

My experience in social research

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Abstract

Sociologists and, more specifically, sex work researchers comprise a distinct subculture in the scientific research community. While there is now a large and growing literature on sex work, there is little research on the community of researchers who produce it. What researchers produce can have a significant impact on policy which in turn can affect occupational health and safety in the industry, therefore it is imperative that we understand how knowledge is produced in this sub-discipline. This study is a participant observation case study that centers around the experience of the author and considers the research and publishing ecosystem through the lens of a neophyte researcher who is only tangentially connected to the university system. This study considers whether it is practically possible for those either directly or indirectly involved in the sex industry to publish high quality research, and what limitations are imposed on researchers when producing this research. Key findings are that it is possible in a limited way to work independently of the university system, and that some publishers are willing to publish authors who need to protect their privacy. However, there are significant financial, ethical, and social barriers that must be overcome when producing and publishing peer-reviewed work.

Keywords: sociology, research methods, sex work, academic publishing

Introduction

In the literature that discusses the social dynamics of social research, the concept of the “outsider” researcher has been proposed to describe the experiences of non-majority researchers (Ray, 2019; Strong, 2019; Treitler, 2019). Treitler (2019) describes how women and people of color are underrepresented and underfunded in the sociological research community. This subtle discrimination extends to institutions as well where Strong (2019) describes the phenomenon of name tag screening at conferences in which participants who are not part of prominent institutions can be at a disadvantage at networking events. Strong describes how researchers based in community colleges can also be at a disadvantage when attempting to fund research given the “hierarchies in grant making” in sociology, and research outside peer-reviewed journals may not be given the attention it deserves.

What then can we say about researchers who are not part of any research institution? Is there room for research accepted based solely on its own merits? My experience shows that, while difficult, it is theoretically possible for individuals outside of colleges and universities to write and publish social research.

Researchers who focus on the sex industry are potentially at a double disadvantage because of the historical stigma surrounding the industry (R. Bowen & Bungay, 2016; Hallgrímsdóttir et al., 2008; Weitzer, 2018). Any researcher, even if they are not directly involved either as a worker, client, or third party, may not want to be associated by name with the research they produce. The need for privacy can create additional barriers to publishing when publishers insist on authors using their legal name.

An additional burden on outsider researchers can be a lack of support and mentoring. Early stage researchers such as PhD students depend on institutional contacts to learn their

discipline and academic culture. Furthermore, social connections between faculty departments can have a significant effect on the career path of researchers (Burriss, 2004). Lastly, researchers who have the opportunity to collaborate, publish more (Akbaritabar et al., 2018).

In this article, I discuss my experience participating in research about the sex industry and provide evidence that the “caste” system described by Burriss (2004) is alive and well in Canadian sex work research. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles I encountered, I was successful in publishing in a peer reviewed journal (Kennedy, 2022, 2024a, 2024b) but have no plans to publish other work for reasons discussed below. I hope that interested readers who would like to engage in social research will find this article a useful guide to publishing that research.

My involvement in sex industry research

My first introduction to the sex work research community in Canada occurred in 2007 when I started collecting classified ads from the Craigslist.com “erotic services” (ers) section. Described in previous research (Chan et al., 2019; Reynolds, 2021), Craigslist.com was one of the first venues where sex workers could advertise for free online. My research contact, John Lowman¹ (Vancouver Sun, 2022), a Professor at Simon Fraser University at the time, was enthusiastic about the information that this could provide on a hitherto underrepresented population of sex workers. However, he did not have the time to be directly involved and connected me with another instructor at SFU who was interested in exploring what we could learn from this growing collection of advertising data.

Naively, I thought that they would prioritize working on this as, at the time, little had been written about this population of sex workers. Furthermore, the advertising data added to

¹ See also <https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/John-Lowman-76213974> for a recent listing of research.

data that John Lowman had collected in the 1980s on the prevalence of street prostitution in Vancouver². However, after about two years with no indication that any work was planned, I stopped the pilot data collection of Craigslist.

In the meantime, the Bedford decision (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford*, 2013; Pivot Legal Society, 2013) prompted the Canadian government to replace the existing criminal code provisions against prostitution with a new legal framework (Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, 2014 (PCEPA) ; Perrin, 2014) that made the purchase of sexual services illegal for the first time in Canada. The recommendations of sex work activists (Pivot Legal Society, 2006), many Canadian researchers (Lazarus, 2022), and the courts (Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, 2014 (PCEPA)) were ignored. In addition, it severely hampered sex workers' ability to advertise online. At the same time, my contact had gotten funding to do a larger study of online advertising as part of ongoing research to explore health and safety issues experienced by off-street sex workers. In November 2014, I resumed downloading data for them to use, this time from a larger group of websites recommended by their advisors. This continued for a year. At the end of the year, I provided my collaborator with the collected data and waited to see what would come of it. Once again this was to be in vain as nothing has been published even years after data collection had ceased.

