



# Misrepresentation & Silence: Gendered Sex Work Discourse in the London Free Press

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*In December 2014, despite the Supreme Court of Canada finding Canada's prostitution laws unconstitutional, the Conservative government passed a bill criminalizing the buying of sex and the advertisement of sex for sale. Sex work has a long history as a hot-button topic, and it continues to remain newsworthy throughout the country. In some contexts, this public discussion has privileged certain lobbyists and so-called advocates, disregarding or distorting the voices of sex workers themselves. This territory is starkly heteronormative, reinforcing gendered stereotypes and naturalizing certain types of heterosexual behaviour while ignoring a spectrum of other realities. This paper analyzes articles about sex work published in 2013 in the London Free Press, a politically centre-right newspaper printed in a mid-sized Canadian city, in order to investigate depictions of sex work in the local-regional context of London, Ontario (Canada). Exposing a Foucauldian rarefaction of discourse, this analysis works to unveil ideological underpinnings, fleshing out a distorted gendered discourse.*

## Introduction

In December 2014, despite the Supreme Court of Canada finding Canada's prostitution laws unconstitutional, the Conservative government passed a bill criminalizing the buying of sex and the advertisement of sex for sale. Sex work has a long history as a hot-button topic and remains newsworthy throughout the country. Public discourse privileges certain lobbyists and so-called advocates, ignoring or distorting the voices of sex workers themselves. This discussion of sex work is starkly heteronormative, reinforcing gendered stereotypes and naturalizing certain types of heterosexual behaviour while ignoring a spectrum of other realities. This ultimately illustrates what Foucault (1981) termed the "rarefaction of discourse" (p. 49). According to Strega, Janzen, Morgan, Brown, Thomas, and Carriere (2014), "what appears as an infinite array of discursive possibilities is actually a repeated and repackaged absence of choices restricted by

ideologically determined notions of acceptability and appropriateness" (p. 13). Although media accounts of sex work proliferate, the range of coverage is rarely divergent; this paper conversely provides an analysis of articles about sex work in the local-regional context of London, Ontario (Canada) that critiques how sex workers and sex work are portrayed as gendered. As Britzman (1998) states, "exploring how the experiences of those deemed subaltern are imagined means taking a second look at the status quo and rethinking how its maintenance produces the ground of estrangements and new forms of ignorance" (p. 88).

## Contextualization

In London, Ontario, a mid-sized Canadian city with a population of approximately 370,000 (Orchard, Farr, Macphail, Wender, & Young, 2012), the recognition that big-city male sex

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workers receive from organizations like Maggie's Toronto and HUSTLE Vancouver is missing. London has programmes directed toward female workers such as Safe Space London, London Abused Women's Centre, London Police Persons at Risk program, and My Sister's Place, to name a few. Many studies show that the size and complexity of a community are related to community decision-making, news source diversity, and the community's orientation to local versus non-local news (e.g., Donohue, Olien, & Tichenor, 1989; DuBick, 1978; Hindman, Littlefield, Preston, & Neumann 1999; Martinson & Hindman, 2005). Martinson and Hindman (2005) also point out that larger communities tend to be more varied with regard to which members have authority and influence. Newspaper content can reflect this bias in the degree of specialization in coverage of specific issues. Community-based groups that seek to advocate change may be more successful if they gain support from sources of power and influence within the community (Finnegan, Hertog, Murray, Pirie & Viswanath, 1995; Martinson & Hindman, 2005). As such, the lack of news media discourse (at all levels) covering male sex work (MSW) may shadow male sex workers or make them invisible in a community.

As the world is not made up of metropolises, and male sex work does not occur exclusively in large urban centers, concentrating on smaller cities can counter a common study bias towards large cities and their newspapers. Bell and Jayne (2009) suggest that urban research has been "patchy and dominated by studies of selected big cities in the Global North" (p. 683). Privileging large cities limits the generalizability of theories and impedes conceptualization of the unique positionalities of smaller cities and the populations within (in this case, sex workers). Looking at London's only daily newspaper, (The) London Free Press (The LFP), allows scrutiny of the dialectical positionality of journalism and news media in order to question the dynamics of gendered discourse, identity, and power contextually, and to

bear witness to a situated representation of sex work, thereby opening a space for nuanced comparative study.

As per Taylor (2001), discourse is the specification of knowledge and truths that are "socially constructed and produced by effects of power" (p. 275). Discourses function as rules designating "what [and who] is and what [and who] is not" (Taylor, 2001, p. 317). This positioning is found in the ways identity politics are constrained or enabled, in the ways material resources are made available or forbidden, in the relationships that can be established with institutions and social agents, and at the frontiers of exclusion or inclusion within a particular context (Johnson & Martinez, 2013). As such, the different narratives that emerge in various contexts can be reassembled into a wider discourse (see Bauder, 2008) about sex work that contains a coherent message showing "how power is discursively and materially produced" (Hines, 2006, p. 52). Huckin (2002) notes that "communication involves more than just the linguistic markers used to encode it – that often what is not said or written can be as important, if not more so, than what is" (p. 348). Heavy silence in the media serves to reinforce stereotypes and can be used to justify marginalization by preventing any conceptualization of sexuality and MSW from surfacing, regardless of whether it comes from the direct subjective and embodied experiences of sex workers themselves or from the opinions of so-called experts. In a sociocultural matrix where gender and sexuality intersect, heterosexuality is the normative default. As such, "gender expectations...are often figured as binary and complementary: men and women form discrete pairs of opposites appropriately attracted to each other, each displaying the appropriate gender characteristics of its half" (Alexander, 2005, p. 50). When people transgress this binary, for example through gay sexuality or women of power buying sex from men, the gendered dichotomy of normative heterosexuality is brought into question. Silence surrounding the

heterogeneity of a phenomenon such as sex work thus constitutes an atmosphere in which normativity persists. By refraining from openly discussing taboo subjects such as MSW, especially when there is an opportunity to do so, norms are reinforced, regardless of whether this silence is noticed by the reader (Huckin, 2002). An interpretive reading can expose this productive or affective silence by identifying those articles in *The LFP* that make assumptions (gendered or otherwise), are presented in emotive terms, or come from biased sources.

The intersection of (at least) two marginalities, prostitution and homosexuality, as well as the difficulty in studying clandestine communities, has contributed to the restricted accessibility of knowledge regarding such groups (Crofts, 2014). Sex work encompasses activities related to the exchange of intimate services for some sort of remuneration. This can include, but is not limited to, escorting, street-based sex work, massage, prostitution, dance, pornography, professional domination and submission, fetish, and internet or phone sex work (Durisin, Love, & van der Meulen, 2013). When attention to MSW does occur, the focus tends to follow paradigms established in female sex work (FSW) research. Such studies concentrate predominantly on street-based work in capital or large cities, examining “sexual health, life histories and methods of entry into the sex industry” (Whowell & Gaffney, 2009, p. 99), and largely disregarding other forms of sex work as well as how the law regulates and influences individuals’ lived experiences. In the news, prostitution is particularly susceptible to these distortions, due to its covert nature alongside the marginalization of workers that rarifies an embodied point of view. In areas where people have limited contact with marginalized groups, it is through the media that many members of the public gain any knowledge of prostitution.

