

Introduction

When thinking about people who work as managers in the sex industry, many people may initially recall “pimps.” The figure of the pimp as a coercive, violent male has been distributed through films, literature, and the media for decades. Recent research suggests, however, is that most sex workers in all areas of sex work are independent of pimps and likely have never interacted with them (POWER, 2012). Although “pimps” are not as commonplace as some believe, there are third-parties involved in the sex industry, including managers, agency owners, security personnel, drivers, phone girls, booking agents, website operators, and other sex workers who perform third-party roles. While some misconceptions about sex work have been widely discussed in public forums, the role of management in the sex industry is still shrouded in myths that are often tied to stereotypes about gender, race, and sexuality. We have little existing systematic evidence about management in the sex industry. The lack of research, policy, or public conversation about management in the sex industry has made it an invisible and poorly understood subject (Weitzer, 2005).

Who are managers in the sex industry?

There is a range of labour arrangements in sex work. Some sex workers report few options and freedoms related to their work, while others report considerable freedoms and decision-making power. Some sex workers operate independently without management, while the work of others is managed in various ways. Little is known about the characteristics of managers in the sex industry and the situational and legal contexts that impact their interactions with sex workers and clients. Even less information exists on the skills they utilize in the performance of their work, their perceptions of their work, and the strategies they use to manage their own health and the health and safety of workers and clients. What we do know is that regardless of whether a person works at the street level or indoors, managers can play a pivotal role in the health, safety, and security of a sex workers’ workplace. As is the case in other worksites, managers can be sources of potential protection and support, or conversely, may be non-supportive and even exploitative (Sanders, 2005).

What do recent studies tell us about managers?

- Persons working in management roles in indoor and out-call establishments are often female.
- Persons working in management roles often have previous experience as sex workers or in other parts of the sex industry.
- Managers often place a high degree of value on issues of health and professionalism in the workplace. In her study of the organization of the sex industry in Britain, Teela Sanders found that massage parlour and sauna owners ran their businesses according to strict moral codes. According to Sanders, “complying with police gave sauna owners an opportunity to illustrate their own moral codes and values and to move away from the stigma and sleaze attached to running a sex business” (2005, p. 112).
- Managers influence the practices and norms of sex work environments, which in turn influences health and safety for workers and clients.
- Managers are often involved in the day-to-day operations and can influence the lives of those they supervise through screening the people purchasing sex, setting service norms and fees,

maintaining the worksite, and instating security measures such as drivers, alarm systems, and protocols for communication.

- Like sex workers and clients, managers in the sex industry are often viewed by the public in a negative light, as the stigma of the sex industry transmits to various parties – a process referred to as stigma by association.

What we want to learn about managers:

- While owners and managers of sex work establishments deal with the same challenges and organizational issues present in other small-scale service businesses, additional strains may be posed by the stigma and legal sanctions which surround sex work. We want to understand the workplace from management perspectives.
- Who are managers and what are their workplace roles, responsibilities, and experiences?
- What factors influence relationships and interactions between managers, clients, and workers?
- What techniques do managers use to prevent and address violence? Are there resources to address violence that would be useful to sex work managers but are unavailable for some reason?
- How do managers perceive the legal context of their work, and what are their experiences and opinions regarding law enforcement, immigration, municipal officials, and other regulators.

Why does this study matter?

- Due to their positions of authority and control, managers are strategically located in the sex industry to play a role in preventing victimization of sex workers (and clients). We aim to shed light on the operations of managers in order to strengthen the safety of sex workers, clients, and others involved in the sex industry?
- Research that examines the complexity of manager, sex worker, and client relationships, and how these are shaped by legal environments will help us understand how to promote health and safety in the sex industry.

Emerging Knowledge on Managers in the Sex Industry*:

In the first study of its kind in Canada, in 2011-2012 researchers from the University of Ottawa, UQAM and University of New Brunswick researched third parties in the sex industry in Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes to gather insight into management practices in the sex industry. This SSHRC-funded research project includes 47 interviews with sex workers who work/worked for third parties. Seventy-five face-to-face in-depth interviews with third parties were also conducted; third parties in the study represented various work contexts, including the street, strip clubs, escort agencies, massage parlours, and brothels. Forty-six of the third parties (61%) were women, and over half of the third parties were current (28) or former (12) sex workers.

The researchers found a range of relationships between third parties and sex workers – some third parties hire workers (agency model), some work with sex workers (associate model), and others are hired by sex workers (contractor model). The report based on this research is

available here on our website. The report makes a much needed contribution to our understanding of the management of the Canadian sex industry.