I found out later that I was never included on the ethics proposal for this study. This seemed odd given that, while publicly available data does not require ethics approval to gather and analyze, as one of the main people handling this data I should have been included as part of the study team. While likely inadvertent, it turned out that this pattern of marginalization would repeat itself.

² Unfortunately, this pioneering research appears to not be available online, but may still be available in hard copy at the Vancouver Public Library.

By 2021 I had two years of data from Vancouver Craigslist ers (March 2007 to March 2009) and two years of data from six sites including Backpage (November 2014 to December 2016). The latter data set was to become the basis for the Silent Majority paper (Kennedy, 2022) and both datasets were used in a second paper that did quantitative linguistic analysis on the usage of the word “no” by advertisers (Kennedy, 2024b).

I asked my research contact, who had not published anything at the time, whether they would be willing to collaborate on an article. Initially they were supportive, providing references and reading initial drafts of the paper. However, the atmosphere of cooperation evaporated after I sent an initial draft for review to PLOS ONE. When I shared the response from the PLOS ONE reviewers with my collaborator, I was told that they “would have rejected it” and I was strongly discouraged from pursuing publication. Other reactions from researchers connected to this former collaborator have also been negative. These included being told that I was “not authorized” to write on this topic, or declining to meet with a group, not organized by me, that wanted to discuss the research.

Why did I get this response? I had been in a support role gathering data for use by other researchers initially, and apparently I had crossed an invisible boundary by attempting to publish my own work. Originally, I had little understanding of how research works with professional researchers. Even when researchers receive high annual salaries as tenured faculty, they typically compete for grants and money appears to have been the gating condition for any research to go forward in this case. In the American Sociological Association (ASA) ethics code (American Sociological Association, 2018) researchers are expected to only publish research they are qualified to do, a provision notably absent in the Canadian Sociological Association ethics code (CSA-SCS Policy, Ethics, and Professional Concerns Subcommittee, 2018). However, there can

be significant barriers to acquire official qualifications for many marginalized groups (Treitler, 2019). Furthermore, there are research areas where in reality nobody is qualified. The latter is to be expected in scientific research. When grant money is involved, as was the case here, there is a tacit understanding between the funder and the grant recipients that the recipients are capable of completing the funded work. This understanding could be violated when the original grant recipients had not succeeded in publishing but someone else, using the same data, had.

The rejection of the Silent Majority paper by some researchers may also be attributed to its critical view of Canadian research which, while providing important data, routinely excludes many workers and likely over-represents specific groups in the industry. It should be noted that this rejection has not been universal. In fact, decriminalization activists see this archival research as pivotal evidence showing that sex work is not a marginal phenomenon in Canadian society and that Canadian sex workers by and large dictate their involvement in the industry.

It took over 15 years from the time of the preliminary Craigslist study to publication. Should it have taken this long? I think not. This 15 year delay means that there are still many unanswered questions. However, it may be too late to answer them as, with the advent of large-scale efforts to identify sex workers online (Dimas et al., 2022), it has become increasingly difficult to automatically collect the ad data needed for this type of research. While preventing the identification of online advertisers is laudable as a step towards protecting their privacy, these changes will severely hamper archival research in the future. Researchers who wish to gain a truly representative understanding of the sex industry will have to evolve methods that are effective in this changing environment.

What to know when you do social research

The following sections consider a series of topics that are relevant for anyone attempting to publish research on the sex industry. While I mainly consider these from my experience, these topics likely affect all researchers involved in social research.

Privacy can be tricky

I am not using my legal name for the purposes of publication. Why is this the case? There could be many reasons. Certainly anyone with a direct connection with the industry, especially those directly targeted by the law in Canada, would be ill-advised to use their legal identity when publishing. Sex workers, who can legally practice in Canada, may also want to hide their identity. For example, many sex workers have other non-sex work employment (R. R. Bowen, 2015; Cunningham & Kendall, 2017; Pitcher, 2015) and indicating that they are sex workers in published research could jeopardize that employment or negatively impact loved ones. In Canada, the PCEPA is worded in such a way that anyone with any financial links with a sex worker could be charged under the law. However, even someone with no direct connection to the industry might have difficulty explaining to employers, friends, or family why they are involved in such research.