Journalism exists to provide an increased understanding of our lives and “position(s) in the world” (Richardson, 2007, p. 7). It is for this

reason that Habermas (1999[1962]) envisages the risks to democratic society posed by mass media in the absence of rigorous critique (see Cukier, Ngwenyama, Bauer, & Middleton, 2009). Deception in the communicative process may occur consciously or unconsciously on the part of the reporter (Habermas, 1984[1981]). Harris (1989) observes that “we write not as isolated individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say” (p. 11). Newspapers expect both contributors and journalists to advance a specific stance. According to Pujolar (2007), “contributors are normally expected to construct a “personal” position or point of view. Journalists are supposed to take a stance of professional reporting that... is normally expected to present “events” in a descriptive way... rather than arguments” (p. 127-128). The media’s stance, then, has the power to assign value, to position social actors to calibrate alignment between stance-takers, and to invoke presupposed systems of sociocultural value (DuBois, 2007).

The national phenomenon of small papers being acquired by large media conglomerates alters what news stories readers receive (Fullerton & Doyle, 2007). In that light, *The LFP* may actually reflect a broader segment of media discourse; however, with Quebecor Media’s ownership and former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney as a member of the board of directors, the paper is known to be politically conservative (Worldpress.org). This may also be a consequence of its subject matter being tailored to London, generally considered a conservative city (Orchard et al., 2012) despite the variability of the city’s population, which may skew the content included in and excluded from the newspaper.

Since discourse is in part the product of social forces, the paper’s editor may also impact not only what is published, but also what authors write and submit for publication. To this end, the intent of editors and journalists should be

analysed accordingly (Huckin, 2002, p. 367). Shulist (2012) argues that an editor's work balances tensions between a need to project the corporate identity of the larger organization they represent and an ethical obligation to inform the public objectively. Journalists themselves "are supposed to take a stance...that formally evacuates issues of personal judgement and perspective" (Pujolar, 2007, p. 128). The Society of Professional Journalism's Code of Ethics (1996) clearly illustrates this point:

The duty of the journalist is to seek truth and provide a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. (para. 1)

Shulist (2012) elaborates, "within this professional stance, a journalist makes ideological statements through the construction of a target audience" (p. 273). Since London only has one for-purchase daily newspaper with a relatively restricted circulation, it would be purely speculative to quantify the influence this publication has on the greater community's conceptualizations of sex work. Nevertheless, in light of a readership that may have limited real-life exposure to sex work and sex workers, The LFP has to habitually convince its audience that prostitution is newsworthy. As such, The LFP constructs itself as a trustworthy authority in order to sell more papers. With a weekly average daily circulation of approximately 70,000 (Canadian Circulation Audit Board, 2012) there is little room to lose readership. Journalists make choices regarding how to communicate news stories, selecting methods and models that appear to be the most promising means to achieve their desired ends. Analysis of these decisions is necessary to understand their deeper meanings and likely interpretations.

## Methodology

Through an analysis of articles published in The LFP, I examine the relationship between text and its likely meaning(s) in relation to contextual factors by "exploring and exposing the roles that discourse plays in reproducing...social inequalities" (Richardson, 2007, p. 6). Accomplishing this requires scrutiny of the form and function of the text, as well as of the way it relates to its production and consumption and to the wider society in which it takes place (Fairclough, 1995; Richardson, 2007).

It should be noted that there are limits to any analysis that assumes every aspect of textual content to be the result of choices of description or inclusion and exclusion (Richardson, 2007), as researchers cannot record all contextual conditions and meanings produced in any text or discourse. Secondly, my analysis lacks inter-coder reliability due to time and resource constraints. Since I am the sole researcher, the results are highly subjective (see Macnamara, 2011; Tinsley & Weiss, 1975). To counter the heavy reliance on my own readings and interpretations, I triangulate between quantitative (systematic coding) and qualitative methods (extrapolating meaning).

As this is my singular interpretation, for the sake of time and manageability, I restricted the sample to a one-year period. The 2013 date restriction was chosen because it corresponded with the Supreme Court of Canada's decision to strike down Canada's prostitution laws in Canada (AG v Bedford 2013 SCC 72. With a hearing on June 13 and judgement passed December 20, the government was given one year to rewrite the laws, and sex work was debated particularly heavily during this period (Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). I compiled a sample of 56 articles containing representations of sex workers, clients, and prostitution by searching the bodies and titles of articles using the Factiva search program. Attempting to cover the regionally-relevant range of language used to describe types of sex work, I

used 13 query terms, including alternative syntactic formations: sex -work, -trade, -sell, -service, prostitution, hooker, erotic or exotic massage or dancer, escort, stripper, hustler, and call girl. Following O’Keeffe’s (2006) framework for analysing media discourse and discussion of a corpus-based approach, I used NVivo corpus software and employed systematic identification with coding sheets for analysis. This allowed me to find “a sense of patterns or frequencies of meaning” (Richardson, 2007, p. 21).

My methodology is heavily informed by Aspevig’s (2011) analysis of British news media and identification of stereotypes of prostitution in what he deems Western culture. He uses an operationalized model of Habermas’ (1984[1981]) universal pragmatics and the identification of validity claims in media discourses (Aspevig, 2011). Habermas (1984[1981]) responds partially to Austin’s (1962) and Searl’s (1969) speech act theory (which states that individuals do things with words in order to effect change or to describe something about the world), redesigning it to incorporate the effects of intersubjective action over speech. By linking meaning with the acceptability of speech acts, Habermas (1984[1981]) moves outside of the semantics of representation, where the truth of facts and norms is presupposed, to the social intelligibility of interaction (intersubjectivity). Since communication rests upon a non-egoistic understanding of the world, interactants in communicative acts must assume that statements are valid. Validity claims connote a richer social idea: that a statement merits the reader’s acceptance because it is justified or true in some sense. This can vary according to dialogical context (Habermas, 1984[1981]). By critically evaluating these claims, we can glimpse assemblages of micro- and macro-processes, and dialogical discourse:

Validity claims can help to discern whether a communicative act should be considered true, sincere, legitimate and clear. By

systematically analysing speech elements against the validity claims, researchers can uncover and analyse evidence of communication’s distortions. (Cukier et al., 2009, p. 179)

