



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (University of Manitoba, 2001)

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**“Blurred Lines: Triangular Power Relations between Managers, Sex Workers,  
and Clients in Canadian Escort and Massage Businesses”**

Social Dimensions of Health

Monday August 24, 2015

10:00AM

University Centre Building

Room A207a

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Cecilia Benoit, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Mikeal Jansson, Department of Sociology, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

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Prof. Vicky Bungay, School of Nursing, University of British Columbia

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Dr. Karen Kobayashi, Department of Sociology, UVic

## Abstract

While the sale of sex services remains legal in Canada, 2014 changes to the Criminal Code makes the management of a Canadian escort agency or massage parlour essentially illegal. Managers must operate in nearly invisible fashion and without standard civil resources and protections; including, access to credit, management training and industry associations, as well as protection from the police and courts. Weitzer (2005) argues that sex work management is one of the most invisible parts of the sex industry and stresses the need for research that investigates all three sides of the sex work employment triangle: sex workers, clients, *and* managers. This dissertation addresses this lacuna with data drawn from a sample of 43 managers of escort agency and massage parlour businesses in five Canadian cities. Qualitative findings reveal what managers do, how they cope, and the extent to which they hold or use power to influence change, taking into account the effect of both stigma and the legal environment and interactions with municipal by-law officials and police. This dissertation seeks to: 1) examine how managers negotiate triangular power relations between sex workers and their clients in escort and massage businesses in the research sites; 2) investigate how the socio-cultural environment affects managers' everyday lives and how they experience conflict/aggression in the workplace; and 3) determine how the legal environment (municipal by-laws and policing) shapes these negotiations. Results show that managers of sex workers have much in common with managers of other frontline services; however the primary factor distinguishing their approach to management is that they operate under the threat of arrest and stigma. Results also show that conflict in the service exchange often starts between sex workers and clients and managers are responsible for intervening. However, because managers operate under a constant fear of the law, their ability to intervene effectively is somewhat hampered. In spite of this, however, managers who have had *direct* interaction with police and municipal by-law officers have a more positive view than those who have not. This is significant because while there is a general fear of officials and punitive censure of sex work-related activities, the reality is that these officials tend to treat these managers fairly. Hakim's (2010) theory of erotic labour is examined in the context of managers' hiring practices in order to understand the capital sex workers and other workers in sexualized service industries draw upon. This research makes a novel contribution to the sociology of service work literature, and is especially important and relevant in the context of recent legal changes where commercial sex enterprises and third party material benefit within these enterprises are now illegal in Canada due to the recent passing of Bill C-36.