How did journals react? Through the course of over two years (2021-2024) I have been in contact with four journals and one preprint site. The journals were: PLOS ONE, the Journal of Sex Research, Sexuality & Culture, and Culture, Health & Sexuality. The preprint site was SocArXiv (part of OSF³). The preprint site was the easiest to publish with, requiring only moderation. However, they were the first to insist that I had to create an “identity” as an author,

³ <https://osf.io/>

as they refused to publish under the organizational name Sex Work Population Project⁴. Further complications are the requirement by academic journals for an ORCID ID⁵, used to uniquely identify research authors, and “institutional context”. These present potential financial and logistical hurdles for researchers who are not already part of an existing academic institution.

The response from peer-reviewed journals ranged from outright rejection from the Journal of Sex Research, despite the fact they had already published related research (Moorman & Harrison, 2016; Nur E. Makbul & Hale, 2023), through rejecting the use of a pseudonym by Sexuality and Culture where the editor-in-chief said “If a topic is not worth authorship, it is not worth publication.” Typically, rejections of this sort were quick, a matter of a day or two. Fortunately, this was not consistently the case: both PLOS ONE and Culture, Health & Sexuality accepted manuscripts for review knowing that I was not using my legal name.

Clearly, in academic publishing, there is a lack of standards for protecting the identities of authors who may be stigmatized by their association with research. It is worth noting that requiring authors to use their legal names has not necessarily prevented fraudulent research from being published (Wilson, 2020). Wilson (2020) describes a number of techniques for combating fraud independent of identifying authors, of which public data repositories and external review are discussed below. However, the only true way to determine if evidence in scientific research is valid is replication of results.

Peer mentoring and reviews

In my experience of writing and publishing research on the sex industry, peer mentoring was virtually non-existent. With a few exceptions, most inquiries via email or social media are

⁴ <https://populationproject.ca/>

⁵ <https://orcid.org/>

never responded to, and no researchers attempted to contact me after publishing my research. It is possible that email communications could be ignored when researchers are subject to high volumes of spam, a common occurrence for corresponding authors when their email addresses are exposed in academic journals. University faculty and sessional instructors often work more than full-time. In one study of academics in 13 countries, self-reported weekly hours ranged from 45.2 to 52.8 hours (Bentley & Kyvik, 2012). However, this lack of response could also be symptomatic of the social exclusion described by others when researchers are not seen as part of the mainstream research community (Akbaritabar et al., 2020; Burris, 2004; Strong, 2019).

There were some exceptions to the rule. Notable were Ron Weitzer Emeritus Professor of Sociology at George Washington University and Gillian Abel Professor at the University of Otago who both read over early manuscripts and provided advice and encouragement. Neither of these distinguished researchers could have known of me at the time they read the manuscripts. There were others as well, including friends and colleagues outside the sex work research community, who provided early reviews. Lastly, my original collaborator did in fact provide useful feedback on very early versions of the Silent Majority before they realized that I was going to publish the research. While this was encouraging, what was lacking was the opportunity to discuss research issues in depth. This lack of discussion meant that I had to rely on peer review for feedback.

What is this peer review process really like? Firstly, getting a response from a journal, when they are willing to send work out for review, can take a long time. The initial submission of the Silent Majority paper to PLOS ONE in 2022 took over four months to be reviewed, Culture, Health & Sexuality took around three months, however, later submissions to PLOS ONE in 2023 took two months each. Secondly, I wasn't prepared for the emotional experience of reading

reviewer responses. The most difficult was when the decision was to reject. It would take me a few days before I could go back and read the reviews. The strategy I adopted when this happened was to pretend the paper hadn't been rejected and respond to the reviewers, updating a new version of the paper in the process. This had the practical purpose of preventing the same response if I chose to resubmit the paper. However, this was also important as, given my lack of experience, addressing reviewer comments was one of the principal ways I was learning the discipline of writing and publishing. Even when the decision required a revision, this could be, as described above, a very stressful experience to anyone unfamiliar with the cultural practices and requirements of academic journals. Journal articles conform to a very specific format, which can be confusing to first time writers. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, ethical considerations have to be accounted for when publishing peer reviewed research. Anyone outside an institution with an Ethics Review Board (ERB) will have difficulty getting research published that is not exempt from ethical review. The ethics guidelines of the American Sociological Association and Canadian Sociology Association can be useful for judging whether any given research project conforms to currently accepted ethics standards (American Sociological Association, 2018; CSA-SCS Policy, Ethics, and Professional Concerns Subcommittee, 2018).