These validity claims involve the context-sensitive acceptability of a speech act. A truth claim must withstand the examination of consistency between moral discourses that is presupposed heuristically by the characterizations within. Characterizations present in the chosen articles helped me to calculate the validity of truth claims by comparing them against dominant discursive arguments. These characterizations were: age, gender, class, health including addictions and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), traits, and relationships. As for predominant arguments in local discourse, I identified six:

- (a) Harm: sex workers are portrayed as victims of violence, damaged, or desperate or reluctant participants in the sex trade.
- (b) Kinky / Taboo: prostitution is illicit fun but relatively harmless.
- (c) Public health risk: promiscuity contributes to the spread of disease. This claim is associated with the argument of prostitution as public nuisance.
- (d) Public nuisance: prostitution brings ills to communities, such as increased crime and drugs, decreased property values, and the harassment of women not involved in the sex trade. As a nuisance, street prostitution is a moral problem that must be suppressed to protect neighbourhoods and public health.
- (e) Scandal: the humiliation of public figures when associated with prostitutes. These include accusations and denials, as well as exposure of sexual habits or preferences that typically lead to resignation, disciplinary

action, or legal repercussions. This implies failure to live up to societal norms, values, and expectations regarding one's own behaviour, but also that of sex work in general.

(f) Multiple: a variety of views were expressed (e.g., articles that evaluate the pros and cons of changing sex work laws).

Aspevig (2011) uses the term 'sincerity' to represent assumed congruity between what is said and what is meant (thus referring to non-deceptive claims). This contrasts with highly connotative language, which brings associated meanings to statements and thereby affects interpretations by reinforcing or undermining more overt claims. Manipulating (consciously or unconsciously) those with whom one communicates can be a strategic way to systematically elicit agreement or consensus. I assessed the sincerity of articles based on the presence of different nomenclatures used to describe those who participate in prostitution. I noted the number of times nomenclature labelling sex work, criminality terminology, and location or culture appeared, because "the repetition of certain terms is considered to have an influential effect on readers, reinforcing the connotations of the term" (Aspevig, 2011, p. 91).

Finally, I assessed the legitimacy or representational adequacy of the articles. Some individuals and ideas are framed as representational of others (constituting a false consensus). In terms of the use of balanced sources, "in journalism, a well-established norm requires journalists to ensure balance in their reporting; hence an indicator of legitimacy in public discourse is the degree of representation and silencing of dissenting voices" (Van Dijk, 1987, p. 7; see also Aspevig, 2011; Cukier et al., 2009). This point is relevant considering the ongoing exclusion of sex workers as sources in mainstream media, the reference to court

documents and police sources, and the effect of these on public perception and policy. Iggers (1999) explains that "newspaper discourse has tended to be shaped by those elements in society that are powerful enough and organized enough to generate press materials, hold press conferences, and otherwise garner media attention" (p. 102). This heavy bias towards coverage of public bodies, the pronouncements of politicians, and the establishment is a direct result of the need for authoritative sources in objective reporting (Iggers, 1999; Richardson, 2007). With this in mind, I noted which sources were cited and whether they represented a balanced view of reported events. Sources included statistics, experts (including advocates), law and order (police and courts), politicians, current and former sex workers, relations of clients, clients themselves, and the "Public" (society-at-large or individuals).

## Results

### *Truth Claims*

The most common argument, found in 56% of the articles, portrays sex work as harmful. This approach was primarily observed in articles that represent prostitution as exploitative for women, either inherently and/or because of associated conditions. One commentator claims, candidly, that these women "were going to die" (Richmond, 2013, Sept. 30). Such statements suggest that sex workers lack the free will to enter or leave prostitution, and are particularly numerous in articles mentioning arrests for human trafficking. In one opinion piece, the author claims that all sex workers have "a history of some kind of abuse. They have either been badly mistreated and are fleeing a dangerous situation, or an abusive past has led them to self-medicate with some type of substance" (Couture, 2013, July 20). Articles asserting that prostitutes need to be rescued also exemplify this claim, suggesting that "women are so traumatized they need their own shelter where they can have access to... 24/7... specialized

services” (Richmond, 2013, July 15).

Eighteen percent of the articles portray prostitution as part of a public scandal associated with a politician or celebrity. In articles discussing the scandals surrounding Toronto mayor Rob Ford in November 2013, there is an increase in intertextual discourse referring to past news stories. These articles claim to reveal “lurid details about booze, drugs, sexual misconduct and suspected prostitutes in the troubled mayor’s office” (Pazzano, 2013, Nov. 14). This is thought provoking, as fraternizing with sex workers is not actually a crime and does not necessarily belong in a summary of Ford’s misconduct. Public statements made by the father of the alleged and accused prostitute, such as “she’s a good girl” (Doucette, 2013, Nov. 15), serve to further perpetuate the stigma associated with prostitution. Only a few articles reproduce the historical association of sex work as an unhygienic vector of disease. This paradigm originated with the rise of medicalization in the 19th century (e.g., “typhoid Mary”) and regained popularity in the early 1990s with HIV (“typhoid Harrys”) (Bimbi, 2007, p. 26). In reference to a case against a stripper who infected her husband with HIV, a strip club owner is quoted as stating that “he chose to have unprotected sex with her [knowing] she was [a prostitute] from Thailand” (Pazzano, 2013, Nov. 5).

Certain current (at the time) events shaped the truth claims of these articles; claims of prostitution as part of larger scandals clearly draw on these events. Discourses used to disparage an individual surround the so-called illicit nature of prostitution and public figures’ assumed oppression of female sex workers. An increase in the discourse of oppression also corresponds to discussions of human trafficking arrests (Richmond & Anderson, 2013), the search for trafficking suspects (Anonymous, 2013), and attacks on street level workers on July 9 in the city (Anderson, 2013, July 13). By July 15 and July 26 there was commentary on potential municipal sex

trade plans (which include a “bad-john-list”) in response to these crimes.

### *Characterizations*

Of the 56 articles analyzed, 16 make no direct mention of clients, while 33 typify clients as men. Sixty-two percent of articles only refer to female sex workers. Strikingly, women and girls accounted for 80% of gendered terminology, with male clients accounting for an additional six percent (86% of gender-codes overall).

