NR	Nr
40/nr	30	Nr	NR	Nr
35/White/Francophone	14	Yes, not stated	NR	Nr
42/Aboriginal	40	Cocaine/marijuana	NR	Nr
31/Aboriginal	20	Cocaine	NR	Nr
47/Black/Mixed	39 (coerced by boyfriend)	Heroin	NR	Nr

Age/Race	Age of Entry	Drug/alcohol use	Foster home/education	Child sexual abuse?
Nr/Aboriginal	13	Crack/alcohol	NR	Nr
31/nr	Nr	Cocaine	NR	Nr
29/1/2 black,1/2 white	14	Methadone/crack	Ran away from home (age unknown)	Nr
36/Aboriginal	17	Heroin/crack	NR	Nr
46/Aboriginal	21	Crack/clean now	NR	Nr
40/nr	39	Alcohol/marijuana	NR	Nr
47/Aboriginal	20's	Alcohol/heroin	NR	Nr
27/Aboriginal	13	Nr	NR	Nr
51/Aboriginal	16	Drugs/alcohol	NR	Nr
42/Aboriginal	13	Nr	NR	Nr
29/Aboriginal	13	Heroin	NR	Nr
23/Aboriginal	13-17	Nr	NR	Nr
43/nr	28	Nr	Nr	Nr
46/nr	38 (daughter died in dtes)	Drugs/alcohol	Nr	Nr
48/nr	41	Heroin then crack (began prostitution when addicted to crack)	Nr	Nr
50/White	17	25 yrs clean from drugs/alcohol	Nr	Nr
38/White	17	Nr	Nr	Nr
39/Aboriginal	27	Nr	Nr	Nr
45/White	15	Heroin now methadone	Runaway @ 15	Nr
32/Aboriginal	11	Yes (drug not specified)	Nr	Nr
41/Aboriginal	14	Nr	Nr	Nr
41/Aboriginal	14	Nr	Nr	Nr
29/nr	23	Yes	Foster home age 3-adult	Yes foster family male
44/nr	Nr/coincided with drug use	Cocaine/heroin	Nr	Nr
47/Aboriginal	20	Heroin at 20	Nr	Nr
43/nr	Late teens	Nr	Nr	Nr
40/blacked out	14	Occasional drug use	Nr	Nr
30/Aboriginal	14	Nr	Nr	Nr
40s/Aboriginal	16	Yes begin @ 16	Nr	1 st baby @ 14 yrs of age
45/Aboriginal	30	Nr	Nr	Nr
38/White	33	8 balls/crack	Nr	Nr
41/nr	17	Nr	Nr	Nr

Age/race	Age of entry	Drug or alcohol use	Foster home/education	Childhood abuse
37/nr	20	Yes	Nr	Nr
46/White	Nr	Nr	Nr	Nr
40/Aboriginal	19	Crack 2 yrs	Grade 8	Nr
34/nr	30	Nr	Grade 12	Nr (but respondent said prostitution "prevents sex crimes")
40/Aboriginal	19	Crack for 2 yrs	Grade 8	Nr
48/ Aboriginal	20	Alcohol/heroin	Grade 11	Nr/"pretty well every girl has a story of some john who tried to kill them."
Nr/nr (Aboriginal?)	For ten years	Heroin/coke	Nr	Nr
37/White	20	Heroin/coke/alcohol(began at 12 yrs. Old)	Nearly finished Gr. 12	Nr (male boss assaulted her tried to get her to have sex w/him, then fired her)
43/Aboriginal	28	Yes ("because of work")	nr	Nr
50/White	17	Bi-polar/psych meds "there's a sex trade in Mental health, too"	Nr	Nr