Up to the time of writing, I have had twelve reviewers comment on my work as part of blinded reviews.⁶ Even when the article is allowed to move forward, some reviewers can be frustratingly terse. This was the case for three of the twelve. Some reviewers can let their own preferences take precedence over what is relevant for the research, the case for four. This was particularly true of the Meaning of “No” paper (Kennedy, 2023) where the subject was more controversial than in the others. In two cases, the reviewers made mistakes. In one case,

⁶ See the Supplemental materials section for a chronological listing of reviews with author responses.

misreading the original paper and, in the other, misunderstanding the measure used. However, even when the research was rejected, reviewers often provided very detailed, actionable feedback that made it much easier to know what needed to be added, clarified, or removed. In both the Silent Majority and Meaning of “No” papers, reviews inspired better, more precise numerical analyses, significantly improving the end result.

What did the reviewers identify as problems in my submissions? I would say that the bulk of the comments, especially after the original Silent Majority submission, related to the organization of the document. Less common but very important were comments on the statistical analyses. A few reviewers commented on my writing style. Lastly, some reviewers disagreed with some of the positions I had taken. Depending on the number of additional analyses, responding to the reviewers typically took between one and four weeks part-time.

My experience with reviewers is, while many make a sincere effort, I got, similar to the response from my former collaborator, a sense that some were engaging in gatekeeping. Given that the peer review process is blinded, this gatekeeping may reflect the cultural expectations of social researchers described in (Burriss, 2004). Indeed, all the issues flagged by my reviewers were easily remedied in a few days or weeks, working part-time. Standards clearly need to be established on what criteria are acceptable for accepting or rejecting research.

I would be remiss in not acknowledging the support of sex work activists who came forward after the publication of the Silent Majority. As early reviewers of subsequent research, they provided invaluable advice. Furthermore, their interest in my research indicated that it was relevant.

Costs and technology

Apart from institutional hurdles that need to be overcome, the cost of publishing research can be prohibitive. For the Silent Majority paper, apart from funding a website for the research for several years (CAD \$978), the main cost was the PLOS ONE publication fee (CAD \$2378 to CAD \$2629)⁷ required only if the article gets published. In addition to these hard costs, I estimate that the unpaid labor of working part-time over a two and a half year period could have amounted to approximately CAD \$27450⁸. Researchers outside institutional settings who are self-funded are faced with the conundrum of either having limited to no access to their work after it is published or high up front publishing costs.

The cost of publishing and disseminating research may be high, but there are many free tools available for researchers that make it possible to manage research projects. These include Google Docs (<https://docs.google.com>) for collaborating on documents, Zotero (Zotero, 2024) for managing references, and Open Science Foundation (<https://osf.io/>) which provides a free to use project management environment for supplemental materials and related project data and files. Google Docs has modest support for academic articles, such as line numbering and a basic citation manager, and can be used with Zotero as a plugin. Being able to share and get comments on early drafts of my research documents was essential. Environments such as OSF also facilitate data sharing and collaboration. This is a necessity for some journals, such as PLOS ONE, which require publicly available data as a condition of publication.

In addition to the project management tools described above, my research would not have been possible without other free to use open source technologies. These ranged from the freely

⁷ As of March 2024, fees have increased to USD \$2290 (CAD \$3100). See <https://plos.org/publish/fees/>.

⁸ Based on a rate of CAD \$25/hour averaging 2 hours per day from 2021-05-15 to 2022-11-15

available Ubuntu operating system including tools for downloading web data such as wget and curl; languages that make processing text relatively concise such as Perl (Wall, 2019) and Python (Van Rossum & Drake, 2009) and Python's associated toolkits for processing images (Khelifi & Jiang, 2010; Zhang et al., 2016); the R environment for statistical analyses (R Core Team, 2021); MariaDB for flexible data storage (MariaDB & Widenius, 2017); and QualCoder, a free to use replacement, for NVivo for managing qualitative research (Curtain, 2023). In addition to these tools, the Git version control environment (*Git*, 2020) and GitLab (<https://gitlab.com/>) simplified management and dissemination of source code.