In contrast to the large number of sex workers characterized as impoverished, clients are generally said to be well off or are not described according to financial means at all. Twenty-five percent of the 39 articles that mention clients involve individuals who are in a position of financial power. These executives, billionaires, politicians, and sports stars are generally characterized by their wealth. Thirteen percent of characterizations of sex workers are based on class, connecting them with poverty and making references to sex workers as homeless, on the streets, and in need of shelter and money. In the media, and thus in popular imagination, the part of London known as East of Adelaide (Street) and the people who live there are often described using tropes of decay, social failure, and crime, primarily referring to the presence of illicit drug and sex trade markets, police headquarters, and drug treatment centres in the area (Orchard et al., 2012). Out of 35 references to sex work in the greater London area, 37% mention the East of Adelaide area. The marginalization of this neighbourhood and its people overlaps with tropes of poverty. Although “things are a lot better than they used to be” (Pedro, 2013, August 27), due to efforts to gentrify the larger neighbourhood, this stigma still exists. As one individual writes, “take a look at the individuals walking the streets of East London and you’ll quickly conclude that this is not the millionaire’s club” (Couture, 2013, July 20). Here The LFP constructs the (white, hetero, cis-male) middle class as “a social norm from which every other group or class is ultimately a

kind of deviation” (Ehrenreich, 1990, p. 3; see also Richardson, 2007).

Sex workers are often stigmatized as addicts using a large array of drugs. Client drug use is also referenced, yet the term “addiction” is never used to characterize these individuals. While about one third of articles refer to drug use, 43% describe sex workers as addicts, and 13% (of articles that include clients) characterize clients as drug or substance users. Thirty-eight percent of articles discuss issues surrounding addiction and substance abuse. When a specific drug is mentioned, articles most frequently reference the abuse of cocaine, prescription drugs, marijuana, methamphetamine, and alcohol by sex workers, and of cocaine, alcohol, and marijuana by clients. A possible explanation for the large number of references to cocaine and alcohol use by clients is coverage of the Rob Ford scandal, in which the media utilized his drug use (associated with its own stigma) combined with his procurement of prostitutes to further vilify him. When they are not portrayed as criminals, depictions of clients are framed by moral judgments with an overall pattern of traits related to stress or neediness. This is especially evident in an article about a politician refusing to leave his position after being caught trying to hire a prostitute; the story describes him as “lonely,” “gaunt,” “exhausted,” “devastated,” “disgraced,” and “soul searching” (McDermott, 2013, July 23).

The overall trope of victimization is one area in which unwarranted generalizations are frequently made in The LFP corpus. Ninety-five percent of articles discussing age reference individuals deemed to be “young” sex workers (occasionally quantified as being in their twenties) overlapping with references to minors (those under 16 or 18, depending on the article). Overall, the most common characterizations of sex workers represent them as females under the age of 18 who are “addicts in despair.” Clients are characterized as males, aged 30 to 39 years old, middle-aged, or between the ages of 59 and 76,

with problematic relationships. These representations are consistent with the dominant discursive claim that prostitution constitutes the harm of vulnerable young women and girls by older and powerful men.

#### *Sincerity Claims*

Taking a closer look at the levels of metaphor and associative terms used, I assess whether they aim to elicit emotional responses or truly attempt to communicate truths about prostitution. Connotative terms carry indirect associations and thereby undermine the sincerity of statements. Therefore, I look at the use of specific nomenclature in depictions of sex workers and clients. To reiterate the conclusions of Aspevig (2011), the repetition of certain words is considered to have an influential effect on readers, reinforcing any connotations of these terms.

#### *Nomenclature for Sex Workers*

The most commonly used term for sex workers is “prostitute,” representing 43% of all nomenclature. “Sex work” is second at 28%. In articles that present prostitution as harmful, “sex worker” comprised approximately 32%, while “prostitute” appeared in 35%. When sex work is presented as scandal, 48% use the term “prostitute”, compared to less than 15% utilizing “sex work.” It is important to note that “prostitute” comprises 96% of terms in public nuisance articles, and 58% in those relating to health risks.

The attempt to humanize sex workers is especially prevalent in one opinion piece titled “London sex workers are human beings like anyone else” (Couture, 2013, July 20). Herein the author makes a case for sex workers’ multidimensionality, or the fact that “they are people. They are daughters, sons, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters; they have people who love them, just like anyone else” (Couture, 2013, July 20). Not only is this one of the rare examples where both women and men, and even trans\* (an umbrella term representing a spectrum of non-cisgender) individuals are



included in the phenomenon of sex work, but by humanizing sex workers as “just like anyone else,” and by using the less stigmatic term “sex workers,” the author also legitimizes individuals’ agency in selling sex (Couture, 2013, July 20).

For journalist Randy Richmond, “sex work/trade” accounts for three quarters of nomenclature, while Jennifer O’Brien is more evenly split between “prostitute” and “sex work.” Interestingly, only two journalists use “sex trade/work” as the sole term in their articles, while five do so with “prostitution.” Looking at the sources referenced in relation to nomenclature, clients and police use “prostitute” half of the time, while former or current sex workers, advocates, lawyers, and medical professionals use “sex work/trade.”

#### *Nomenclature for Clients*

The most common term for those who purchase sex is “john,” comprising 47% of all references. “Client” accounts for 31%. The terms used for those who buy sexual services also have associative connotations. Not only does the word “john” ignore women who buy sex, it is also used to index (e.g., Silverstein, 2003) negative stereotypes and actions that lead to further implications. Seventy-two percent of usages of the term occur in the context of truth claims arguing that prostitution is harmful. In its title alone, the article “Every john is a bad john...” (Richmond, 2013, July 26) illustrates the negative associations with this word, indexing a vilification of men who pay for sex. In the article, an advocate says that “there is no such thing as a good john, so every john is a bad john. Johns buy women. They commodify women...it minimizes the risk every woman has, because all johns are bad” (Richmond, 2013, July 26). The use of repetition here is significant to emphasize the exploitive power a “john” has over “women.” Other evocative terms frame johns as “violent,” “nasty,” “HIV positive/dirty,” or “criminal.” The term “client” has associations with business; however, it is used almost equally in arguments emphasizing harm and scandal. Perhaps the term

is not as business-neutral as one might expect. Further, the act of buying sex, and being caught doing so, is portrayed as humiliating. The term “defendant” comes directly from court documents and is only used in arguments of scandal. In judicial nomenclature a defendant is someone who is charged with a crime; articles suggesting that those who purchase sex must defend themselves index negative connotations. Sourced by journalists, this term is taken from police reports where a perceived crime has occurred but the individual has not been taken into custody.

