



The other side of the equation: Researching male customers of street sex workers

Two year SSHRC Insight Development Grant

Research Team: Susan Strega (Social Work), Helga Hallgrimsdottir (Sociology) and Steven Garlick (Sociology)

Over the last decade in Canada, street sex work has received considerable media attention through extensive coverage of workers disappeared and murdered in locations such as Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. A considerable body of Canadian research about street sex work and workers has developed alongside media accounts and public inquiries. Within this extensive documentation, there has been little attention to men who buy sex from workers. Our intention in this project is to address this substantive gap by investigating the purchasing side of the street sex work market. This project will develop and pilot a qualitative research approach for uncovering the complex social relations and discourses of men who buy sex from street sex workers. The approach we decide on will be used to hear men's narrative accounts of their involvement as customers of street sex workers. Our analysis will contribute to two theoretical areas: the social construction and performance of masculinity; and how relationships between these men and the sex workers they patronize shape the experiences and trajectories of workers. The project addresses three principal research questions:

- What are optimal approaches for conducting in-depth qualitative research with men who buy sex from street sex workers?
- How does data from street sex work customers contribute to theorizing connections between sex work and masculinities?
- How do men who buy sex from street sex workers characterize and understand their relationships with street sex workers?

The findings of this project will be used to develop a theoretical framework and methodological guidelines for a large-scale project investigating male customers of street sex workers.