A hidden cost of research is journal access. While there are now many open access journals such as PLOS ONE, most of the reference materials I used would not be available without access to an academic library. In my case, I had been volunteering at a lab for a number of years and was able to get library access through my work in the lab. For researchers without this access, publishing research may be difficult, if not impossible. However, the situation is not entirely bleak. All journals make abstracts available for free, which typically summarize the results reported in research. There are free tools available such as Inciteful⁹ and Google Scholar¹⁰ that can be used by researchers to find relevant research without paying high up front fees to academic journals.

Ethical concerns

Ethical standards are essential if social research is not to exacerbate the harms it often describes. Like the peer review of research results, peer review of research design is a

⁹ <https://inciteful.xyz>

¹⁰ <https://scholar.google.com>

requirement for studies in the social sciences. Typically, reviewers are part of institutional Ethics Review Boards.

In my volunteer lab work, I have seen this process in action. From what I have seen, the review process essentially stops once a study has been approved and there is no practical oversight of the implementation of the proposed study design. While passing an ethics review forces researchers to consider ethical dimensions in their research, in practice there is little to stop researchers from crossing ethical boundaries.

For researchers outside an institutional context, there appears to be no way for researchers to get ethical reviews of study designs. This significantly limits the research that can be carried out. For example, even with adequate funding, no research that involves interaction with human participants is possible either directly, such as in interview studies, or indirectly, such as in questionnaire-based studies. However, there are some types of studies that are exempt from ethical review according to ASA and CSA-SCS guidelines. For example, exempt are studies that review existing research and studies that involve participants who would have no reasonable expectation of privacy. Archival research on publicly available internet data is an example of the latter.

Nevertheless, in my research, I am collecting data that contains personally identifying information. Given that data sharing is an important component of my research, anonymizing data as much as possible is required. Best practices at least include sharing the least amount of data to reproduce results; changing any identifiers, including image identifiers, contact information, and names, that could be traced back to the original sources; and having others review the anonymized data prior to publication.

What happens during and after publication?

Once my paper had been accepted for publication, there were additional steps that needed to be completed. Firstly, the document was thoroughly checked. Authors, institutional affiliations, and research contributions had to be finalized. Secondly, the paper was typeset, and a publication date was set. In my case, for the first paper (Kennedy, 2022) it took about a week after the formal acceptance of the paper to clear up any final issues and about two weeks after that for it to be published. For the second and third papers (Kennedy, 2024a, 2024b), the timing was approximately two months to the first review and another month until the paper was accepted, then, finally, two months to publish. PLOS ONE indicates that it can take more than a month for this post-acceptance process to complete (Public Library of Science, 2021). Typically, production was very slow to respond to queries and, when I discovered they had swapped the first two figures in (Kennedy, 2024b) they were not quick to correct the mistake.

As described earlier, I never received any feedback from research peers following publication of the Silent Majority. This has not been for lack of trying. Initially, I created a press release and attempted to contact two large science blogs. The first responded that they do not report on research from independent researchers. The second did not respond at all. This process certainly would have been easier if I was associated with an institution, as most have press officers to produce press releases and the ability and brand recognition to promote the research to a broad public.

However, all was not lost as I discovered one or two Reddit communities that eventually allowed me to describe the research, with the Silent Majority paper getting an enthusiastic reception in *r/science*. This drove up the number of views on PLOS ONE substantially. However, (Kennedy, 2024a) which is arguably a much more straightforward paper was subject to large

numbers of trolling comments and I eventually deleted the post. Given that both papers are essentially covering the same topic, how long workers stay employed in the sex industry, it is puzzling why the reception was so different.

I have also used Twitter to announce research, but building a large enough following can be a very time-consuming process. With Bluesky becoming available to the public, the former Twitter science lists may be revived. However, these lists are generally for professional academics only.

Discussion and conclusions

I have discussed my experience as a sex industry researcher, mostly working outside the institutional context. My experience has highlighted some inequities and opportunities that “outsider” researchers may experience. Indeed, it is possible in a limited way for researchers in this area, who are not associated with an institution, to produce and publish in peer-reviewed journals.

Many of the issues described above are a direct result of the social organization of social research and the inequities I experienced are shared by many researchers (Burriss, 2004; Ray, 2019; Strong, 2019). It is worth noting that highly ranked institutions do not necessarily produce more research than lower ranked institutions (Akbaritabar et al., 2018; Burriss, 2004) and emergent “class” behavior among social scientists may be a cause of social fragmentation in the social sciences (Akbaritabar et al., 2020).