#### *Framings*

Framing is a schema of understanding, an assemblage of narratives and stereotypes that people rely on to comprehend an event or concept (Goffman, 1974). Framings of sex workers echo the main claims of articles. Similar to Aspevig’s (2011) findings for The Guardian and The Daily Mail, the most common framing of sex workers in The LFP is as unhealthy victims. This is particularly evident in articles using hyperbolic statements, such as, “they have travelled so far down one road they might not ever turn around” (Richmond, 2013, Sept. 29). This sensationalism is supported by descriptions of prostitution as “so clearly wrong that there is very little that a person can say” (Lazzarino, 2013, July 19), and “the trauma these women experience is equal to the trauma of Vietnam war vets” (Richmond, 2013, July 15). Equating trauma experienced by street sex workers to the trauma of Vietnam War vets not only requires the reader to have an interdiscursive knowledge of the atrocities of this war, but also alludes to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). On one hand, identifying PTSD requires diagnosis by a mental health practitioner, and cannot be based solely on the convictions of advocates or reporters. PTSD was finally legitimized and added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III in 1980, with this process being predominately influenced by the experiences and conditions of American veterans of the Vietnam War (see Jones, 2013). By connecting these two concepts, authors aim for

readers to consider the issue of sex work as similar in seriousness to war; some authors create a more direct connection by referencing a war on prostitution itself, with advocates and police acting as freedom fighters to try to prevent casualties of war (read: female sex workers). Sensationalism is particularly present in articles that deal with the trafficking, abuse, or prostitution of children. These articles emphasise the brutishness of these crimes, with repeated use of affective phrases and terms such as “seedy underworld” (Crittenden, 2013, April 20), “spectre of a serial predator..., looming..., eerily similar attacks” (Richmond, 2013, July 11), “demimonde” (Schiefer, 2013, November 2) and “horrors” (McKim, 2013, November 20). While these phrases are perhaps fitting for trafficking or murders, their repeated use alongside framings of buying and selling of sexual services evokes voyeuristic associations that sensationalize and detract from the communication of direct details of incidents. Use of comparisons, such as “trying to cure cancer with a band aid” (Richmond, 2013, July 26), and “like an alcoholic in denial” (Dickinson, 2013, June 7), shape our understanding of prostitution as an extraordinary phenomenon, and perhaps allow readers to abandon reason and any sense of proportion.

The ways in which clients are framed also parallel the main claims of articles. Portrayal of clients as aggressors or criminals corresponds with claims that prostitution constitutes victimization and exploitation. As aggressors, their actions are described as “controlling,” “in positions of power,” “darkly warning,” “threatening,” and “using force and torture,” and are connected to fears for sex worker safety (Kinsella, 2013, Nov. 18). The frame of criminality overlaps onto the humiliation of public figures, as these scandals become known after the “accused” is “caught” by police. Similarly, for sex workers, these frames reference police reports, court documents, investigations, “john sweeps,” and so on.

### *Legitimacy*

According to Aspevig (2011), “legitimacy is achieved with a balanced selection of sources and experts” (p. 155). This aspect of the analysis assesses who is cited as an authoritative source within articles and whether multiple sides of an issue are addressed. Sources were counted by type rather than on an individual basis, even if one or more sources representative of a categorical group were cited. This approach was chosen in order to directly compare the use of different types of sources by a number of articles.

In the articles analyzed, sex workers are rarely quoted directly as authorities. Clients are cited almost one third as often, perhaps because many of the more notable clients relevant to this sample of articles are public figures who are more accessible to journalists for interviews. If sex workers are referenced at all, it is mostly by association with another individual, such as a friend, family member, boss, co-worker, or representative speaking from a position of authority or speaking for others. One contributor’s opinion piece is a prime example of this: “I’ve known many sex workers who claim they...do what they do as a choice. To that I say, yes and no...there is only one reason they do it... If they didn’t need the money, they wouldn’t be making that ‘choice’” (Couture, 2013, July 20).

Of all local advocates, one individual is referenced in about 40% more articles than the next leading referent, and two articles explicitly portray her opinions. A public and self-described “abolitionist,” she:

Believes prostitution in its very essence is violence against women and should be abolished... Abolitionists believe legalizing prostitution creates an industry that makes it easier for traffickers to target vulnerable women. (O’Brien, 2013, Dec. 27)

When sourced, her use of first person plural pronouns alludes to her quotes as representative of

all abolitionists. Some examples of this include, “*We* want the appeal to win. *We* are all abolitionists. *We* support the decriminalization of women but criminalization of men who choose to buy women” (O’Brien, 2013, June 13, emphasis added), and “*We* fought as women’s advocates” (O’Brien, 2013, Dec. 27, emphasis added). In the first quote, the use of anaphora (repeated use of the word “we”) conveys emphasis and unity, and appeals to the emotions of the audience. The journalist citing her also collectivizes her opinions: “She and other ‘abolitionists’ were disappointed in the court decision” (O’Brien, 2013, June 13). By quoting other advocates or politicians and aligning their viewpoints alongside specifically labelled abolitionist views, while ignoring or not labelling these individuals’ views under any specific ideological spectrum of their own, reporters suggest these sources are taking an abolitionist stance. This gives abolitionist views more clout and infers the potential to influence government policies and laws. Labelling one individual as representative of the abolition movement and of other abolitionists presumes that his or her views are congruent with others’ and that the abolition movement is a coherent and unified project.

## Discussion

According to Aspevig (2011), “objectivity and validity are communicative ideals in journalism; unfounded statements violate truth claims” (p. 125). The studied articles’ claims regarding prostitution make scant reference to empirical data. If reporters adhere to conventional journalistic ethics and report faithfully, then it is quite likely that their reports unwittingly reproduce manipulative silences emanating from source documents or so-called experts (Huckin, 2002, p. 365). Aspevig (2011) continues, “the prevalence of certain claims...during certain [months] may [indeed] be linked to concurrent events, however their disproportionately high

occurrence may have the result of suggesting the truths are more generally applicable than is warranted” (p. 126). This makes sense in light of concurrent events within my sample. If FSWs are specifically involved or targeted in a crime or scandal, then there is no need to mention sex workers outside of those specific instances. However, during subsequent debates, ignoring the variability of sex workers constitutes an injustice.

Although some researchers, advocates, and politicians may argue that the lack of representation of MSWs lies solely with their numerical representation, since there are fewer males than females engaged in sex work, Smith (2012) reminds us that this is based on flawed logic:

The focus on women tends to be justified...on the grounds that the “vast majority” of sex workers are female...yet it has never been interrogated empirically. (Rather, the words “vast majority” are uttered and... all male and transgender sex workers... disappear). (p. 590)

Both the material included in and excluded from media reports can help to legitimate existing power structures in society, including pre-existing patriarchal paradigms of the need to save so-called destitute women, as well as blatant ignorance and subjugation of that which is deemed non-normative (e.g., female clients, non-heterosexuality). According to Matthews (2008), cultural “myths represent exaggerations of partial accounts; they have a rational core representing larger ideologies. Unfortunately, these myths distort the richness of reality by substituting half-truths, platitudes and slogans for explanations” (p.21).

Ideology is important because it works to constrain the interpretation of incoming issues and the formation of opinions. This is an important point in light of the varied spaces and places sex

workers inhabit, as well as their own variable characteristics (e.g., gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.):

The hegemony of essentialist discourses means that, for example, the existence of [a victimizing cis female prostitution] is taken for granted... [This] is not questioned – they are assumed to exist. [Non-female and Non-victimized sex workers] are assumed not to exist; they are assumed to “actually” be something else. (Nordmarken, 2014, p. 40)

Once an ideologically legitimate form of sexuality has been defined, other forms are declared to be rare, perverted, deviant, sinful, degenerate, or unfathomable. When male sex work takes place between men, it does so within a world and a context that resists feminist scrutiny of patriarchal exploitation, the theoretical structure commonly used to explain the imposition of sexuality, or even sexual slavery, upon women and children (Dorais, 2005). Silvey (2006; see also Bondi, Avis, Bingley, Davidson, Duffy, Einagel, Green, Johnston, Lilley, Listerborn, Marshy, McEwan, O'Connor, Rose, Vivat & Wood 2002; McDowell & Sharp, 1999; Rose, 1993) elaborates that “these spatial relationships determine whose bodies belong where, how different groups’ subjective experiences of spatial relations vary according to context and what sorts of exclusionary and disciplining techniques are applied to specific bodies” (p. 70).

Weitzer (2010) further explores this discourse: on one side, some abolitionists (e.g., Farley, 2004; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004) “claim that extremely high percentages... of prostitutes are assaulted, raped, and otherwise victimized” (p. 19). This is contrary to the findings of other researchers, whose victimization figures are typically lower (e.g., Cunningham & Shah, 2014; Seib, Debattista, Fischer, Dunne & Najman, 2009; Whittaker & Hart, 1996). It is impossible to definitively document the frequency or

seriousness of victimization in any population, let alone for those on-the-margins, due to serious methodological flaws. On a fundamental level, there is no way of knowing all parameters of either the sex worker or customer populations (e.g., how does one designate services offered that do not necessarily involve sex or money?). There are also issues regarding access to and cooperation of those involved in sexual commerce (e.g., what does it mean for generalizability when individuals exercise the right to stay silent or don’t agree with social definitions?). Due in part to these inherent indeterminacies, selection biases are rampant: “The most desperate segment of the sex work population are those who are most frequently or seriously victimized and may be especially likely to contact certain service providers” (Weitzer, 2010, p. 19). One article in *The LFP* reflects this bias; the author describes a doctor who “opens [her] heart to sex workers” (Richmond, 2013, September) working with a police sergeant dealing with those involved in “dangerous, unhealthy” (Richmond, 2013, Sept. 29) street-level trade.

Corrigan and Sayer (1985) call this moral regulation: a project of normalizing, rendering natural, or taking for granted what are ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order. Richardson (2007) sees this as the “fallacy of composition” (p. 136), when conclusions are drawn about a whole group based on the features of some of its members. Butler (1990) argues that production of the subject as fiction functions to ground the legitimacy of the producer. In effect the production and then concealment of the notion of a subject is constructed in order to invoke that “discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates [the producers’] regulatory hegemony” (p. 2). Centrally, partly state-funded abolitionist agencies attempt to give unitary and unifying expression to what are in reality multifaceted and differential historical experiences of various groups (e.g., sex workers,

youth, men-who-have-sex-with-men) within society, denying their particularity (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985).

Further ideological assertions manifest through the use of specific nomenclature. According to Dorais (2005),

The two terms “sex work” and “prostitute” signify a recurring ideological opposition in the... [media] and public mind. While some argue that the term “sex worker” trivializes a serious problem, others are equally adamant that the term “prostitute” should be avoided because of the load of negative connotations it carries. (p. 97)

An interview in *The LFP* with one local community advocate also addresses this point:

One side in the debate says some women make a choice to join the sex trade. The other side says no woman ever wants to become a prostitute and it can't be considered a trade, or work... If it is supposed to be apolitical, get rid of the title. (Richmond, 2013, July 26)

Lizzie Smith (2013) articulates the argument further:

The term prostitute does not simply mean a person who sells her or his sexual labor (although rarely used to describe men in sex work), but brings with it layers of knowledge about her worth, drug status, childhood, integrity, personal hygiene and sexual health... When media refers to a woman as a prostitute...it is not done in isolation, but in the context of this complex history. (para. 7)

When authors' use of nomenclature is compared with their dominant arguments, articles in *The LFP* seem to follow this trend. The results of this comparison suggest that using the term “sex worker” is more humanizing when claiming that prostitution is harmful to “real” human beings

versus being part of a public fiasco. By using the term “sex work,” women can be portrayed as subjects with agency, who are then victims of harmful exploitation (usually at the hands of men), thereby doubly removing this assigned agency. In contrast, the use of “prostitute” has the effect of diminishing the humanity of sex workers by portraying them as “dirty” sexual objects, making any relationship with them (platonic or otherwise) pejorative. That the term “prostitute” was used more frequently than “sex worker” may show a failure by *The LFP* as a whole to accurately represent and understand the implications of using specific lexicon. However, this may also be evidence of stance-taking by specific journalists. Du Bois (2007) claims that dialogicality can be seen wherever

a stance-taker's words derive from, and further engage with, the words of those who have spoken before—whether immediately...or more remotely along the horizons of language and prior text as projected by the community of discourse. (p. 140)

This resonates with Richardson (2007), who explains, “words convey the imprint of society and of value judgments in particular, they convey connoted as well as denoted meanings” (p. 47). Journalists' choices to use certain terms, or to reference or interview certain individuals, impact the way in which people, events, narratives, and discourse are viewed. Broader social meanings are indexed by the use of specific terms in specific discursive contexts. Through indirect indexicality (Ochs, 1990), the terms used to identify those who buy and sell sex have deeper meanings that allude to larger discursive constructions of sexuality, gender, and normative behaviours. Hunt (2002) describes prostitution as “an organizing metaphor in which various social issues are moralized” (p. 2). As such, when selectively defined, these terms have different implications for the governing measures that are deemed necessary to address the socially constructed problem of “prostitution.” In

general, it seems that the terms “prostitute,” “escort,” and “stripper,” as well as “client,” are used relatively more often in reference to scandal, while “sex worker” (humanizing) is used in reference to exploitation by a “john” (stigmatic).