The process of creating research over the last two and a half years has been a frustrating experience. Forging any kind of exchange of ideas beyond a superficial level has not happened within the research community. The researchers who were skeptical of my research did not

communicate their concerns with me. In my experience, researchers, especially senior researchers, can have strong opinions which may not be supported by evidence. This lack of discussion, I believe, potentially entrenches inaccurate beliefs about the sex industry when researchers resist findings that are critical of their work.

On a political level, it appears that, for some Canadian researchers, there is little urgency on their part to work towards decriminalization. Specifically, in a political movement with few financial resources at its disposal, should research funding gate the accumulation of evidence? Furthermore, after reading many research reports on the sex industry there seems to be an overemphasis of the perspectives of specific groups, typically workers, and reduced emphasis on other equally important populations involved in the industry. This can only result in dysfunctional policy.

The majority of sex industry studies are relatively small-scale qualitative studies that may not accurately represent the industry. In contrast to this, a very large body of research using high volume internet sources exists supporting law enforcement (Dimas et al., 2022). Only a handful of studies researching the sociology of sex work use sufficiently large archival datasets to be considered representative (see Kennedy, 2023 Introduction). A possible reason for this phenomenon, given the relatively low barriers for researchers using publicly available archival materials, may be a lack of training. If this is the case, researchers who are interested in this topic may gain some insights on how to work with archival materials by examining how historians and political scientists use them (see for example Grimmer & Stewart, 2013).

The lack of access to paywalled academic research discussed above is a significant structural inequity. Ironically, much of this research is likely funded by the Canadian government (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2023). Initiatives to mitigate this inequity include the

European Union Plan S which proposes to greatly expand the availability of academic research by making all government funded research accessible to the public (Else, 2018). However, the current high cost of paywalled research prevents researchers outside institutional settings from accessing it. This not only affects researchers, but also negatively impacts those advocating political change, where efficient dissemination of research findings is critically important.

Work as a research assistant can address some structural inequities. Certainly, hands-on experience producing and disseminating research is necessary to learn the culture and processes involved. For prospective researchers who are interested in learning, some research projects have involved sex workers or other experiential people in the production of research (for example Benoit & Millar, 2001; Bernier, 2022; Machat et al., 2022). Alternatively, NGOs often publish their own research (for example Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), n.d.; Lam, 2020) and can be another way for experiential people to get involved in learning about the industry.

There is clearly a need for peer review outside academic journals and ethics review outside of institutions. Peer review is typically voluntary and tied to the specific journal where a paper was submitted to. Providing peer review outside the context of publications could make the process more efficient and more transparent. Stack Exchange, which provides support forums where visitors can ask questions on technical topics, anonymously rates members who answer those questions. A similar rating system for peer reviews would allow peer reviewers to develop a reputation and authors could be assured that the reviewer was not simply “going through the motions” when doing a review. In my experience, reviewers never offered specific justifications why they rejected an article. Exposing the review process and creating standards for reviews

could make it much easier for researchers to learn what constitutes publishable research well before submitting a paper to a journal.

Ethics review, like peer review, would also have to be decentralized if researchers outside of institutions are to be able to independently contribute to the literature. However, unlike peer review, it may be possible to automate this process somewhat with expert systems. For example, a questionnaire could identify what type of research is being carried out and check that the researchers are following a prescribed set of guidelines before allowing a research project to go forward. This information could then be shared with a prospective publisher as part of the editorial review process.

In sex industry research, experiential people provide critical support roles and, as advisors, frequently review research designs. However, I believe there is an expanded role for experiential people to become the primary producers of research. For their voices to be heard, a significant shift in the social organization of sex industry research is needed that specifically addresses their needs.

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Supplemental materials

Review history in chronological order:

1. [The Silent Majority Response to Reviewers](#)
2. [The Silent Majority Response to Reviewers 2](#)
3. [Meaning of "No": Culture, Health and Sexuality - Decision on Manuscript ID TCHS-2023-0049](#)

4. [Meaning of "No": Culture, Health and Sexuality - Decision on Manuscript ID TCHS-2023-0203](#)
5. [Response to Reviewers PONE-D-23-35872 Estimating turnover and industry longevity of Canadian sex workers](#)
6. [Response to Reviewers PONE-D-23-33995 The Changing Meaning Of “No” In Canadian Sex Work](#)
7. [Estimating turnover and industry longevity PONE-D-23-35872R1: Final Decision](#)
8. [Meaning of "No" PONE-D-23-33995R1 Final Decision](#)