The concept of moral panic, represented by media topics construed to suggest great danger to society, functions to obscure real sources and locations of danger (Kaye, 2003). Moral panic derives power from stereotyping key participants involved in some sort of drama, frequently relying upon depictions of worst-case scenarios to generate sympathy and to mobilize public support. Relevant incidents create feedback loops, with journalists going to social service agencies for information, propagating the standpoints of the agencies, and thereby providing a context for state action. Consequent state action further validates the newsworthiness of the story, adding energy to the movement generated (Brock, 1998; Kaye, 2003). Elite groups or institutions (e.g., civil servants, scholars, professionals, politicians, etc.) control access to different forms of text and talk. Journalists seek to interview these sources, ask their opinions, and thus introduce them as major news actors. Yet, journalists and editors can choose how to use, change, or quote those they have interviewed, thereby altering meanings. Either way, interactants (e.g., journalists, interviewees) do have options to draw on in terms of what they will say and how they will say it. These options are based on existing discursive resources that become institutionalized, unquestioned, and authoritatively used over time (Hall, 1997; O’Keefe, 2006). Interactants may control discourse by setting or selecting the time and place of interviews, participants, audiences, possible speech acts, agendas, topics, choice of language, style, and strategies of politeness or deference. They may essentially determine who may write and say what, to whom and about whom, in which way and in what circumstance (Van Dijk, 1995).

Representations and representatives of “law and order” are prevalent in The LFP articles. As such, sources’ framing of sex work-related activities results from or is influenced by their societal roles: preventing crimes and upholding or creating laws. Alongside government-sponsored advocates, the public sector replicates social benevolence that is attentive to certain “needs” rather than “rights.” This humanitarianism holds firmly to the concept of *parens patriae*, the state as parent, and maintains that sex workers are people so oppressed they cannot consent to any type of behaviour. Murchison (2013) points out that, following this logic of parental responsibility, liberal informers argue it is not necessary to extend rights to those engaging in so-called criminal behaviours, or to those who are not able to make choices using their own (presumed) free will. This view demeans those who maintain that they choose and enjoy working in the sex industry, and questions embodied subjectivity. Essentially, this re/victimizes and dehumanizes sex workers by implying that they are in fact being degraded, or have no agency. In the context of *parens patriae* and women, patriarchy is (re)produced, not only shaping “women’s culturally specific sense of sex subjectivity” but also acting “as a powerful determinant of women’s potential for adaptation or resistance in the face of change” (McDowell & Sharp, 1997, p. 32).

Individuals recruited to comment on these issues presumably have a familiarity with (female) prostitution, presence, and recognisability in the community, and have most likely been contacted previously for similar articles. Some of these experts are involved in the abolitionist movement, or are only mandated to deal with specific issues (such as alleviating the abuse of women or helping street sex workers). These experts are in a position by virtue of their knowledge-base to mislead journalists (consciously or unconsciously) and the public through a strategic use of framing (Huckin, 2002, p. 365). Doing so would presumably be to their own advantage, since

either they or their organization would offer many of the services portrayed as necessary to ending the so-called exploitation of all FSWs. A news report of this type could help generate more funding and could therefore be viewed as propaganda.

As stance is realized by a linguistic act that is at the same time a social act, any stance tends to be shaped by its framing (DuBois, 2007). An abolitionist stance may index an identity for a particular advocate; however, the label abolitionist alone is interdiscursive (see Courtine, 1981; Fairclough, 2003) in that it indexes the 19th century anti-slavery movement. On one hand, the abolitionist movement helped first-wave feminists realize the injustices they personally had to face: that because they were women, they were isolated from positions of decision-making. Instead, they did the behind-the-scenes work for the movement while men made decisions and received recognition (DuBois, 1978). On the other hand, the abolition of slavery of African Americans was a push for equality in law, self-ownership, and freedom of body and mind. Prostitution abolitionists have appropriated this discourse (the anti-slavery discourse is explicit in three 2013 articles in *The LFP*) in an effort to “liberate women from the evils of men” (Anonymous, 2013, Oct. 15). Its use coincides with frames, characterizations, and tropes of victimization and exploitation, trauma, violence and abuse, addiction, poverty, and frailty.

Ong’s (2006) discussion of neoliberal biosecurity is useful for exploring the interdiscursive subcontext of the abolition of (cis-female) prostitution. Discourses of the enslaved or at-risk body are not proposed in the name of the common humanity of women. This abolitionist viewpoint does not invoke human rights for the legal status of sex workers, it appeals to basic sociocultural values about the moral worthiness of certain female bodies. Only by invoking sociocultural understanding and compassion, not abstract rights discourse, can the moral legitimacy of women’s

biosecurity be persuasive to larger society. In the course of their work, some sex workers are exposed to violence, drugs, and life-threatening diseases and have little or no access to health services, yet a disproportionate amount of articles proliferate that discourse. Some feminists ask why prostitutes are treated as mindless working machines and not as human beings. Some abolitionists insist on the government’s moral obligation to stop trafficking (used synonymously with prostitution) of women and children by men who buy sex from women. This language avoids actually demanding workers’ rights, instead stressing moral redemption and advantages to public health, as women should not be objectified and enslaved. After all, FSWs “ha[ve] families and [a]re children and mothers” (O’Brien & Richmond, 2013, Feb. 9). By focusing on the at-risk body, confronted with potential violence, specific abolitionist arguments can elicit greater moral sympathy and can compel society to reify the construction of a vulnerable female body.

### Implications

It is important to remain sceptical of claims that play into patriarchal discourses of the weak female body (and the corresponding binary of the strong male body). Abolitionist activities, like all others, are situated within particular constellations of power and ethics, and interventions can actually generate new moral hierarchies or sustain older ones (Ong, 2006). For example, black feminists have long problematized the use of women and gender as homogenous categories reflecting the common essence of all women. Spelman (1988), states, “the description of what we have in common ‘as women’ has always been a description of white middle class women...to bring in ‘difference’ is to bring in women who aren’t white and middle class” (p. 4).

The hegemonic performance of (white, middle-class) gendered spaces is also implied, despite crime statistics suggesting that women in general

are more at risk at home and from men they know personally than from clients and professional pimps (see Sinha, 2013; Valentine, 1992). Are women then still encouraged “to perceive the private sphere of the home as a haven of safety and refuge and to associate the public world, where the behaviour of strangers is unpredictable, with male violence” (Valentine, 1992, p. 23)? Valentine (1992) states:

When away from the protection of others or the police, the media often imply that [a woman] was to a certain degree responsible for her own fate by putting herself at risk [by selling sex] and warn other women to avoid similar places and situations where they are vulnerable. Equally, however, the media does not suggest that [heterosexual] women who are abused by their [male] partners should not date or live with men. (p. 24)

The media rarely reports on the numerous sex work interactions that are uneventful or non-sexual, let alone mutual and positive. It thereby generates conceptions of the quantity of so-called crimes, but also creates impressions of the context of the selective cases it reports.

By perpetuating other discourses, the lives of sex workers (particularly those of almost completely neglected non-white non-cis female genders) are potentially impacted, as public discourse is integrated into or formed into schema, worldviews, models, and opinions that affect (in)action. Although these schemas represent a reader’s subjective understandings, they embody particular instances of socially shared knowledge and opinions of such things as misogyny or misandry, crime, and heteronormative sexuality (Van Dijk, 1995). In the area of social intervention, it is important to ask questions, such as which implicit values determine what is beneficial and for whom in the pursuit of community wellbeing. Where do criteria for defining problems and generating solutions come from?

Either way, we are faced with a paradox that Young (1995) outlines astutely, and which is worth repeating at length. Categorizing individuals into groups and

Acting as though these ascriptions say something significant about [a] person and [their] experience, capacities, and possibilities is [offensive] and oppressive. The only liberating approach is to think of and treat people as individuals... However, this... ideology... obscures oppression. Without conceptualizing [individuals] as a group in some sense, it is not possible to conceptualize oppression as a systematic, structured, institutional process... Either we blame the victims and say the disadvantaged [person’s] choices and capacities [(abilities)] render them less competitive, or we attribute their disadvantage to the attitudes of other individuals [(that is to say, men)]... In either case, structural and political ways to address and rectify... disadvantage are written out of the discourse... [leaving individuals to fend for themselves]. (Young, 1995, p. 192-193)

This reverberates with Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010), who state that “if someone’s social identity is understood as being fixed or essential within the person, it can validate and justify sex, racial, class, and other differences as being “natural,” which can ultimately reify the multiple systems of oppression” (p. 432).

Disregarding or even neglecting to include the genuine voice of different sex workers (and the matter of MSW) in stories of prostitution could be considered a manifestation of power over others. A balanced article consults sources expressing different or, ideally, diverse views (Aspevig, 2011). As marginal and (pseudo-) criminalized citizens, some sex workers (and clients) may not be willing to identify themselves. If the goal is to net many readers by being informative and all-encompassing, a responsible news outlet should



include marginalized voices, in further editorial pieces if not in an immediate article. Inclusion of the views of sex workers and/or clients (or representatives that do not skew their voices), and of people from all walks-of-life, is vital. This is fundamental not only for balance but also to explore the needs, or lack thereof, of sex workers.

## Conclusion

While some argue that sex work contributes to violence against women, and that decriminalization will only condone violence, this position fails to acknowledge the diverse experiences of people working within the sex industry (Dorais, 2005). Depending on social and political conjuncture in a delicate balance between public morals and public opinions, we must question a one-size-fits-all approach to laws, policies, and practices. With almost two thirds of The LFP articles showing unbalanced sourcing, distorted discourses about sex work are prevalent. Serughetti (2013) points out that “the depiction of males as violent and dangerous clients stems from their association with the most degrading and coercive expressions of the sex market” (p. 43), and this has played a major part in the stigmatization of sex work. Discourse in The LFP appears to fit with Valentine’s (1992) discussion on the Images of Danger and the gendered division of space:

Numerous content analysis studies of newspapers have shown that crimes against individuals such as rape and murder are exaggerated (see Smith, 1984; Graber 1980; Van Dijk, 1987) because they are easy to obtain, the human interest angle sells newspapers and they are a useful editing device. (p. 26)

The first step in challenging (mis)representations in public and political discourse (and in this case The LFP), in order to un-silence silenced voices,

is to recognize and illuminate those distortions. As Richardson (2007) states:

Journalism has social effects: through its power to shape issue agendas and public discourse, it can reinforce beliefs; it can shape people’s opinions not only of the world but also of their place and role in the world; or if not shape your opinions on a particular matter, it can at the very least influence what you have opinions on. (p. 13)

Habermas (1984[1981]) asserts that public opinion does not rule, but leads administrative power in particular directions. In most cities, regardless of size, there are few or no public or quasi-public services directed specifically at MSWs. In London, Ontario, there are none. Questioning opens a space that responds to calls (Barthes, 1972[1957]; Spivak, 1988) to challenge “the privileged audience to hear [and seek out] the subaltern without duplicating a hegemony which renders the marginalized speechless yet again” (Libin, 2003, p. 126). Therefore, it will be imperative in further studies to consider, and implement, ways to destabilize the discursive and physical spaces that are (re)produced in the gendered, heterosexual hegemony (Eves, 2004) seen to prevail in The LFP.

Advocates thus need to stimulate a coherent reflection on the ethics into which the public is drawn. Ong (2006) describes biowelfare as the “rights to life and bodily integrity, which have been called the first genre of human rights, the fundamental elements of individual rights” (p. 212). However, moral demands for the biowelfare of women are not antecedent to claims for full-fledged legal rights for all sex workers, hence the perpetual ignorance of non-FSWs and the dismissal of FSW (and others) who disagree with the dominant discourse. The public’s increasing responsiveness to trafficking may be influencing the call for more stringent policies on sex work. While sex workers, like all people, should not be subject to abuse, the state should not intervene in

sexual relations between fully consenting adults. Sanders (2009) explains, further, that “the view that abolition might be used as a sweeping method of controlling trafficking seems to illustrate some critics’ point that the awareness of trafficking has set off a crusade against prostitution in general” (p. 79).

It would seem that one way to deal with ignorance about MSW is to remain ignorant, and The LFP seems content to reproduce this silence. Perhaps it is not just The LFP, and MSW is not dealt with precisely because it questions the societal categorizations and spaces of gendered sexuality. Questioning the collapsing of sexual acts into identities and destabilising, de-homogenizing, and shattering the fictionalized nature of the normative is threatening to the sociopolitical order, Foucauldian regulatory networks of power that work to order productive individuals and populations (Halley, 1993; Puar, 2007). To illuminate such issues would raise questions of the “self” and what MSW represents to society, let alone to the gendered female and to the definition of prostitution in general. It would somehow bring the other on to the scene and this simply will not do:

Anything that cannot be classified in terms of lawful/unlawful is...a non-entity lying outside the borders of the system. The side effect of this invisibility is that it is threatening; it remains uncontainable and expansive, it feels colonising and noisy; thus, the system ends up marginalizing it. (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulous, 2004, p. 3-4)

According to Luhmann (1994), “silence is the mirror in which society comes to see that what is not said is not said” (p. 33). In other words, that which cannot be verbalised is not recognized because we do not know how to deal with it. This ignorance of what cannot be communicated is contained in silence and is therefore threatening. (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulous, 2004). It is not

just the invisibility of MSW (or the silencing of sex workers) that creates vulnerability for some workers, rather their invisibility in discourse perpetuates a cycle of “marginalization by dominant social institutions and ideologies” (McDowell & Sharp, 1999, p. 222); their invisibility is evidence of their marginalization.

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